

THE AMBROSIAL GLORY OF TIRUMALA

English Translation

by

AMBIKA ANANTH

Telugu Original

“Tirumala Leelaamrutham”

by

P.V.R.K PRASAD, I.A.S (Retd.)



**Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Tirupati.
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P.V.R.K.PRASAD, IAS (Retd.)

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FOREWORD

The Ambrosial Glory of Tirumala is an English translation of the *Tirumala Leelaamrutham* written by Mr. PVRK Prasad, IAS (Retd), in Telugu. It delves deep into the power and glory of Tirumala shrine and its Lord Shri Venkateshwara as evidenced in the many Puranas. The author dexterously combines the mythological and historical evidences with his own personal experiences, and knowledge gained through interaction with scholars. The book is a well-researched study. It seeks to answer many doubts that crop up in the minds of common people about the Tirumala shrine and the various mythological stories centring around Lord Venkateshwara, his manifestation on the earth in this shrine, his marriage with Padmavathi and the glory of the Lord and the holy *teerthas* located on the hill, etc.

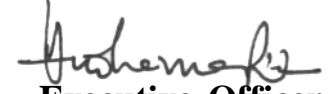
The book makes an interesting study as it aptly begins with the mystery surrounding the conch and the discus of the Lord. As we find the conch and discus in gold attached to the idol of the Lord, we get the doubt: does the Lord really possess the discus and conch or are they added to him? The answer is however found in the story of his devotee-cum-relative Tondaman Chakravarthy to whom the Lord gave his discus and conch to help him conquer the demon Simhada and continued ever since to remain without them for several centuries till Srimadramanuja restored them to establish unequivocally that the idol in Tirumala

shrine is none other than Lord Vishnu. Similarly, though the Lord is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, at times he seems to act like a human being like pressing the feet of Bhṛigu who kicked him in the chest, falling in love with Padmavathi and feeling the pangs of love, asking Vakulamata to mediate for the marriage and he himself becoming a soothsayer, taking loan from Kubera executing a Promissory Note, reviving the wife and children of Krishna Sharma by sprinkling the waters of *asthi teertha* rather than directly, etc. Like an ardent devotee endowed with tact and common sense, the author answers many of such questions quite convincingly. The author substantiates God's acts in terms of God's *Leela*, sport or stage-play, or to teach the world an exemplary code of conduct in a certain critical situation or to infer what is dharma and what is adharma according to the *yugadharma*, etc.

With a view to giving the book a wider exposure, the book is translated by Mrs Ambika Ananth into English in a simple, readable style. It is not easy to translate religious, spiritual and philosophical terms from Telugu to English. But, being a good translator herself, the translator has taken adequate care to represent them in as simple terms as possible and be faithful to the original without distorting the facts. I am sure the book makes an interesting reading in English as well. It enlightens us about many episodes pertaining to the Tirumala shrine that we are ignorant of. The spiritual import behind them is brought out well through critical discussion. In one word, the book gives us a glimpse

of different puranas focussing on the glory of Lord Venkateshwara. I am sure, the book serves as a spiritual guide to all the enthusiastic readers who want to know about the eternal glory of Tirumala and its Lord.

In the Service of Lord Venkateswara



Executive Officer

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
Tirupati

Author's Note

In March 2010, when I was at my daughter Madhavi's house in Chicago, I received a telephone call from Sri I.V.R. Krishna Rao, the then Executive Officer of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams that informed me that my services as the temple adviser were terminated with immediate effect.

While in America, I used to know about the temple news through TV channels and friends.

It was in principle that the TTD Board decided that the services of all those over 60 years of age employed in the administration and other related services would be terminated. Earlier, the same Board extended my tenure by two years. Krishna Rao said that the decision was taken on the basis of the judgment given by the High Court in some cases, and hence, around 50 employees were terminated from their duties. Even though a few days ago I knew that this would happen, losing the relationship with the temple was very painful. It was not a paid job. I then had been an Honorary Advisor for almost six years. Though I was not paid any salary, it did not mean that the temple was not expending anything on me. TTD had provided me with an office space in Hyderabad, a telephone, a PA, a car for going to the temple and to Tirupati on work, and free accommodation there. For some, it might have probably looked like '*Airavatam*' the proverbial white elephant (that requires lots of maintenance).

My work involved formulating programmes to spread and implement the *dharma*, to be the Chairman of the Charitable Advisory Council at the district and Mandal levels to oversee the charitable activities, providing advice on the working of *Dasasahitya* project, Annamacharya project, book publishing, ‘*Shravanam*’ project, monitoring the security of the temple jewellery, ‘*arjitha sevas*’, and giving appropriate suggestions and advice on any other issue related to temple management.

After my retirement from regular service, I considered this opportunity, service to God, for six years as a result of some merit I must have accrued. I wish I had continued to serve the Lord till my last breath. I am glad that God had given me the blessed opportunity which my fellow officers did not get.

No matter how long I served, it’s hard to leave the Lord’s service. Various unpleasant comments were heard from various corners.

Some of the members of the governing body had their own reasons to be angry with me. When a few members tried muscling each other in front of the Press or Media, I tried to convince them against it. When they did not stop their behaviour, I myself told the Media that “Anyone connected to the temple should be careful not to tarnish its image and reputation when they talk to the press or tell the media anything. And that any difference of opinion must be discussed in the Board meetings, not made public, and that a few

members are doing it, hence, the government has appointed them to take action against them.” The governing body members did not seem to like what I said. And there was a wrong notion that I had instigated many senior officials to submit a petition to the Governor against the project ‘*Ananthaswarnamayam*’. In fact, I was away in the US when it happened.

According to my conscience and the knowledge of the *Shastras*, only if we have enough *punyam*, i.e. merit, and only if Lord bestows His grace on us, we can work for Him. All other things are merely causative factors of the mundane reality. If one’s merit is strong and God’s grace is abundant, no one can do anything. That is my firm belief and conviction born out of my experiences.

Earlier, they gave me the post for a tenure of two years, now suddenly they terminated me. I consider this as God’s work. Or I think my virtues were too long to be fit in the service, or I must have had some shortcomings in my service. So, the opportunity to serve God further evaporated like camphor.

Did I make any mistakes while performing my duty? My thoughts ran on those lines. After successfully conducting two conferences congregating the Heads of religious seats (*Peethaadhithis*), Heads of Mutts and Hindu religious organizations for two years, the subsequent Conference in 2010 had been postponed without any reason, not once but twice. Was it a mistake that I remained a mute spectator then?

Even when I submitted my report on the paid *sevas* (*arjitha sevas*), free *darshan*, and *darshan* tickets, they shelved the idea of taking any action, blaming that I delayed the report by a year. I however remained silent. Was that a mistake on my part? When I resubmitted the same report later and made a few suggestions, the Board made some changes to my suggestions. Was it a mistake that I remained silent even when I did not concur with a few decisions made by the Board? Was it a mistake that I did not tell the possibilities to be realized and if they refused to agree I did not quit on my own? Such random painful thoughts came to my mind.

Against this background of the sad developments which hurt me deeply, while thinking about the effect of Swami *Anugraha*, at this point of time, executing work for the glory of Tirumala Kshetra came to my mind. I felt a deep desire to study the power of this *Kshetra* as mentioned in the *Puranas*. In many *Puranas*, it was mentioned about *Swami* and the *theerthams* in Tirumala and the incidents that had taken place over the eons. I began to pen down in simple language, all that I have read — to share with others. Translating them into writing in simple language is, I consider, a way of service to the Lord. The culmination of all this is the present work, *Tirumala Leelamrutham*, the glory of Tirumala through generations.

It is an attempt to combine the mythological and epic (historical) pieces of evidence with my experiences

in three parts. When the very word Tirumala is uttered, the God who is called by various names such as Lord Srinivasa, Venkateswara, Balaji, Srivaru, and Perumal, will come to the mind. Though there are many stories in mythology about Srinivasa and Tirumala, everybody gets reminded of how Lord Vishnu descended from *Vaikuntha* to marry Padmavati and resided on Anandadri as Lord Srinivasa. But the 12 *Puranas* tell about Srinivasa, about Venkatachalam, about the pilgrimages there, about their glory, about many sages, sinners alike, how they served him and got liberated.

This book has taken shape due to my strong urge to make all that accessible in the form of stories to one and all, so that it could be read devoutly as '*parayana*' while going on a pilgrimage to the sacred Tirumala.

PVRK Prasad

Translator's Note

Tirumala Leelamrutham is an authentic and laborious literary work done by Sri PVRK Prasad, IAS (Retd), in Telugu, culling and compiling all information about Tirumala as mentioned in *Dwaadasa (12) Hindu Epics (Puranas)* including the *Ramayana*. Revelations such as Lord Karthikeya's holy dips in what's today called *Kumaradhara* on the Tirumala hills or the visits made by Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuma, and an army of Sugreeva to Tirumala, and so on adorn every page of this book.

I consider myself blessed to be able to translate this very informative and absorbing book into English.

Though Sri PVRK Prasad held positions of high esteem, he carried his credentials and scholarship with commendable modesty — he considered himself only a 'Srinivasa Dasa'. His writings are a result of his sincere, unfailing devotion and dedication and prodigious productivity of a great mind and a great heart.

In a decisive moment Sri Prasad decided to write this book and it took a form with telling mythological imagery and turns of phrases filled with his reverential surrender to Lord Srinivasa and his abode Tirumala, that gave a luminous dimension to the work deserving global readership and celebration.

Only an English translation can reach a large number of readers across the globe. With this idea in

mind, I have taken up the translation work with the blessings and consent of Sri P.V.R.K.Prasad and I remain ever greatly indebted to him for the trust he had in me as a translator and more importantly as a devotee of Lord Srinivasa.

When a translator takes up a book for translation, the first requirement is that he/she must have a strong liking for the work and the second is to be faithful to the original without distorting the facts. I have great respect and a liking for the writings of Sri PVRK Prasad, and I could not but be faithful to his original work in Telugu.

I tried my best to make my translation as near to the original as possible. Without making any tall claim, humbled by this deeply satisfying task fulfilment, I seek the indulgence of the cognoscenti.

My sincere thanks to Dr.K.V.Raghupathi (Retd.), Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, for his meticulous editing work.

Ambika Ananth

Plot No. 8, Narayaneeyam, Riverside Estate,
Doddabele, Kengeri, Bangalore 560 060
Email ID: ambika.ananth@gmail.com
+91 9448061318

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CHAPTER 1

MYSTERY SURROUNDING THE CONCH AND DISCUS

The presiding deity, Lord Venkateswara Swamy on the Tirumala Hills, has four arms. One arm has the conch, another the discus, and the other two arms are the *Varada hastham*, the boon-bestowing hand and the other the *Kati hastham*, reaching his waist. Everyone knows this, every devotee sees all this during the *darshan* time. But questions cum doubts may arise in the minds of devotees such as — Does the *vigraham* (the idol) really have the conch and discus which are visible to the devotees? Devotees may not have a convincing answer. So, what is the truth?

These days the common *bhakta* may have the *darshan* of the Lord for just a second, maximum — it may extend to five seconds or maybe for a minute. Those who book the tickets in advance for *Arjitha Sevas* like *Archana* or *Thomala Seva* or *Abhishekam Seva* or buy VIP tickets may have an opportunity to sit and have the *darshan* of the main deity (*Moola Vigraham*) for an hour or half an hour. Even if it is *Thomala Seva* or *Archana Seva*, one can see only the jewellery adornments of the Lord except for a few hours; on Thursday and Friday, one gets to see only the face of the Lord. The *Karpura namam* (the camphor *Tilak*) covers Swamy's eyes and most part of his forehead. The rest of his form is fully covered up to his feet with silken robes and jewellery.

Only on Thursdays and Fridays *Nijapaada darshanam* (*darshan* of the Lord's feet without the golden covering) and *Netra darshanam* (*darshan* of the Lord's eyes without the camphor covering) are available. During the *Abhishekam* with milk, the Lord's waist is covered with a small loincloth, while, during the consecrated bath with fragrances and unguents, the loin cloth is removed. Only during the *Abhishekam* conducted on every Friday morning, one can have the *darshan* of the full form of the Lord for nearly twenty minutes.

Even when one sees the Lord's idol during that consecrated bath, it is impossible to describe it in words. From the bejewelled crown to his feet chiselled in sculptural perfection, adorned with ornaments, vestments, armaments, one can just see the magnificent Lord, his jewellery, bracelets on his arms, small dagger in his waist belt, Srimahalakshmi on his bosom. This Lord's glory can be seen but cannot be described in words as words fail to convey the glory.

Lord Sree Venkateswara has four arms. One is the *Varada hastham* pointing to his feet, assuring that for those who surrender unto his feet, liberation is certain. The other hand is *Kati hastham* that looks as though it is holding his thigh portion, indicating that those *mumukshuvus* (devout ones who completely surrender) who seek to cross the terrible ocean of *Samsara*, the mundane world, must take refuge at his feet so as not to get drowned in it but safely cross over with waters

reaching only till their waist level. Thus, both arms point to the lower portion.

The other two arms seen over the Lord's shoulders look as though they are wielding two weapons, the conch (*Shankham*) and the discus (*Chakram*). During the *Abhishekam*, one would have noticed that the idol is made of *Saligrama Shila* and the conch and discus, of gold. If one looks at them keenly, one can easily understand that they do not belong to the form of the deity but are fixed to it.

Why so?

The conch and discus in the Lord's arms were later fixed to the deity to prove that he is none other than Lord Vishnu himself.

Does it mean that the Lord did not have the conch and discus at all? If they were there, what had happened to them? Why did the necessity of fixing the golden conch and discus arise? The answers to these questions can be found in our mythology and in historical evidence.

Who is this Lord? How does he look like? Why has he manifested on this earth? Why has he manifested only in this sacred place of Tirumala *Kshetram*? What are the infinite powers of the Lord? Who are those blessed souls who served this place and surrendered unto the Lord and attained emancipation?

We shall learn all about the facts in this *Tirumala Leelamrutham*!

CHAPTER 2

STORY OF LORD VENKATACHALA AND FULFILMENT OF DESIRES

In many *Puranas*, the glory of this *Kshetram* was described as *Venkatachala*, *Tirumala*, *Vrishabhadri*, *Anjanaadri*, *Naraayanaadri*, and *Anandaadri*. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains in detail the glory and grandeur of Venkatachala and Padmavathi Srinivasa Kalyanam. Besides, twelve other *Puranas* extolling the magnificence of Tirumala Kshetram account for Srinivasa's story and miracles. In the *Puranas* like *Varaha purana*, *Bhavishyottara Purana*, *Skaanda Purana*, *Brahma Purana*, *Brahmanda Purana*, *Vamana Purana*, *Markandeya Purana*, *Garuda Purana*, *Padma Purana* and *Hari Vamsham*, the powerful glory of this *Kshetram* is described wonderfully. Sage Vedavyasa was an incarnation of Lord Srimannarayana. Such a great sage eulogized the greatness of this *Kshetram* in the *Puranas* he had written.

In *Dravida Veda* and *Brahma Samitha* (*Thiruvayimozi*) written by Sri Paramkusha (Nammalwar) and in other *Divya Prabhandhams* written by *Alwars* and in books like *Shilaappadigaram*, the glory and grandeur of Sri Swamivaru is described and mentioned in an exclusive manner. Some may believe that these were all man-made (some take Sage Vyasa as a human being and not as an incarnation) but in the divine Rig Veda, which was not composed by any human being, there is a reference to Lord Srinivasa of Tirumala.

In later times, though there came about many treatises exemplifying the glory of this *Kshetram*, *Sri Venkatachala Ithihaasa Maala* by Sri Ananthacharyulu (a Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams publication) is considered valuable. In recent times, the works published by the Devasthanams like the *Shilasaasanaas* (stone inscriptions) in Tirumala, a research work by Sri Sadhu Subrahmanyam Sastri, and N.Ramesan are of great importance. Apart from these works, many great souls like Tyagayya, Annamayya, Purandaradasa, and Tarigonda Vengamaamba had composed great *Sankirtanas*, *Kavyas*, and *Shatakas* (hundred *slokas*), in praise of the glory of the Lord in a multitudinous way. *Venkateswara Mahatmyam* was a film produced by the encouragement of TTD and *Srinivasa Kalyanam*, a dance drama, was produced by the famous Vempati China Satyam dance troupe. These made the story and glory of *Sri Srinivasa Kalyanam* reach many people.

Everybody knows the Lord as “*Aapada mukkula vaadu*” (the one who wards off dangers and dire situations if prayed to and the vow is promised), but very few know the power and glory of this *Kshetram*, the supreme magnificence of the Lord, the *theerthas* (natural water bodies) on the Tirumala hills and how they got their respective names, the connection of gods like Brahma and others with this *Kshetram*, the relation between Hanuman and this Tirumala hill, and whether the deity on the hills is Vishnu or Shiva, or Brahma, or

Kumaraswamy, or Kala Bhairava, or an incarnation of Shakti. I feel God-inspired to provide answers to these in a clear, simple language, quoting from the *Puranas*. There is nothing of my own creation or imagination here; it is already there in all the *Puranas* and scriptures. I have added a few of my experiences here and there.

All the information I gathered is by listening to the learned ones, especially the series of discourses in Kannada on “Srinivasa Mahatyam” rendered by my *guru*, the main pontiff of Uttaradi mutt, Sri Sri Sri Satyatma Teertha Sreepadulavaru. When I was heading the three-member committee appointed by the government to resolve the problem regarding the “Veyi Kaalla Mandapam” (thousand pillared Mantap) in the Tirumala Master Plan, Sri Sri Sri Tridandi Ramanuja chinna Narayana Jiyar garu brought to my notice the book *Sri Venkateswara Ithihasa Mala* written by Sri Ananthacharyulu, yet another source of valuable information. When I was the Executive Officer of TTD, we published a book in English entitled *Tirumala Temple* written by the then Person-in-charge member of the Devasthanam Committee, Sri Ramesan. This book, too, helped me in gathering authentic information. Besides, other books, too, written by those like Sadhu Subrahmanya Sasthri Garu, Sri Ramachandra Rao Garu and also books such as *Venkateswara Vaibhavam* by Dr. K.V.Rangachary and *Tirumala Darshanam* (TTD publication), and other books published by Hathiramji Mutt were good sources for the present book. The stone and other inscriptions

found in the Tirumala Temple, and the discussions I had with Pandit Jagannathaacharyulu garu and Madambakam Acharyulu garu, who were the Asthana Vidwans of the temple, were important in gaining information. I had served four years as the Executive Officer of TTD, six months as the President of the three-member committee, for six years (post-retirement) as the Advisory member of the TTD board and three years as the president of (Dharmakka Advisory Board, TTD). During all these years there were many issues and topics which came for my perusal and assessment, and I thought all that I had learned would be very useful to the average devotees. So, I desired to share all this through this *Taratarala Tirumala Series*...

The King who Never Wanted Sorrow to Come to Him

King Janaka was a highly righteous person. He won over anger, never uttered a lie, a highly devout person, and practiced dispassion. He ruled his kingdom with joyful serenity.

One day a desire arose in him,” I must never have sorrow, I must enjoy only happiness”. This was his thought. His desire was also ordained by the will of God. Just after a few days of this thought in his mind, his younger brother, who was looking after the regal responsibilities on his behalf, died. Unable to bear the separation from her beloved husband, his wife (Janaka’s sister-in-law) too died. King Janaka became

very depressed. His own daughter Sita was still unmarried, his brother had three daughters, and the responsibility of taking care of them fell on his shoulders. All of them should get married to the sons of the same King so they would go to the same family. He was old and protecting the kingdom from demons like Ravana was very difficult. This thought had created so much fear in his mind. For a person who never tasted sorrow or difficulty, everything suddenly turned against him. He could not eat any food, nor could he sleep peacefully. He started neglecting his responsibility as a King. Unable to do anything or think anything, King Janaka summoned Sataananda, their family preceptor (*guru*), and their priest (*Purohit*). But all this sorrow and unfortunate happenings he had experienced only in his dream.

In the olden days, people used to consult their family *gurus* or the learned sages whenever they were struck with difficulties and sorrows. For King Janaka who was in a sorrowful state of mind because of his dream, Sataananda could easily show him hundreds of ways to attain happiness. The family priest should be able to guide and show the right path.

Sataananda told King Janaka, “The one and the only remedy for this is to hear the story of *Sri Venkateswara Mahatmyam*. While I tell the story you must listen to it with concentration and devotion. Not only these four difficulties but also any other difficulty will vanish”. After saying so, Sataananda narrated the story of *Venkateswara Mahatmyam* to King Janaka.

He told the power and glory of the story that by listening to it one can tide over all the problems and get all desires fulfilled. If one wants progeny, children will be born; if one wants wealth, it will be bestowed; if one wants power in the profession, it will be given; if one wants to rule over a kingdom, that will happen; if one wants health, it will be restored; if one wants happiness and comforts and higher knowledge, this story of *Sri Venkateswara Mahatmyam* fulfills all desires.” He also said, “Even gods like Brahma and Rudra listen to this story to get higher positions and for retaining them.”

This incident of Sataananda narrating the story to King Janaka is a boon given to the former. Sataananda was the son of Sage Gowthama and his mother Ahalya remained a stone for many years due to the curse given by Gowthama himself. The only redemption and cure of that curse for his mother would be given by Lord Rama. It must happen only when Sage Vishwamitra brings Sri Rama to Sita Swayamvaram. Only if Janaka listens to the story will the marriage of Sita take place; only if Rama comes to Mithila Nagar and on his way, he removes the curse, his mother Ahalya would be freed from it. All that had happened in the same exact manner. It is true that not only when one listens to the story, but also when one tells the story of *Sri Venkateswara Mahatmyam*, all the difficulties and sorrows will be annihilated.

The story of *Venkateswara Mahatmyam* as told by Sataananda reveals many interesting and hitherto unknown facts as it goes further, and it begins with the introduction of how each hill got its respective name.

CHAPTER 3 VRISHABHAADRI

In the *Bhavishyottara Purana*, it is explained that the Tirumala Hill had four different names in each *Yuga* (Eon) and hence it will be known by such four different names: in the *Krita Yuga* as *Vrishabhaadri*, in the *Treta Yuga* as *Anjanaadri*, in the *Dwapara Yuga* as *Sheshadri* and in the *Kaliyuga* as *Venkataadri*.

In the *Krita Yuga* there lived a very strong and powerful demon by name *Vrishabha* in the hilly region. He was strange in his behaviour. He used to disrupt the penance of sages, but he himself observed penance by taking a holy dip every day in the *Tumburu theertham*, and by doing penance he became highly powerful and strong. He was a staunch devotee of Lord *Narasimha*. For five thousand years he did very severe penance (It is mentioned that every day he used to offer his own head like a flower by cutting it off and then with his own power and Lord *Narasimha*'s blessings stuck his head back to his torso). Pleased with his severe penance and worship Lord *Narasimha* appeared in the form of Lord *Narayana* and asked *Vrishabha* to go for a boon. The latter asked the Lord, "I have heard of your strength and power as Lord *Narasimha* and Lord *Narayana*, so with a strong desire for a dual fight with you, I did this severe penance. You fight with me and fulfill my wish."

Lord *Maha Vishnu* agreed to engage him in a fight. Though he had the power to kill him in a second, the

Lord fought a fierce battle with him for twenty-seven days just to satisfy *Vrishabha*. *Vrishabha*'s strength weakened. When Lord *Vishnu* was about to cut him asunder with his discus *Sudarshana*, *Vrishabha* prayed to the discus. "It is said that by pressing the emblem (*mudras*) of your discus and conch on bodies one can attain liberation. If I die after getting into direct contact with your *Sudarshana chakra*, I will surely attain liberation". So saying, he sought a boon from Lord *Vishnu*. "Oh Lord, I did severe penance for five thousand years for your appearance and I fought a tremendous battle with you for many days. Hence, the whole world must know this for ages to come.

Hence, let the hill on which we fought the battle be known by my name". A demon remains a demon always. After doing such a great penance, instead of seeking knowledge and liberation, *Vrishabha* asked for a dual fight with the Lord. In the end, he asked the Lord that the hill be named after him, giving more V

This episode was narrated to King *Janaka* by *Sataananda* while describing the power and glory of *Venkatachala Mahatyam*. This episode highlights that if one wants to die, one will not be able to die, as also, if one wants to live, one will not be able to live without the will of God.

Anjanaachalam

The same *Vrishabhachala* got the name of *Anjanaadri* in the *Treta Yuga*, thus *Sataananda* explained to King *Janaka* while narrating the story of

Venkateswara Mahatmyam from the *Bhavishyottara Purana*.

Kesari was a monkey King. His wife was Anjanaa Devi. Both were soft by nature and very staunch devotees of Lord Vishnu. Despite this, they lacked progeny. They deeply wished for the birth of a son. His worship and penance did not help them. Once, they visited Sage Matanga's *ashram*, got his *darshan* and blessings. The sage initiated Anjanaa Devi into a *mantram* (an incantation), *Matangachhayithi matangaha*. "Matanga" means the one who has the firm philosophy fixed in his mind that "Yithi" is the suprememost. It means one who has deep faith in it and follows the path!

Sage Matanga advised them to have a holy dip in Akasha Ganga, a divine waterfall situated on the hill *Vrishabhadri*. As advised by the sage, Anjanaa Devi had a holy dip in the temple pond, *Swami Pushkarini*, visited the temple of Varaha Swami and circumambulated the peepul tree and headed to Akasha Ganga.

After a year of penance, Vayu Deva, the wind God, carried fruit and dropped it in her hands. She accepted it as god's blessing and consumed it resuming her penance. After a year, she got again one more fruit which she consumed and so it went on in the same way for twelve long years of severe penance.

After the completion of twelve years, Vayu Deva dropped fruit in her hand with his semen in it. Anjana Devi became pregnant after eating it. Thus, Vayu Deva

himself was born as Hanuman. Vayu Deva had three manifestations, Hanuma, Bheema, and in between another incarnation that took place only after the mother had done twelve years of penance. Kunti and Vedavathi, the wife of Gehabhattu, had done twelve years of penance. Kunti served Sage Durvasa assiduously for thirteen years, which is equated with penance. Thus, she received a boon that she would beget progeny by any god she chose to have a child with. The result of twelve-year penance was the birth of Bheema and the other one year of penance gave her the four Pandavas. Bheema was none other than Vayu Deva. In the *Kaliyuga* the incarnation of Madhwacharya manifested. The purport behind all the three manifestations was the will of God. These three manifestations, full of knowledge, devotion, and dispassion, find an elaborate description in the *Balidhha Suktham* in the *Rig Veda*. Just because Hanuman's birth took place in the monkey form, one must not take him as less intelligent. He was so full of knowledge in its entirety, that though he was a monkey, he came to be known as "Hanuman".

Thus, being the birthplace of Anjaneya Swamy, the son of Vayu Deva, and as the place where Anjana Devi did her penance, this hill came to be known as *Anjanadri* in that *Yuga*. Many devotees believe that the present area of *Jabali threetham* was the then *ashram* of Sage Matanga and that Anjanaa Devi had done her penance there only. Hence, the devotee's faith is that if any childless couple take a holy dip in *Jabali theertham* and *Akasha Ganga* and worship Lord Srinivasa, they would surely beget children.

CHAPTER 4

SESHADRI- ANANDAADRI

When King Janaka asked their family preceptor and *guru* Sataananda the way to ward off sorrow forever, the latter said that one must listen to the glory of *Venkatachala Mahatmyam* from the *Bhavishyottara Purana*. He started narrating how the hill had attained the name *Seshadri* in the *Dwapara Yuga*.

When the two sentinels at *Vaikuntam*, Jaya and Vijaya, refused entry to the divine sages Sanaka and Sananda, they faced the wrath of the sages and were cursed to be born as demons. During that time, Lord Vishnu appointed Adi Sesha the guarding sentinel at the *Vaikuntam*.

Vayu Deva, the God of Wind, who too is, like Brahma, a son of the Lord, came to *Vaikuntham* to see Sri Maha Vishnu for some personal reason. As was blessed by the Lord himself, Vayu Deva had the power and capacity to see the Lord any time at any place. But Adi Sesha stopped him with his golden staff from entering. He refused to listen to the words of Vayu Deva, “I must go and meet the Lord quickly!” Vayu Deva asked him again and warned him that he might face similar kinds of punishment as was experienced by Jaya and Vijaya for rudely stopping the sages from entering Vaikuntham. Vayu Deva tried to convince Adi Sesha.

For every living being, it is Vayu Deva who gives the life-giving air for inhalation and exhalation – breathing

applies even to Garuda, Sesha, and gods like Rudra and others. Not only that, it was Rudra who served Vayu Deva as his disciples get initiated by him into a *mantra* and after doing penance for forty *Brahma Kalpas*, get the post of Sesha to become the bed for the Lord to recline on. The *Purana* proclaims that Adi Sesha due to his ignorance developed arrogance over his position. It was because of the knowledge imparted by Vayu Deva that he gained the post of Rudra and became Sesha. So the Lord decided to remove his arrogance and ignorance. Adi Sesha, however, stopped Vayu Deva and insulted him. Even when Vayu Deva requested him to go inside and inform the Lord about the former’s arrival and that only after getting permission would he enter Vaikuntham, Sesha refused to yield to that request too.

An argument ensued between them. They exchanged a verbal fight. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* provides their conversation in detail.

Sesha argued that since he was very close to the Lord and since he formed the bed on which the Lord reclined and since he was the one guarding the gates of *Vaikuntha*, he was the most important of all the retinue of the Lord and therefore there was no need for him to pay respects to Vayu Deva.

Vayu Deva replied thus, “Just because the servant who presses the feet of the King is close to him physically, can he claim to be superior to the king’s son, the prince?”

“I always remain in such close proximity to the Lord in his *sannidhi* and I worship him with my services and I am his personal aide — so there is none who is more important than me” thus argued Sesha.

“Just because the pet dog is closer to his master, can the dog claim to be superior to the elephant which is tied outside the house?” argued Vayu Deva.

This kind of verbal duel went on and on and had reached its peak when Lord Vishnu entered the scene asking why they were fighting, as though he didn’t know anything about it. Sesha complained about Vayu Deva that when he was following the instructions of the Lord in his duty, Vayu Deva spoke rudely as though he was supreme and as if he was closest to the Lord.

Vayu Deva remained silent and unperturbed and continued with his praises of the Lord. So, the Lord after listening to what Sesha had told Vayu Deva, “What work do you have with this Sesha who is so proud and arrogant?”

He then turned to Sesha and told him “Instead of feeling great and thinking superior, one must prove his power through his performance”. The Lord then put them to a test to prove their power. We need to know something important at this point. According to the *Shastras*, gods are not like human beings. Among human beings, one may have mind power, but maybe weak in body, and in another one, the body may be powerful but may have no power of intelligence. Whereas among gods, it is not so. They would possess

physical and mental strength equally. According to their division, those in one orbit will have the same strength. Those who were in the higher orbit would possess a hundred times higher mental and physical strength than those in the orbit below them.

So, if one had won the test, the supremacy would be proved in mental and physical strength over the other. Hence, the Lord gave them a test.

The Lord showed a mountain which was far away and told Sesha, “That is Ananda, the son of Meru Mountain. You go and wind yourself around it and hold it tight with all your might. Protect it by spewing your venomous breath. See to it that Vayu Deva doesn’t move the mountain. If he succeeds in moving it, he will win the test and become greater than you and if fails to move the mountain, you will be proclaimed greater than he”.

As soon as this was pronounced by the Lord, Sesha rushed to the mountain, wound himself around it and started spewing his venom in his breath to protect the mountain from Vayu Deva.

Vayu Deva prayed to the Lord, and as he touched the mountain with his little toe, (*kanishtaanguli samsparsaath*), it rose along with Sesha and flew thousands of miles away in southern direction and fell on the banks of the river Suvarnamukhi. Then the hill got the name Seshadri or Seshachalam. That mountain range extends from Srisailam to Venkatagiri in Tirumala

and has become popularly known as the Seshachala group of mountains.

This episode propounds the “*Jeevotthama*” philosophy. It took place to prove who was the *Jeevotthama* between Vayu Deva and Sesha. Different editions of the *Bhavishyottara Purana* have different versions of this story. One *sloka* says that Vayu Deva could not move the mountain, but because of Vayu Deva’s pleading and because of the Lord’s taking pity on Vayu Deva, Sesha loosened his grip a bit. Some argue that those who affirmed that Sesha was the *Jeevotthama*, had rewritten a few *slokas* in the *Bhavishyottara Purana* and had inserted them instead of the original *slokas* written by Sage Vyasa. If one examines properly, this one *sloka* and other aspects, it will be understood that the *slokas* were changed. Even the words uttered by the very Lord (like ‘*Maanina*’ and ‘*atyantha garvi*’) proved the arrogant nature of Sesha and to subdue it all this had happened. The *Brahma Purana* and other *Puranas* contain this episode in a very detailed manner. In the *Brahma Purana*, through the words uttered by Meru Mountain, Sage Vyasa very clearly talks about it. Meru says, “It is a mistake of Sesha and my son (Ananda) had borne the punishment, the brunt of it”. In the same way, if other *Puranas* are perused, it will be known that to teach a lesson and bring down the pride of Sesha the Lord must have created this episode.

Having come to know of this heated verbal exchange between Vayu Deva and Sesha and the

concomitant result, Meru Deva, the mountain deity, came running to Lord Maha Vishnu and said, “ Lord, because of the fight between these two, is it justified that my son be thrown so far away with a blow? The mountain around which Sesha wound himself is my son Ananda. Now he is in *Bhooloka*. You have to save him.” Saying so, he appealed to the Lord, who consoled Meru Deva and said “all this has happened due to my will as ordained by me. In the coming 28th *Kali Yuga*, I will manifest and spend time in *Bhooloka*. Then my abode will be with your son (on that mountain). Thus, your son will attain bliss and eternal name and fame”. In the *Markandeya Purana* and the *Varaha Purana*, it is proclaimed that Garuda at the behest of Lord Mahavishnu had transported *Vaikuntha* itself onto this mountain, and this was the reason the hill has got the name ‘*Vaikunthaadri*’.

Hence, that hill is called ‘*Anandaparvatham*’ and the temple of Srinivasa is called ‘*Ananda Nilayam*’. The *gopuram* of Lord Srinivasa’s sanctum is also ‘*Ananda Nilayam*’. There is one more story pertaining to this. One of the *Puranas* says that when the Lord came down to *Bhooloka*, he had arrived in his chariot called ‘*Ananda Nilayam*’. There are many scriptural shreds of evidence saying that many devotees had seen the vision of the Lord along with his chariot in the sky. In the story of Shankaraju, it is said that the Lord had instructed him to build a temple and the idol was seen by him.

Going by the above episode, one must not take Sesha as someone inferior. He is the very bed on which the Lord reclines and by the grace of the Lord he gained the power to bear the very Lord himself. He has the strength to carry the whole universe on his hood. He is nearer to the Lord. Except for Lord Srimahavishnu, Lakshmi Devi, Brahma, Vayu Deva, Saraswathi, and Bharathi Devi, everyone else had to come under the influence of Kali and lose discriminatory power for some time and, due to this ignorance, he had revolted against Vayu Deva who was in the high orbit. Sesha's pride got subdued. In the order of hierarchy, after the Lord Mahavishnu, Lakshmi Devi, and others as mentioned above come Garuda, Sesha and Rudra. They are in one orbit and are of equal stature.

The *Puranas* clearly proclaim that Sesha carries the Universe on his hood and Vayu (*koormam*) bears Sesha along with the whole Universe. Therefore, to prove that Vayu Deva is the *Jeevotthama* the episode had happened. The Vishnu *koormam* who bears these two is the very Lord.

So, whenever one remembers Seshachala or calls out Seshachala Govinda, one must also remember how dangerous it is to be egoistic in life. To visit this *Kshetram* is highly meritorious but if one comes with pride and authoritative attitude, it portends badly. This episode is a reminder about it for all of us.

CHAPTER 5

SRI VENKATACHALAM (SRI VENKATADRI)

The *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains in great detail how in *Kali Yuga* the hill had got the name *Venkatachalam*. 'Vem' means various kinds of sins and demerits and 'kata' means that which annihilates those sins. Since this hill has the power to annihilate sins, it has got the name '*Venkatachalam*'. Whose sins got annihilated? Though there are many stories of many people's sins getting absolved and annihilated, the story specifically mentioned in this *Purana* is related to Madhava.

In a village close to Kalahasthi, there lived a conservative, devout brahmin by name Purandara who had a son by name Madhava. Madhava's marriage got solemnized with Chitrlekha, a girl from Pandya kingdom.

Madhava too, like his father, was always following *shastras*, had staunch beliefs in rituals, and was strict in his spiritual observances as he was born in a conventional family. Though he was learned and wise, a strong desire arose in him one day which is totally unapproved by the *shastras* — the desire to have sexual union with his wife during the twilight time (*Sandhya samayam*). The *shastras* proclaim that even if it is with one's own lawfully wedded spouse, untimely enjoyment of sexual union is forbidden and if indulged, will cause great calamity not only to the family but also to the whole society. Every duty-bound householder

must practise '*praajapathya brahmacharyam*' – the prescribed code of celibacy. Having sexual pleasure with one's wife is allowed and is perfectly alright, but there are a few rules. There is a specified time for that. Just because nobody sees, one should not perform forbidden acts. There are the eternal witnesses like the Sun god, the Fire god, parents, preceptor, and rulers of the eight directions, and so on. And one's conscience is always there. It's not that Madhava did not know these rules, but because of some past *karma*, his momentary ignorance played on his weakness.

We know about the story of Sage Kashyapa and his wife Diti. Diti too had such a desire; even when her husband Kashyapa tried to convince her against, she was persistent. Through their untimely sexual union were born the diabolical Hiranyaaksha and Hiranyakashipu, the brothers who tormented the worlds.

Due to his bad destiny, Madhava too, coming under deep sexual desire expressed his wish to his wife. She refused to accede to his wish reminding him that it was against *shastras*, but Madhava was in no mood to listen to her. Unable to go against her husband's wish, feigning that they were on their way to the forest to collect Dharbha grass, they hoodwinked Madhava's parents too and entered the forest area. When Madhava was about to consummate the act with his wife, he spotted an attractive low-caste woman by name '*Kunthala*'. Fate was very powerful; he sent his wife back home and went to have sexual favours with the low caste woman.

Though she belonged to a low caste, since she lived in those times, she knew the ways of morality and *dharma* despite not knowing any *shastra*. She objected to his wish, "What connection can be there between a fine brahmin like you and a lowly woman like me — for someone like you who is so used to partaking of God's *prasadam*, how can you get physically close to me who is so used to drinking and eating meat? Your Brahman qualities will become adulterated. Do I need to tell all this to you, a learned one? Give up this sinful desire," she pleaded with him in many ways. Blinded by his strong amorous desire, Madhava got ready to enjoy her forcibly too. As there was no choice left, she gave in to him. Later, she told him, "With this sexual act, your brahminical qualities got destroyed; Cast away your *yagnopaveetham* and cut your tuft away. Live with me like a lowly one and start drinking and eating meat." Madhava agreed to be like that and spent a few years with her. After a few years, the low caste woman died naturally. Her death brought Madhava back to consciousness...! Another *Purana* says that this woman was Madhava's wife in her previous birth and that, due to a curse, she took birth in a low caste.

Madhava became inconsolable after self-introspection — "Who was he? How strict was he in spiritual observances? What kind of a Brahmagyani (with knowledge of Brahman) he was? What is this terrible fate? What kind of lecherous sin did I indulge in? What an unfortunate, cursed one I am! The life which was perfect for a seeker, I destroyed it with my

lustful behaviour!” So thinking, he started roaming in a sad state of mind. Then one day he saw the King’s retinue going from North India to South India on a pilgrimage. He joined them and went along.

The King along with his retinue, after reaching Seshachalam, took a holy dip in the sacred *Kapila theertham* and performed *pitru karmas* very assiduously by even giving *danam* (charity) very generously. Madhava who was with that group did not have any money either to perform rites for his departed forefathers or to give away in charity. But since he knew that it is staunch faith and belief rather than money which was required for such rites, he went to *Kapila theertham* and took a bath. As he did not have any money with him, he made earthen balls instead of rice balls as offering to the *Pitrus* and completed the rites with deep devotion. He started climbing Seshachala hill. The minute he came into physical contact with the hill he vomited, much to the surprise of everyone around. All the sins he accrued previously over many births came out in that vomit emitting bad stench. The moment his vomit fell on the mountain, fires came up and burnt to ashes all the sins that came out through the vomit. All his sins got annihilated. All the gods showered blessings by raining flowers on seeing such a wonder. Then Lord Brahma appeared and proclaimed, “In the coming birth, you will be born to King Sudharma as his son Akasharaju, and will become the father of Padmavathi, who will be having all the attributes of Lakshmi Devi, and you will have the great

fortune of getting Lord Srinivasa as your son-in-law!”. Madhava climbed up the hill, took bath in the holy *Pushkarini* and had the *darshan* of Lord Varaha Swamy in the temple, and left his mortal body.

Similarly, just by coming into contact with the hill, one’s sins will get destroyed completely. Hence the hill got the name ‘Venkatachalam’, ‘Venkatadri’ or ‘Venkatagiri’. ‘Vem’ means sins and ‘Kat’ means that which destroys.

Though Madhava had committed sins, when he felt highly remorseful, God created an opportunity for him to go with the king’s retinue on the pilgrimage to get his sins absolved. This is called ‘*Karma Dharma Samyogam*’. It is not important as to how much one has spent lavishly on the rituals and rites, but the dedication and devotion with which one has done is important. The *shastras* proclaim that if one performs such rites in *Kapila theertham*, it gives much more merit than that when performed in Gaya and Badri. Until a few decades ago, all the pilgrims without any caste discrimination used to perform the rites offering oblations to the deceased ancestors after taking bath in *Kapila theertham*. For some reason, that tradition has vanished completely in recent times. Even if a few want to perform the rites, there are no facilities for that. When I was holding the post of Adviser to Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams, I gave a suggestion that this tradition must be revived and that the facilities to that effect must be made. In 2009, the TTD Board

members consented to my suggestion, and a decision was taken to revive the tradition and make facilities for the same at *Kapila theertham*. If everything goes well, this scheme may come into existence very soon. For every family to clear *pitru runa*, (indebtedness to parents and ancestors), to gain *punyam*(merit) and cleanse off sins, this ritual of performing rites at *Kapila theertham* is a great opportunity, I believe. This *pitru karma* can be performed in various ways. Rice balls can be made and offered to Brahma or just black til (sesame) can be offered in *tarpanam* (with water), or just by saying the *Samkalpam* (the purpose of the observance and by whom it is offered) these rites can be performed, and even *Hiranya danam*(donating either gold or cash in charity) can be done to one's satisfaction; if nothing is possible, one can simply take bath in *Kapila theertham* and blow the conch turning towards the south direction and do prostration. Whatever is possible, one must do it with dedication and devotion. Then salvation of forefathers and annihilation of sins is assured. The story of Madhava is a true testimony to that. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* has this story of Madhava.

Kapila Theertham

To the southeast direction of Venkatachalam, we can find *Kapila theertham* and the temple of Kapileswara. This is a very sacred *theertham*. The *Vamana Purana* has the following story of this *theertham*.

It seems, in the beginning, the *Shivalinga* of the temple was in *Patala Loka*, the nether world. There Sage Kapila used to worship it and every day the celestial cow, *Kamadhenu* used to do *Abhishekam* with her milk.

This *linga* started growing in size. And finally, from *Patala Loka* it reached *Bhoo Loka* after ripping the earth open. *Kamadhenu* too came up along with the *linga* and, to stop it from growing any further up, she placed her hoof and pressed it. Even today one can find the marks of those hoofs of *Kamdhenu* on the *Kapileswara linga*.

Since Sage Kapila worshipped this *linga* it has become famous as Kapileswara. In the *Krita Yuga* and the *Tretha Yuga*, *Agni deva* (the Fire God) worshipped this *linga* and hence called '*Agni linga*'. The same *linga* is called *Agneya linga*. When Lord Paramashiva said that he too would manifest and be on Venkatachala along with Lord Vishnu, he was told to be on the southeast side of the hill. Since Lord Shiva presides on the southeast (*agneya*) side of Venkatachala, this *linga* has come to be called '*Agneya linga*'.

Mythology says that in the *Dwapara Yuga*, the *Sudharshana chakra* worshipped this *linga*, and that in the *Kali Yuga*, the divine cow *Kapila* has worshipped it.

Right opposite to this *linga*, the pond into which *Kapila theertham* cascades down as a fall, looks like a beautiful lake. The *Puranas* proclaim that anyone

taking a holy dip in this *Kapila theertham* will gain as much merit as doing an *Ashwamedha Yagam*.

On the full moon day of the month *Karthika*, all the sacred rivers and *theerthams* converge in this *Kapila theertham*. Therefore taking a holy bath on that day is highly meritorious. The charitable donations made here give manifold *punyam*. Just a small *danam* will bestow the fruits on a par with those of donating gold the size of Meru Mountain.

It is highly significant to perform rites to *pitru devathas* here and give away charities. In the story of Madhava from the *Bhavishyottara Purana*, this aspect has been strongly emphasized. Those who perform *danam* and do charitable acts are sure to attain higher worlds like *Soma* and *Swarga*.

The *Puranas* have shreds of evidence that many demigods, Gandharvas, and human beings have got their sins destroyed by worshipping the Lord and performing austerities on these hills.

Sesha accrued the sin of troubling *Vayudeva* who is equal in stature with him. So he has done penance on this hill for the grace of the Lord. He wished to serve the Lord by being his bed even in *Bhoo* *Vaikuntha*. He received complete grace of the Lord. The Lord gave him the boon that in the 28th *Kali Yuga* when he came down to this *Seshachala* and remained there till the end of the *Yuga*, he would please him benevolently. This *Venkatachala* is a highly meritorious

Kshetram, the best pilgrim place. Where great ones do penance, live and see the appearance of the Lord, that place will be called a *Kshetram*, a *theertha*!

Brahma Deva, on coming to know that the Lord would come to *Seshachala* and *Ananda Parvatham*, came to this place with the intention of getting emancipation, along with crores of demigods, thus proclaims the *Bhavishyottara Purana*.

CHAPTER 6

IT'S TRUE - THERE ARE NO CONCH AND DISCUS

The glory of Vayu deva is very significant. In one *Yuga* Vayumurthy took birth as Anjaneya on this very hill, in another *Yuga*, he was responsible for sending *Sesha* and *Ananda* to this area.

In another *Yuga*, Vayu deva did severe penance for a long time on this hill and the Lord was so pleased with his penance that he gave him the high post of the chief of the *Pradhana Anga Seva*. Therefore, he could serve as the highest devotee of the Lord, like Anjaneya in the Rama *avatar*. And in Krishna's *avatar*, as Bheema, he could do maximum service to the Lord as his very important devotee. Bheema was the one who killed a hundred Kauravas in the Mahabharatha battle, of the 11 akshauhini's of Kaurava soldiers, he single-handedly destroyed 7 akshauhini's. He killed valiantly the terrible ones like Jarasandha, Keechaka, Duryodhana, Dusshasana, Hidimbaasura, and many more such demons. By serving the Lord that way, he got established himself as a supreme enabler of God's ordinance and as the principal part in the divine scriptures and *Puranas*. He permanently stands as '*Jeevotthama*'.

Vayu deva gained all this power because of the severe penance he carried out on this hill. On this earth, this is the place where Vayu deva is present in all glory. Vayu deva was ordained to be the future Brahma in the coming *Brahma Kalpa*. In the *Brahma Purana* it is

said that Brahma who came down to do penance along with all the three crores of gods and demigods gave instructions to Sage Agasthya to circumambulate the hill and get salvation. When Agasthya enquired about the procedure to do it, Brahma told him to circumambulate while chanting the *shastras* — and when Agasthya questioned him about which *shastra* to be recited, Brahma told him that the glory and greatness of all *shastras* was in '*Sri Venkatachala Mahatmyam*' and that he should chant the text and the *stotrams* while circumambulating. Sage Agasthya, after circumambulating the hill as told by Brahma, built his *Ashram* on the banks of the River Suvarnamukhi (the present Thondavada) and established and consecrated the linga of Agastheswara and settled there forever.

Saraswathi

It is not just Brahma, even Saraswathi has a special connection with this hill. River Saraswathi existed on the earth, the presiding deity being Saraswathi Devi herself. But amongst the rivers, it is the river Ganga that is very famous — the reason being that her source of origin is at the feet of the Lord; she took birth there, so Lord Shiva placed the sacred river on his head. Thus, she has become the sacred Ganga.

Saraswathi Devi desired that she should become the most famous (more than the river Ganga) amongst the rivers. To achieve that status, she started doing severe penance on the same hill. While she was deeply engaged in the penance, Sage Pulasthya came to that

place. Pulasthya was the son of Brahma, the son of Saraswathi too. Deep in her penance, she did not care much for his visit. Taking that as an insult, Pulasthya cursed her (Though in comparison Pulasthya was much inferior to Saraswathi Devi, he was a great devotee himself and had done much penance to gain the power to curse anybody; but the loss would be his as all the merit he had earned through his penance would go waste). “Whatever you are seeking through your penance you will not get that; you will never become as famous as Ganga.” He cursed her as ordained by the Lord.

Even then Saraswathi did not give up her penance. Pleased with her penance, Lord Maha Vishnu appeared and gave her a boon. “Sage Pulasthya is a great ascetic having done penance for many years. The fruit of his penance and his curse will not go waste. Ganga originated at my feet and so has gained the highest supremacy amongst all the rivers. I cannot change that. Since your wish has to get fulfilled, I will create a lake on this hill. It will become the very best one amongst all the lakes in the entire world. You will be the presiding deity of that. Anyone taking a holy dip in that lake will get all their sins absolved.” Saying so, the Lord created a lake (*Pushkarini*) on that hill. The presence of Saraswathi Devi in this lake is at her glorious best.

The same *Pushkarini* is located in the northeast direction of the Tirumala Devasthanams, right in front of Varaha Swamy temple. Since it is the highest one in

glory amongst all the lakes, it is famously called Swamy Pushkarini.

Vibheeshana

Saraswathi Devi, as ordained by the Lord, accepted her son Pulasthya’s curse. It was not she who made a mistake; she did not even notice him while being immersed in the deep contemplation on God. It is natural for the demons to lose their temper and become arrogant. It was in that fit of anger that he cursed her. Even though he was her son, cursing her is a perfect example of the demonic trait.

Saraswathi Devi cursed Pulasthya in return that he would beget terrible and haughty ones as his progeny. Pulasthya fell at her feet realizing his grave mistake. Saraswathi Devi said, “You have to undergo punishment for the wrong you did. But, by way of relief, though your first two grandsons would be evil ones, the third one would be a gentle, righteous, devout one”.

Those two grandsons of Pulasthya were the demons — Ravana and Kumbhakarna and the third one was Vibheeshana.

The *Pushkarini* in Tirumala has the presence of Saraswathi Devi in a very effective way. Those seeking the grace of Saraswathi Devi, those who want to have a good education and succeed in examinations, those who want to increase their memory power, those who want technical knowledge — from scholars to dullards to students — must take a dip in the *Pushkarini* and read this episode on Saraswathi Devi to get their desire fulfilled.

History of the Temple

The *Puranas* contain the information regarding the temple construction in Tirumala Kshetram. Especially the *Brahma Purana* quotes that God had very specifically instructed about the construction by appearing to King Shankaraju.

“Not only in *Vaikuntha*, I have existed in my full form as myself on this hill. I manifest in the form of an idol, though. But what you see is not an idol, as I stand in my *Satchitananda* form. I will not be visible like that to everybody. Only to the learned ones, great souls, and to those on whom I wish to bestow liberation, I appear not as a stone idol, but they can see me in my *Satchitananda* form. For everybody else, I will look like a stone idol. But I will grace and bless all those who understand that I exist in my full presence in that idol and look at me with that feeling. O King, build a temple here and be blessed.” That the Lord Vishnu himself ordered the king Shankaraju thus and got the first temple built is what is written in the scriptures.

Later on, that temple got dilapidated and the sage Vaikhanasa used to worship that idol. He started worshipping that idol based on the instruction by the Lord himself.

The *Brahma Purana* mentions this subject that Sri Vaikhanasa used to worship Lord Gopala Krishna. Every aspirant will have a chosen deity's *bimba roopam* (idol) to do *Upasana* — dedicated devotion. By worshipping other gods or by having *darshan* of those gods one cannot get the real perceived

knowledge. Only by worshipping that chosen *bimba roopam* will fetch him/her that knowledge. Therefore, worshipping the idol is significant. That is what the *shastra* calls *Yogopasana*.

There is no difference among the incarnations - Matsya, Koorma, Varaha, Vamana, Rama, Parasurama, Krishna, Buddha — all these are the incarnations of Lord Vishnu only. But in *Kaliyuga*, Lord Srinivasa is not a special incarnation. In the *Bhavishyottara Purana*, God himself proclaims that he is 'Krishna' and that his parents are Devaki, Vasudeva and that he was brought up by Yashoda. That very Krishna is Srinivasa.

God instructed Sage Vaikhanasa that instead of worshipping him in the form of Gopalakrishna, he must worship Lord Srinivasa's idol and that it was *Yogopasana* for him that would lead him to experience the perceived true knowledge. Vaikhanasa's worship began thus (even today in the temple of Srinivasa in Tirumala, it is the same *agamas* — rituals as introduced by Sage Vaikhanasa that are offered to the Lord as temple *kainkaryam*).

Those days when Sage Vaikhanasa worshipped the Lord, there was one *shudra*, a low caste one by name Rangadasu, from whose flower garden he used to get flowers to Sage Vaikhanasa for the *puja*. One day while collecting flowers Rangadasu spotted one *gandharva* by name 'Kundala' who came to his garden and started sporting with his celestial damsels. Seeing that his mind became disturbed; he felt jealous of Gandharva who could enjoy with so many beautiful

women. He plucked flowers with that wavering mind and sent them for the Lord's worship. The Lord did not accept those flowers, since they were offered without dedicated devotion and focus. He cursed Rangadasu, "Leave the mortal body with which you had engaged in wrongful thoughts; Find another body. Since you will leave your body after deeply desiring union with women, in your new body you will be born as a king who will enjoy the company of many women!"

Since Rangadasu was a devotee, the curse given by the Lord turned into a boon and he got a fine body. As told by the Lord, the royal body he got after leaving his earlier one was that of 'Thondaman Chakravarthi' who became a staunch devotee of the Lord. He was the younger brother of King Akasaraju.

Thondaman Chakravarthi – The Emperor

Thondaman Chakravarthi, the younger brother of King Akasaraju, was a great devotee. When Vakula Devi, the mother of Lord Srinivas, approached King Akasaraju with the marriage proposal, Akasaraju asked the *guru* Brihaspati for advice. "Srinivasa is none other than Lord Srimannarayana. You are so blessed. Perform the marriage," he advised him. He also added, "I am residing in *deva loka* mostly. Srinivasa has come to manifest on the earth in Tirumala. Close to Tirumala, Rudra is existing as Sage Suka who is in *Padma Sarvora* (lake). More than me, he knows about the Lord. It will be good if you consult him regarding this." Then King Akasaraju sent his brother Thondaman to Sage Suka.

Thondaman was so blessed as to be in charge of overseeing the marriage ceremony of Sri Srinivasa-Padmavathi. He was the one who got the temple for Srinivasa built on the hill with three enclosures and seven entrance gateways.

A few years later, when enemies invaded his kingdom, Thondaman prayed to Lord Srinivasa ardently surrendering at his feet. Then the Lord himself sent his conch and discus to help and protect him. With the help of those God-sent armaments, he won over his enemies and went to Venkatachala to pay his reverential gratitude to the Lord.

There he asked the Lord a strange boon, "You had sent your conch and discus for my help and I have conquered the enemies by their power and grace. If people of all times, now and in the future, must know the help and grace you have shown to me, you must see to it that they remain with me forever. Anyway, I know that your weapons are born of incarnations; Even if they are with me with other '*amsha*', they will be present wherever you ordain them to be (just the way King Bali and Ambareesh were blessed). Therefore, in this form of Srinivasa, you please don't wield them. When people have your *darshan* and see you, they must know that you have given your conch and discus to Thondaman i.e., me."

Such a strange wish! It gives joy to God to fulfill even such strange wishes of his devotees. He said, "As you wish." Hence, the deity of Lord Srinivasa of Tirumala does not have conch and discus.

CHAPTER 7

WHEN THE SON'S HEAD IS CHOPPED OFF

During the time when Sage Vaikhanasa was doing the *puja kaimkaryam* and worship to Lord Srinivasa, there lived in the same place a great devotee by name Nishadha. He used to offer some rice to the Lord as offering every day from the paddy yield he got from his land and after it was offered to the Lord, he used to partake of a little as *Prasadam*.

One day while going to the forest to collect honey, he called his son and told him that he would return quickly, but instead of waiting for him, he must go and give some rice and honey in the temple to be offered to the Lord.

When he returned home later, he found his son offering cooked rice to the Lord and saw him eating it after saying '*Krishnaarpanam*'. He became terribly enraged, "You wretch, how dare you defy the Lord's service? How lazy you are not to go and give rice in the temple! Instead of giving it in the temple, how can you cook and eat it?" Thus shouting, he cut off his son's head. The Lord immediately appeared in front of Nishadha in the form of Varaha Swamy and said, "Don't be angry with your son. He cooked rice and offered it to me with much devotion. Only after I partook of his offering did he eat the *Prasadam*; like you, he too is a great devotee!" Then the Lord restored his son back to life. He instructed Nishadha to build a temple for this *Varaha Avatara* to get liberation. The

Puranas proclaim that the Lord blessed Nishadha and told him that whoever took a holy dip in the *Pushkarini* located on the east side of the temple and had *darshan* of Lord Varaha Swamy would get liberation. The Varaha Swamy temple was built by this great devotee Nishadha.

Theerthams in Tirumala

In the *Uttara bhaga* of the *Brahma Purana*, there is an exhaustive description of the glory of Tirumala *Kshetram*, the power of the hill and the number of *theerthams* (sacred lakes and natural water bodies) and their grandeur and great divine capacity.

According to this *Purana*, there are sixty-six crores of *theerthams* in this Tirumala *Kshetram* — is it believable? But the truth is that in every atom-sized area of this *Kshetram*, demigods, sages, and seers, *Gandharvas*, etc. are doing penance. Every stone, every tree, every droplet became an abode to these great souls and became highly pristine and blessed. Those great ones eternally perceive and worship the Lord through the power of their penance — such blessedness is associated with this *Kshetram*. Every drop of water is a *theertham* — those crores of *theerthams* evoke great devotion for the Lord in the hearts of devotees. Among those *theerthams* there are a hundred and eight *theerthams* which are specially mentioned for their power to invoke *bhakti* significantly. Of those hundred and eight *theerthams*, sixty-four are known to bestow *bhakthi* and *vairagyam* (dispassion). Those *theerthams* which have the power to give liberation in a much significantly higher way are

described extensively. They are — Swami Pushkarini, Papanasanam, Akashaganga, Kumaradhara, Tumburu *theertham*, Ramakrishna *theertham*, Pandu *theertham*, Panchayudha *theertham*, and Gogarbhham.

Sage Vasishtha and Swami Pushkarani

Does offering priestly services (*Pourohityamu*) bring demerit or sin? Is it alright to do *pourohityam*?

Every town or village will have a *purohit* — a Hindu priest. Because he is someone who wishes well (*hitamu*) for the *puramu* (village or town) and works for that cause, he is called a *purohit*! Priests depend on the village for their livelihood and offer their services and accept the amount, be it ten rupees or more as *dakshina*. It is just not that small amount that they take, they also receive the results of the sins done by the people who get the *pujas* or rituals done and pay the money. Most of the *purohitis* do not know this.

The *shastras* say that the priest who has accepted *dakshina* and *daanam* must chant Gayatri *mantram* (incantation) or any other *mantram* to get redemption from the sins accrued through those *dakshina* and *daana* and that he must do their daily *puja* and rites without fail. Even if he does all this very assiduously, still some sins will remain with him. So, it is a must that he should go to Venkatachalam and get the sins absolved by doing *paapa parihara* ritual.

This aspect is especially mentioned in the latter part of the *Brahma Purana*. Sage Vasistha was the

priest to the Royal families and was giving his services and advice to many kings. Since he was a highly learned one with the knowledge of the scriptures, he was constantly under the fear of sin. Inherently he was mild-natured and had a disciplined temperament and was strictly following rules given by the *shastra*. He was a great ascetic, but he too got under the firm grip of fear as once he sat alone reflecting on himself and his work. He thought: “I offered my services as a priest to many kings and had accumulated all their sins upon myself. How to wash them away and get rid of them? How is it possible?” Though he was a highly knowledgeable one and did whatever possible to absolve the sins accrued, he still felt very disturbed.

To add to it, there was a problem in the form of one Sarvaabadhha.

Sarvaabadhha was a *brahma bandhuvu* — that is one who does not do *svadhyaya pravachanam* (learning of the sacred *Vedas*). It is the duty of every brahmin after *upanayanam* to study the *Vedas* and the *shastras* pertaining to their sect, and along with that he must do daily rituals prescribed as per the *shastras*. He must teach others the knowledge he himself has gained. He must do charity (*daana*), not just receive it. He must follow the rules that prohibit doing something throughout his life and surrender to the Lord completely. The rituals which are done to gain wish - fulfillment should be performed not for himself but for the welfare of the society and for others’

well-being. He should lead his life thus. He must feel contented with the *dakshina* and *daanam* offered by others, should not aspire for anything for himself in the form of money or charity for the services he has offered in getting *vaidika karmas* (rites and rituals) performed.

Only such a person is a 'brahmin'. All the rest are called '*brahma bandhuvus*'.

That Sarvaabadhha was a *Brahma bandhuvu* — as his name conveys (*sarva* -full, *abadhha*- lies) he was full of lies, a depraved one, who did not do any *karmas*, who did not possess any knowledge of the *shastras*. He did not have any qualities of a brahmin but he wanted *dakshina* and *daana*.

There was a *Yagna* on a high scale going on – the brahmins were given large donations in the form of money and land and food offering. Sarvaabadhha went to that *Yagna* and stretched his hand first seeking *daanam*. People who gathered there pushed him away saying, "Hey, do you think you are some Sage Vasistha to be given *daanam* first?"

Sarvaabadhha did not know who Vasistha was, but gathering from the talk around he realized that he must be a great brahmin — that's when '*Karma Dharma Samyogam*' took place for him and as the good time for self-evolvment comes, the mind functions correctly and the past life's merit will come to fruition. Sarvaabadhha became repentant of his own life. He decided that his emancipation would be only

through Vasistha, so started chanting the name of 'Vasistha' continuously with high regard as a *guru* for him. Sage Vasistha came to know that Sarvaabadhha was doing penance by chanting his name very resolutely.

Sage Vasistha thought, "When I myself am in a disturbed state of mind worrying about my own sins, the sins accrued by Sarvaabadhha are going to add on top. If I don't help him out and uplift him, his sins will further stick onto me. Hence, it is my bounden duty to see that his sins too get absolved!"

For that reason, he would worship and pray to Lord Brahma who would be pleased by his worship. Sage Vasistha explained his situation and asked him how he could get rid of all the sins and absolve them totally.

The idea Brahma gave to Sage Vasistha was "Venkatachala *Kshetra* is very powerful and supreme. There is no other *Kshetram* better than Venkatachalam for getting one's sins absolved. After taking a holy dip in the sacred *Swami Pushkarini* and after worshipping all the other *theerthams* there, if you circumambulate the hill while chanting the glories of the Lord and the scriptures, then your wish will be fulfilled."

Sage Vasistha has spiritually helped and uplifted many kings from their sins and he stood as a role model to someone as great as Sage Vishwamitra.

Sage Vasistha followed the advice given by Lord Brahma. He himself got rid of his sins and got the sins

of Sarvaabadhha too absolved — and made him a ‘*Sarva Sidhha*’ (one who is adept at everything). This episode is there in the latter part of the *Brahma Purana*. ‘*Vem*’ (sins) ‘*Kata*’ (that which destroys); that’s why it is called Venkatachala hill. The *theerthams* on the hill as well as the very hill itself are naturally endowed to destroy sins completely as the Lord himself has come down from Vaikuntham to manifest there. That hill is Lord’s *Kreedachalam* — the hill where he sports in all his glory.

Papanashanam

Indra deva after vanquishing and killing demon Vrithhasura got rid of *Brahma Hatya Paapam* — sin of killing him — by taking a holy bath in this Paapanashanam theertham and also got back his post as Indra.

CHAPTER 8

OLD AGE VANISHED WITH THE BATH

Once, an old brahmin went to Venkatachala and addressing the Lord and other gods like Brahma started praying loudly.

“I am an utterly poor one. Feeding my own family of children and wife has become a burden. I am unable to take care of them. I cannot bear my terrible hunger and I cannot see my children go without any food. I have turned into an old person even in my youth. I have decided to die instead of leading such a life. Amongst you, if anybody is capable of saving me, please come and save me. I want to commit suicide after letting you gods all know my situation.” Yelling that way, he was about to jump from a cliff.

Then God himself appeared there disguised as a prince and said, “Stop, don’t jump! Don’t commit suicide!”

Seeing the prince, the old man, picked up some courage and strength. He said, “You are a wealthy prince. Since you stopped me from dying, from now on my responsibility is entirely yours.” God, in the disguise of a prince, said, “Ok. Keep that thing aside. Let me tell you that you don’t have the right to destroy your body. God gave you this body for you to do *sadhana*. You should not end it like that. Taking one’s life is a sin, say the *shastras*. Don’t you know that? Only when the body becomes completely useless to do any *sadhana* is there a possibility to give up one’s life according to the *shastras*. Just because one is suffering penury, it is

against the *shastras* to commit suicide and die.” God, after putting sense in the brahmin and holding his hands, decided to take on himself the responsibility to bless him with redemption. Oh, what a great fortune! God himself holding his hands would take him to a *theertham* on Venkatachalam and make him take a holy dip! Immediately after the holy dip, the old man’s old age vanished, and he became youthful, handsome and healthy. Therefore, the *theertham* where he had a holy dip has got the name ‘Kumaradhaara’ (kaumarya is youthful state). Thus, the *Markandeya Purana* proclaims. *Skanda Purana* has one more story. Since Skanda did penance and took bath in that *theertham*, it has become popular as Kumaradhaara. (*Kumara* is another name of *Skanda*). We shall talk about it later.

God blessed the brahmin and told him, “You go home and find all the wealth you want.” He also advised the brahmin thus: “You do any *karma* (work or duty) without any desire; any work you do offer it to me for my contentment by saying *Sri Venkateswara preethyardham*! Enjoying life is not wrong, but with the thought of offering it to the Lord enjoy everything. With the belief that God has given everything, with a feeling of gratitude and with the faith that it is the will of God, do everything and enjoy it. Do only those lawful deeds — don’t commit those deeds which are prohibited by the *shastras*. Follow what the *shastras* say, don’t do that which you desire. Whatever you do, offer it to Lord Krishna by saying ‘*Srivenkatesha priyathaam*’ and lead a life of an aspirant and a seeker.”

That brahmin’s old age was due to his poverty. Lord Srinivasa gave his wife also youth and great wealth to enjoy and saved his entire family. The *Markandeya Purana* says that the Lord destroyed his sins which caused his poverty and due to the merit, the *punyam* the brahmin got by having the darshan of the Lord and a holy dip in *Kumaradhara*, the Lord gave him great wealth. Because the *theertham* removed old age and bestowed youth, it has got the name *Kumaradhara*. This is one very important *theertham* of Venkatachala. It is located about six kilometers from the Temple of Lord Srinivasa. The full moon day, *Poornima* in the month of *Magha*, is considered as a very special day. It is on this *theertham* that the Devasthanam is building *Kumaradhara* project. Since the water available through Gogarbhham and Paapanashanam projects is falling short, this project has been taken up. This project will end at the confluence of *Pasupudhara* and *Kumaradhara*.

The *sastras* proclaim that every person must clear three debts in his life. For parents who give the physical body as a means for spiritual practice and to perform duties and rites, one is indebted and so must clear that debt. By taking care of parents affectionately, by providing care in their old age and after their death by doing all the prescribed rites and doing charity in their name, one should clear the indebtedness to parents.

In our bodies, there will be supportive demigods in each and every organ providing strength and encouragement for us to perform good deeds and our daily practices. By doing *Brahma Yagna* every day,

by giving prescribed *tarpanam* (water and *til* offering), by doing *Yagna* and *Yaga* regularly, one must clear debts to those gods.

Sages and seers after gaining knowledge of *mantras* gave that knowledge to the world and our gurus gave that knowledge to every one of us. So, to those gurus also we need to offer *tarpanams* and clear their debt. This is our duty, responsibility, and prescribed work. This episode explains it clearly. These prescribed rituals are part of our means to salvation. These we don't do them for their sake, but for the sake of our own welfare and merit. We must know that these will help us not accrue sin. Not that we are doing something great for gods or gurus or ancestors; it is to be understood that we will accrue the sin of being ungrateful if we do not do them. Only when one has gained a great amount of merit or *punyam* will one be born with a physical body that will comply with and assist one's spiritual practice. The opportunity should not be wasted. The eternal message is that one must follow the rules prescribed by the *shastras* and must make one's life purposeful by leading a devout life in the worship of God.

“*Venkateswara Mahatmyam*” in the *Varaha Purana* clearly explains this. In this world, it is very difficult to get three things-

1. A dip in the holy *Swami Pushkarini*
2. Opportunity to serve the feet of the *guru* who has given supreme spiritual instruction

3. *Ekadashi vratham*

Only with great *punyam* accrued over many births that one will get these three. Man must keep striving for these.

Once an old brahmin came to Venkatachalam. His condition was so weak that he could not sit or get up on his own. He was in deep sorrow — the reason being that he realized how he had wasted his life by not doing any spiritual practice when he was physically strong. Even if he wished to do now there was no strength. If he died without doing any *sadhana* in this birth, whether he would get a body in the next birth which will be conducive to spiritual practice or not, and if yes, when? ‘Oh, how I wish I could do that now’ was his thought which caused lots of distress and pain, and to fulfill that wish he had a desire to live longer.

As mentioned earlier, a man is born with three debts. So, when the old man cried in sorrow that he couldn't clear those debts and that he would like to die only after clearing those, the Lord appeared and took him to a *theertham* and made him bathe in it. He regained his youth; he was blessed with great wealth. Later on, with practice and knowledge, he had attained salvation. Thus mentions one *Purana*. Another *Purana* says that the *theertham* which gave him the youth got the name ‘*Kumaradhara*’.

This is a message for all of us — not just for that brahmin. We all must understand and realize that God has given this body to do spiritual practice and that he has given wealth to do moral and good deeds.

CHAPTER 9

SRI RAMA IN PUSHKARINI

The *Varaha Purana* explains in detail the association between Lord Srirama and Venkatachalam. On one occasion Brahma and other gods visited Lord Sri Maha Vishnu who was residing on Venkatachalam to seek protection of the worlds from the demon Ravana. Lord Srinivasa gave them the assurance of safety and protection.

Around the same time, King Dasaratha, who was in a state of complete dejection for not having progeny, went on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam on the advice of Sage Vasistha and after bathing in the *Swami Pushkarini* started worshipping and offering prayers to Lord Srinivasa. The *Varaha Purana* quotes the prayer completely. Lord Srinivasa blessed King Dasaratha and told him to go back to his kingdom and perform '*Putra Kameshti Yaagam* (*Yagna* done seeking progeny) which would fulfill his desire of having children.

King Dasaratha, as ordained by the Lord, performed the *Putra Kameshti Yaagam* and was blessed with Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Shatrughna as sons that set the beginning of Ravana's end. Thus, the *Varaha Purana* clearly proclaims the connection between the birth of Lord Rama and Venkatachalam. The same *Varaha Purana* in another instance gives in great detail Sri Rama's visit to Venkatachalam.

There Sage Sootha described thus to sages like Sounaka and others.

After Sita's abduction by Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana made friends with Sugriva. After the killing of Vali, they started for Lanka along with Hanuman and the monkey army. They left Pampa Sarovaram (lake), Rushyamookam (mountain) and proceeded on their journey towards the south and reached Venkatachalam. There, Anjana Devi, mother of Hanuman, prays to him after offering obeisance to Lord Sri Rama "O Ramachandra Prabhu! Like me, many sages are waiting for your visit for long. Please show your grace on us and come up the hill and bless all of us." In response to her request, Lord Rama said, "I am in great haste to protect Sita. So I am going along with the monkey army to Lanka. After completing that very important task, I will surely fulfill your wish on my way back."

Then Hanuman in a very humble manner spoke to Rama, "O Lord Rama, the monkey army is very exhausted after the long journey. They all need some rest. There are many fruit-yielding trees on Anjanadri and also there are many cool streams too. Honey, which is the monkey's favourite food, is abundantly available here. Since rest is definitely required for them, it may be better to take a rest here on Anjanadri. It is on the way. It is famous for many edible sweet bulbous roots. There is nothing of which you are not aware. Please do according to your wish."

Understanding Hanuman's inner thought, Rama said, "O son of Anjana, Hanuman, May it be so. You

go ahead by leading the army.” So saying Rama climbed Venkatachala.

To the north of the hill, one brahmin by name Nirloma did penance to appease Brahma to attain *Brahmaloka*. Pleased with his penance, Lord Brahma appeared and blessed him and said, “You will certainly attain *Brahmaloka*, but that will happen only after you have the *darshan* of Rama and Lakshmana; so wait here for them to come.”

After waiting thus, Nirloma got the *darshan* of Rama and Lakshmana on Venkatachala. He prayed to Rama, “O Ramachandra! My penance came to fruition after having your blessed *darshan*. Please give me your permission to go to *Brahmaloka*.” Lord Rama blessed that brahmin with his consent and proceeded further on the hill.

On the way, Rama absolved a few *Yakshas* of the curses they were suffering from, and reached the ashram of Anjana Devi, which was close to Akasha Ganga. After giving her his blessings, Rama went to *Swami Pushkarini*. (Some say that Anjana Devi *ashram* is the present *Jabali theertham*). Rama, along with Hanuman, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, Jambavantha and Neela, took a bath in the holy *Swami Pushkarini*. That *Pushkarini* has the power to bestow the lost sovereignty back to those who have lost it. It can bestow victory in any field. This is the result of taking a bath in which Rama vanquished Ravana, freed Sita, and ascended the throne of his kingdom. Thus proclaim the *Puranas*.

When Rama was on the Venkatachala hill, a few blessed poets went to bathe in the *theerthams* and when they found a cave near *Pandu theertham*, they went inside. The *Varaha Purana*, while describing this, proclaims in detail that those poets saw Sri Vaikuntha Narayana along with his servants who had attained ‘*saaroopyam*’ (same appearance as Narayana) inside the cave. When a few monkey warriors who also had the *darshan* told others about the cave, they, however, could not find the cave as it disappeared on its own. The *Varaha Purana* says that only to those who were highly deserving the *darshan* of Sri Vaikuntha was given by Lord Srinivasa on Venkatachala.

To the southwest of *Swami Pushkarini* (means the location where the present temple is situated) Hanuman built a thatched hut for Rama and served him along with his retinue. They savoured the fruits, flowers and the cool water from the streams on Venkatachala and rested on Venkatachala. The *Purana* very beautifully describes the scenes of their frolicking in the waters and how they shouted in joy while enjoying the abundant supply of fruits and bulbous roots available on the hill. After taking a rest thus, the leaders of the monkey army announced loudly that they were all ready to destroy Lanka and Trikoota and that they were all rearing to kill Ravana and his demon army. With such an army which became very active and strong on the Venkatachala hill, Rama started on his journey towards the seaside on the south.

CHAPTER 10

A FROG IS RELEASED FROM A CURSE

Praacheena Barhi was a king who had a great interest in performing *Yagnas*. He was such a *Karma yogi* that he took it upon himself an important task of growing *darbhas* (tropical grass considered sacred material in Vedic scriptures) all over the world to perform *Yagnas*.

Once Tumbura, a Gandharva who was adept at musical skills, came to his kingdom and after seeing the way he was performing the *Yagna* rites so diligently, praised King Praacheena Barhi very highly. “There is no other King on this earth who is as great as you are. You have performed countless *Yagnas*. There is none other who is wealthier than you. How many charities and donations you have given! Who else had done feeding poor brahmin as you have done? You are a *veera* (victorious one), a *soora* (courageous one), and a *daana shikhamani* (tiara gem-like one in doing charity), etc.” There was one reason for him to praise Praacheena Barhi. He was in possession of a special Veena embedded with nine varieties of precious gems and valuable stones, a very rare and expensive one. Just to get that Veena from Praacheena Barhi, Tumbura, who was the most important singing Gandharva, praised a mere human being with high fanciful metaphors. By doing so, he achieved his ambition to possess that Veena from that King.

Tumbura went to Sage Narada along with that Veena. Seeing that Veena and coming to know how Tumbura got that Veena, Narada became enraged. “Alas! Instead of praising the supreme Lord which we are supposed to, what is this menial thing of praising a human like Praacheena Barhi? That too desiring something you did this condemnable deed; you deserve to be punished. You are a Gandharva who has the power to fly in the sky and move about. All our skills, talent and powers have to be used in the worship of the Lord, not for the sake of our self-interest and desires. Since you praised a man for self-gain, you will lose your power and eligibility to move about in the skies and you will be born on the earth,” Narada cursed Tumbura. But his curse was also in some way for Tumbura’s spiritual uplift.

Tumbura was temperamentally very soft-natured, a devout one and a fine person. Maybe due to his *karma* or temporary veil of ignorance or in a momentary demonic excitement he must have done that wrong, but as he had the grace of the Lord, due to Narada’s curse, he fell down on earth at a place called *Ghonateertham* which was on Venkatachala. He took a holy bath in that river and continued his penance.

Tumbura, who was doing penance, worship and taking holy baths regularly, got the *darshan* of the Lord who appeared before him along with all the other gods like Brahma in the month of *Phalguna*, the twelfth lunar month. The Lord asked all the Gods to take bath

in the *Ghonateertham*. He told Tumbura also to take bath along with them. Tumbura got released from the curse given by Sage Narada. He got back his original *Gandharva* looks and traits like flying in the skies, and most important was the ability to sing mellifluously.

Tumbura sought a wish from God that the *theertham* which gave him deliverance should be named after him. By God's will it became popular as *Tumbura Teertham* instead of *Ghonateertham* since that day. There were two reasons for Tumbura's wish. When the great souls and learned ones bathe in it and remember his name, he would get half of their *punyam* (merit) and when those lesser in stature than him bathe in it and think of his name, he would be in a position to give them *punyam*. This *theertham* is a very glorious one with great power. All the Gods bathed in it in the presence of the Lord. The *Varaha Purana* says that after going to the *theertham* if one does not take a holy bath in it, he/she will accrue 'Pancha *maha paathakaalu*' — the five most terrible sins. And if one bathes in it, all the sins will be destroyed.

Tumbura was blessed to receive God's grace on another special occasion. Once Rambha, the celestial dancer, was going to meet Kubera hurriedly, as summoned. On the way, Tumbura stopped her and restrained her from going. Kubera on coming to know of it cursed him to become an immobile demon. Tumbura then took the form of a demon by name Viraadha. His curse would be annulled by blessings

and grace of Lord Rama. During the time of *Mahabharatha*, he would be born as 'Sanjaya' and would serve as the charioteer of Dhritarashtra. As per God's will, he would get divine supernatural vision. So Tumbura was born as Sanjaya who narrated to Dhritarashtra everything that was happening in the *Kurukshetra* battle.

The *Varaha Purana* has one more episode which explains the glory of this *Tumbura Theerta Kshetram* where Sage Gargi enquires about the power of this Tumbura *theertham* with the guru of demigods.

After the release from his curse, Tumbura, during the month of Magha, woke up early in the morning and, after taking bath, got ready to do his daily worship to God. He found that his wife was still sleeping; so he woke her up and told her to take the sacred bath of the Magha month and arrange for his *puja*. His wife, due to the cold weather of Magha month and that too in the early hours, felt lazy to get up and delayed arrangements for his *puja*.

Tumbura, in a fit of anger, cursed her to be born as a frog in a place where there was a scarcity of water and felt miserable. She then realized her mistake and pleaded with him for remedy from his curse. Then he explained how her release would happen later. Due to his curse, she would be born as a frog and get stuck among the roots of a peepul tree, and suffer terrible misery without water for a thousand years. Once Sage Agasthya, going on a pilgrimage with his disciples,

rested in the shade of the tree. He started describing the glory of Tumbura Theertham to his disciples. By listening to that description, the frog's curse was released and she assumed her original form and offered her salutation to the sage. Then Sage Agasthya instructed her on the rules of a chaste woman (*pativratha dharma*), how she should not go against her husband's words and wish. But he also said that if the husband was an immoral one and ordered to do the prohibited deeds, then a wife should oppose that. When the husband was a devout one with moral values and when he asked for help for God's worship, then ignoring that would be considered against *pativratha dharma*. Sage Agasthya then blessed her and sent her. Just by listening to the glory of *Tumbura theertham* if sins get destroyed, is it particularly necessary to emphasize the power of bathing in *Tumbura Theertham*?

But these holy baths must be taken with knowledge and understanding of the significance of such a bath. If one bathes in it just thinking that it is a *theertham* filled with water, then the results will not be great. After knowing the glory of the *theertham* and remembering it while bathing in it, and also if one bathes in it with feelings of remorse for the sins committed in the past, and offers the fruit to Lord Srinivasa by saying '*Krishnaarpanamasthu*', then there will be no sin that cannot be destroyed and there will be no merit that will not be gained.

The *Purana* says that Arundhati Devi did twelve years of penance by bathing in the *theertham* daily.

When the Lord appeared and asked her what boon she would seek from him, she said, "If I get the complete knowledge of the glory of bathing in *Tumbura theertham*, it is enough!" That is the greatness of this *theertham*. Arundhati knew that in that *theertham* there is the presence of the Lord in a very special way and also the presence of all the other gods as ordained by the Lord. Hence one must realize the power of the *theertham* to bestow liberation. Deliberately and willingly, in one's lifetime, one must go to this *theertham* and bathe in it with dedicated devotion reciting the lines that show the power of *Tumbura theertham*, and then one gets the merit of being a *pativratha*, especially the sin of going against husband's wish will get destroyed. These days, it is difficult to find wives who have not gone against their husbands' wish; hence bathing in this *theertham* is very essential.

We all have heard / read Saint Poet Annamcharya's composition, '*manujudai putti manujuni sevinchi...dukhamandanela?*' Tumbura's story exemplifies that being born as humans we must praise the great qualities of the Lord but not any human being. Tarigonda Vengamaamba, even after her husband's death, did not accept the conditions of widowhood, but remained a *Sumangali* — like a woman whose husband is alive, and so faced social condemnation. She left Tarigonda and reached Tirumala, but there also when she faced the wrath and condemnation by the priests, she came to *Tumbura theertham* and did penance for ten years by bathing in the *theertham* every

day. With the merit she had gained thus, she developed knowledge, devotion, and dispassion. She gained power and ability to compose songs on Lord Venkateswara and could challenge the pontiffs of various *peethas*. Even today one can see the place where Vengamamba lived near *Tumburatheertham*.

This *theertham* is situated at a distance of nearly fifteen kilometres in the north direction of Lord's temple. On the full moon day of *Magha* month (March-April) when the *Uttara Phalguni* star is rising, taking a holy bath in the *theertham* is considered highly auspicious. On that day all the three crores of gods and demigods and even Brahma bathe in the *theertham*. Hence it is also called *Phalguni theertham*. Food offering as *prasadam* for *puja* is brought from the main temple.

CHAPTER 11

KASYAPA RESURRECTS PARIKSHIT

There was once a poor brahmin by name Atmarama, who had a large family. He had the responsibility of taking care of his old parents and feeding his wife and children. He did not have even one rupee with him. He was out of his wits. Then somebody advised him, "If you want to get rid of your poverty, there is only one way — that is, go to Venkatachalam, take a holy bath in the *theerthams*, have the *darshan* of Lord Varaha Swamy and worship Lord Srinivasa. Then your troubles will come to an end."

Immediately Atmarama started on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam. As a part of his *yatra* ritual, he took a holy bath in seventeen *theerthams* in Venkatachalam. Due to the merit gained by him, Sage Sanathkumara, who was a controller of mind, appeared before him. Atmarama explained his situation to him.

Sage Sanathkumara, with the power of his penance, looked into Atmarama's past life. He realized that there were many sins committed by him and that was the reason he was going through severe penury in the present birth.

We human beings most of the time don't give any charity and also stop others from donating anything or from doing charity questioning, why that much, why this, why should you give to that person. When one has the capacity to do charitable deeds but does not

do, and if one does charity for just name and fame, or if when one is in a good financial position to donate on a large scale but does it on a very smallscale, instead of getting any merit, there is a chance to accrue sin. To those who have never done *vastra daana* (donating clothes), *griha daana* (donating a house or a dwelling), *anna daana* (donating food) or *abharana daana* (donating jewellery), poverty is inevitable in their next birth.

That was the case with Atmarama. He had never done any charity; he had also prevented others from giving charity. At least, he was not treading on the path of tradition. The *shastras* proclaim that if one is respectful of tradition and follows the rules prescribed, it not only helps attain salvation but also gives material wealth. Sage Sanathkumara initiated Atmarama into '*Vyuha Lakshmi mantram*' who had no *Poorva Punya* (merit accrued in the past life), and who had never done charity and also prevented others from giving charity.

In the bounteous wealth God had bestowed on human beings, the physical body is the most important one. This body is the means for worldly, temporal and spiritual practices and gains. Atmarama started chanting the *Lakshmi mantram* with great focus and dedicated Upasana.

Later, Lord Srinivasa himself appeared before him and blessed him with longevity, health, and great wealth. He was blessed to lead a moral life. Atmarama spent

the rest of his life in happiness doing charitable deeds and donating alms to the needy.

The *Puranas* thus proclaim the greatness of the Theerthams in Tirumala and the power of Lord Srinivasa.

The *theerthams* in which Atmarama had taken a holy bath were listed as seven in number in the *Puranas* namely, *Kapila Theertham*, *Chakra Theertham*, *Vishvaksena Theertham*, *Panchayudha Theerthams*, *Brahma Kunda Theertham*, *Agni Theertham*, and *Saptharushi Theerthams*. Later on, by leading a worthy life, Atmarama justified his name which stands for one who is always in a blissful state.

In today's world who is free from poverty? We all suffer from various kinds of poverty. Apart from financial poverty, we suffer from health poverty, spiritual poverty, moral poverty, etc. Surrendering to Sri Venkatachalam is the only means to destroy these illnesses.

If one contemplates on and recites the story of Atmarama while taking a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini*, poverty of all kinds will get annihilated.

The story of King Parikshith is very well - known. Once, while on a hunting trip in the forest, with great thirst he reached the *ashram* of Sage Sameeka. As the sage was in deep meditation, he did not hear the king asking him for water. Enraged, the king put a dead snake around the sage's neck and left.

Krupi, the sage's disciple, narrated the incident to the sage's son Shringi. But he added, "I have just informed you not to take revenge. Anger does not suit a brahmin."

But in his rage and impatience, Shringi cursed King Parikshith that in a week's time he would die of serpent King Takshaka's bite.

Shringi was just an eight-year-old boy then but because of chanting *Gayatri mantra*, he could curse as per the *Purana*.

Just as the curse worked, Takshaka, the serpent King, started on his job, and on the way he came across a brahmin named Kashyapa who was a scholar in *Mantra Sastra* and who studied *Ayurveda Sastra* deeply. He had knowledge but had no recognition from people. Both of them during conversation exchanged the purpose of their visit to King Parikshith. The brahmin told Takshaka that he was going there to revive and resurrect the king with the power of his *mantras* and the science of *Ayurveda*.

But Takshaka did not believe the brahmin's words. Though Takshaka was able to give much more wealth in the form of Naga Mani (precious gems which serpents possess) than what the King could give, he did not reveal it to the brahmin but decided to test his power.

"I don't believe you possess such powers. I am that serpent King Takshaka. I will bite this huge tree and it will burn down to ashes. If you can bring it

back to life I will believe that you have the powers which you claim to have," said Takshaka.

Kashyapa agreed to that condition and said, "Yes."

Takshaka bit the tree there and the tree which was green and full of fruits and flowers got burnt down completely to ashes.

Kashyapa meditated on the *mantra* and pronounced, "The Almighty Supreme Spirit pervades the rivers, seas, the five elements, birds, animals and the humans and fills them with *Chaitanya*, life and vitality. May that Almighty fill this *bhasma* (ash) to bring this tree back to life."

Amazingly, that tree and the fauna residing on it regained their life standing like in the past.

Takshaka understood the power of Kashyapa, so he told him, "You are planning to save the King for the sake of gaining wealth. I will give you twice the wealth you thought you would be getting from the King. Go back, give up the idea of saving the King."

Kashyapa was not only a scholar adept at *Mantra Sastra*, but also a great devotee. So, by meditating he came to understand what God's will was. He came to know through his yogic power that King Parikshith's death was inevitable due to the poisoning of Takshaka's bite.

So, thinking that Parikshith would die either way and that there was no point in going there, he decided

not to go back home empty-handed. So, he decided to accept whatever wealth Takshaka was planning to give him.

The *Bhagavatham* narrates the story of King Parikshith — how he would do the ‘Praayopavesam’ (abstaining from food and awaiting the approaching death in a sitting posture) for a week and how he listened to the sacred *Bhagavatham* discourse from Sage Suka during those seven days and how he, due to his own destiny and the curse, was bitten by Takshaka and how, after dying, was liberated because of the power of listening to the *Bhagavatam*. Sage Vyasa did not elaborate on what had happened to that brahmin Kashyapa and how the story had ended.

But in the *Skanda Purana*, Sage Vyasa explains in detail the story of Kashyapa.

After obtaining all the wealth in the form of Nagamani and other valuable gems as a gift from Takshaka, Kashyapa started back home. The woodcutter who was burnt to ashes also got back the life. Sitting on the tree he listened to the whole conversation that had taken place between Takshaka and Kashyapa. Smitten by the greed for wealth, the woodcutter reached the village where Kashyapa lived and spread the word around that Kashyapa had not brought the king back to life.

Hearing that, the relatives of Kashyapa and other villagers were stunned and enraged at his behaviour, “Though you have the capacity and skill to revive and

though you have started with the intention to save him, with your greed for wealth, you haven't saved the King. You are responsible for our King's death. It amounts to murdering him which equals to the sin of *Brahma Hatya* (killing a brahmin). You have committed an unpardonable crime.” Saying so, people confiscated all his wealth and expelled him from society for good.

CHAPTER 12

BEAR, LION, MAN

Those days, the punishment of expulsion from society was a very terrible one to endure. If the whole society is put to trouble and if bad is happening because of one person, then it is the responsibility of the society to expel that person and save everybody. It is a very strong punishment. There will be many difficulties — food will be a problem, no charity will be given, no comforts and amenities provided by the society can be enjoyed — life becomes terrible.

After being expelled from the society, Kashyapa repented a lot. He did not know what to do and what was God's will. Once sage Shaakalya came to the place where the highly repentant Kashyapa was there. Shaakalya has great powers due to his austerities and penance. He had great command of Pancharathra doctrine and he was the one who wrote the famous *Shaakalya Samhita*. Kashyapa sought his advice to get rid of his suffering. He lamented loudly and questioned the sage, "What wrong have I done? Why has all this happened to me? What must I do?"

Sage Shaakalya contemplated in meditation after praying to the Lord and, by the grace of the Lord, he came to understand the whole background. He told Kashyapa, "When someone has the ability to cure someone of a disease but does not help, he will get the sin of killing a Brahmin, *Brahma Hatya*. Shastras proclaim that in such a person's company one should

not have food and even speaking with that person will entail in accruing of sin. Since you have committed great mistake, you must go through the suffering of the punishment.

Kashyapa said, "I did not accept what Takshaka said immediately, I contemplated and prayed to the Lord and found out what God's will was: Parikshith's death was inevitable and certain. So, I thought even if I had gone there, I would not have been able to do anything and also accepting God's will I did what I felt was right. Then why must I get any sin?"

Sage Shaakalya replied, "Just because we believe it is God's will, we must not give up our duty. Take, for instance, a doctor and a patient. When the patient is suffering from a terrible illness and the doctor knows that death is certain, he should not stop his treatment. It is the bounden duty of the children and relatives to see that the treatment is given even when the impending death is certain. They should not think that it is a waste of money and stop the treatment. If getting a disease is one's fate, seeing that he gets the treatment till his death and bearing the expenses for the treatment is the duty of his children and relatives and that is their fate. The doctor's duty is to continue with his treatment and put in his effort till the very last breath of the patient. If one does not do one's duty that way, *Brahma Hatya Paapam* (the sin of killing a brahmin) will be accrued. This is what the *sastras* proclaim." (It is frightening to imagine looking at the present situations.)

Kashyapa asked Sage Shaakalya what remedial measures he was expected to take to get rid of his sin. Sage Shaakalya gave a piece of advice as an expedient.

“There is no remedial solution for this kind of sin. But with a repenting heart, visit Venkatachalam, bathe in the sacred *Swami Pushkarini*, pray to the Lord sincerely and seek his blessings to destroy your sin. If you complete your pilgrimage to Venkatachalam with the repentance that if, in spite of one’s capacity, one does not extend help to others in their difficulties, it will result in great sin

The *Skanda Purana* says that Kashyapa did everything as told by Sage Shaakalya and got back his spiritual glow. After completion of his pilgrimage, he went back to his village where he received a respectful welcome from his relatives.

CHAPTER 13

THREE BIRTHS AS CHATAKA (JATAKA) BIRD

Yagna deva was a Maharashtra brahmin who was very righteous and docile by nature. His wife was Sumathi, but she was completely opposite to her name in her behaviour — a Durmathi (evil-minded one) and their son was also a wicked one. The son had all the bad qualities one could imagine. All the five terrible sins were in his character. It is considered a sin to make friends with those who have habits like drinking, womanizing, murdering, stealing, etc. All the methods which Yagnadeva tried to bring his wife and his son on to the correct path failed miserably. Finally, he went to Sage Durvasa and lamented his bad fate and asked for his guidance to help and uplift them. As advised by the sage, Yagnadeva went on a pilgrimage along with his wife and son to Venkatachalam and took a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini* which freed them from their sins and bestowed liberation.

Hemanga was a very fine King who was very philanthropic by nature. Sage Veda Vyasa described very beautifully in the *Skanda Purana* the charitable deeds and donations made by him. He had donated cows equal to the number of stars in the sky and the drops of water in the sea. To the brahmins, the poor, and the disabled, he gave in charity huge amounts of gold, precious gems, land and houses. But the *Purana* proclaimed that he had one ‘*dosha*’ — a wrongful

trait, a fault in his personality. In our view, that may not seem wrong but according to the *shastras* it is!

That King had not offered water in charity. He might have given everything in charity but had not given *Jala Daan* (water in charity) to his visitors who happened to be thirsty after the scorching heat. But he had donated every other thing in charity. His belief was. “Who will give water in charity? Water is available everywhere. I am a King and befitting my stature I must donate cattle, land, gold, etc.” And, he had one more blemish — he was treating everybody equal not assessing their worthiness to accept the donation. He used to honour scholars, brahmins in the same manner along with *Brahma Bandhuvus* (those scorned by society), the poor, and the disabled. He did not give prominence and importance to scholarship and erudition. And without checking their credentials, he used to donate to those pseudo-scholars who were simply boasting with pride about their knowledge without actually possessing any. By donating to such unworthy people, he accrued sin. According to the *shastra*, one must take into consideration qualities like respectfulness and worthiness of a person and then give a donation or bestow felicitation. Moreover, when a King is giving donations and honouring anybody, the whole society watches keenly. Hence, it is important that only worthy persons are selected for the purpose of giving charity or honouring.

It does not mean one should not help or donate to the hungry, poor, disabled, and unworthy ones. If one

wishes, one can offer help in a congenial manner in every way possible. But helping wicked people is a sin, but again *dharma* says hungry ones who, though wicked by nature, must also be fed and given water and satisfied. We give donations to those who are poor, but we may not know in what way that money will be used by them. Many believe that donating and giving charity is our *dharma* and how that money will be used is not our concern but is based on the *karma* of those who took the charity. But the *shastra* does not leave us so easily with compassion. The *shastra* says that if the money we give in charity is misused for wrong purposes, then we too will get a share of the sin accrued. Hence, we must know the eligibility (by doing due diligence), and then giving charity to those who are eligible is our bounden duty. If one donates without thinking on these lines, or just neglecting that rule, or with ignorance that treating everybody equal is our *dharma*, it results in terrible sin. When one does not give water to the thirsty, one will be born as a Chataka bird three times.

Though King Hemanga had done so much of charity and donation, due to the faulty way of doing, he accrued sin and so had taken many mean births like dog, donkey, and later got another birth as a lizard. As a lizard, he lived in the palace of one King by name Shruthakeerthi, who was very moral and righteous and was serving the learned ones sincerely. Once a brahmin by name Sruthadeva who was a highly knowledgeable one and a *sadhaka* visited his palace. King Hemanga

very cordially served him by inviting him in and did *Pada puja* (worshipping the feet). As part of that ritual, the queen and King Shruthakeerthi cleansed his feet with water reverentially and honoured him by giving the traditional betel leaf with areca nut (*tambulam*) along with the monetary donation. After doing the *Pada Puja*, when the King took *jnana padodakam* (the water from his feet) and sprinkled it on his head, a few drops fell on the lizard which was there on the wall close by. By the power of the *jnaanodaka*, the lizard got past life remembrance and became aware that he was King Hemanga. He questioned Sruthadeva, “What wrong have I done? For one like me who did so much of charity, why this disgustingly terrible birth as a lizard? Tell me the reason.” Sruthadeva, with the power of penance, came to know the two major *doshas* of Hemanga. He told him that despite doing many donations, he had not given water to anybody, not out of ignorance but because of arrogance and careless attitude as to why he should give mere water in charity. Despite knowing the *shastra* and seeing the thirsty ones, he had not given water to them. Sruthadeva told him that it was a big sin he had committed. And, without knowing one’s eligibility to receive charity, if one gives charity to the wicked and undeserving it does not yield any merit but only sin. Hence you had had such low births,” explained Sruthadeva to Hemanga. Hemanga, in the form of a lizard, felt deep repentance and asked Sruthadeva, “What are the ways and means by which I will get liberated and my sins atoned for?”

Skaandhapurana explained it in detail. Sruthadeva, out of great compassion, donated one day’s merit he had accrued by visiting Venkatachalam, taking a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini*, having *darshan* of Lord Varaha Swami and Lord Srinivasa. With his dip, his sins got destroyed and *punyam* acquired, Hemang changed from the lizard to physical body ready for *sadhana* immediately. The *Purana* proclaims this episode extensively. What had happened to all the charity and donations he had made, and the merit accrued? Though he got low births because of the sins, it was because of the merit he accrued, he became eligible to enjoy the compassion of Sruthadeva and got his physical body which led him into the path of spiritual practice to ultimately have the *darshan* of the Lord himself. One must bear the negative results of sins committed and enjoy the positive results of the merits gained. These two are inevitable. The *Sashtra* says that there may be atonement to a few minor sins, but others have to be definitely borne. In this *Kaliyuga*, the pilgrimage to Venkatachalam, bath in *Swami Pushkarini*, and *darshan* of Lord Srinivasa will destroy any kind of sin, proclaims the *Purana*. Devotion, dedication, and repentance are very important. Just taking a bath in the *Pushkarini* and having Lord’s *darshan* are not enough. Doing all that with great faith and devotion is very significant. How will one develop devotion? Which knowledge develops devotion? What is that knowledge? Only the knowledge about God’s power and supremacy will give that devotion. The stories in

the *Puranas* proclaim the power of God, hence one must recite them, contemplate on them when taking the holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini* in Venkatachalam, and then have the *darshan* of Lord Srinivasa.

Veda

The *Brahma Purana* explains the merits gained by charity and the power of charity. Though it is meritorious to do charitable deeds and donations anywhere, if one gives charity in places of worship and *theerthams*, the merits gained become manifold. If one gives charity in temples, in places where the presence of God is more, *kshetras* where sages and great souls have performed penance and attained siddhi, places where elders performed *Maha Yagnas* and meritorious rituals, on the banks of sacred rivers like Ganga, they bestow immense *punyam* or merit. That is the reason that we donate and do various charitable acts in places like Kasi, Haridwar, Gaya, Badari, and Rameswaram. In these *kshetras*, doing ritualistic puja to the Theertham, performing prescribed rites and ceremonies to dead ancestors is a tradition which is being followed for long. The *Brahma Purana* more specifically mentions the merit one accrues by giving charity in Venkatachalam. Compared to other *kshetras* and *theerthams*, this *Purana* emphasizes that giving charity or donation in Venkatachalam gives merit millions of times more.

The story of Vishnuvrudha is a testimony to that fact.

One Devaswami Acharya was a learned scholar and a *sadhaka*. He used to run a good *Gurukul* with many students. Vishnuvrudha was a young brahmin student there. Because of the sins accrued from his previous births, he developed a wicked mind. Desiring his *guru's* wife, he killed his guru and had his desire fulfilled by forcefully enjoying her. He accrued terrible sins through *Brahma Hatya* (killing of a brahmin), deceiving his own *guru*, having sexual union with others' spouse, deceiving the learned ones — all these horrible sins pushed him into a terrible hell name '*Chandakolaahala*', where he was put through unbearable hellish punishments. His son Veda was a fine man, a highly knowledgeable one. Coming to know of the wrongs his father had done and the terrible results he was facing, he went on thinking about ways to give liberation to his father. But his father's sins were so severe that merely doing ceremonial rites or related donations would not atone them. Veda believed that it was his duty to do something significant to get his father released from his terrible sins. After searching all the *Puranas*, he came to know that donation of lamps (*deepa daanam*) at Venkatachalam would give great results. Veda was not however a rich person.

But with great faith and dedication, he went on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam. There he took a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini* and worshipped Lord Srinivasa for a very long time. Then on the sacred hill, he performed all the rites of obsequies and followed all the rules about the *Theertham*. Then he gave lamps

and ghee to the temple authorities and the priests and also donated all the material required to light all the lamps in the sanctum of the temple for one whole day and night on behalf of his father and requested the priests to light a '*Nanda Deepam*' in his father's name and donated money in charity as was possible to him. The *Brahma Purana* describes that Veda completed his *Yatra* successfully and offered the fruit of that *Yatra* to Lord Krishna by saying "*Krishnaarpanamasthu!*", and that his father attained liberation. In Sanskrit, there is a saying that in oil and ghee there is a quality called '*Sneha*' (friendship — which is supposed to be a state of mutual trust) and that the lamp will be glowing till that quality of '*Sneha*' lasts in it. Similarly, if we want the light of the divine to shine in our hearts, we must have that quality of '*Sneha*' in the form of devotion in our hearts. For that very reason of Veda possessing the quality of '*Sneha*' in his devotion, his father who was in *Naraka* (hell) was blessed by the effulgence of knowledge and got liberated. The donation of a small lamp with complete faith and devotion in Tirumala has such a power.

Has only donating the lamp in Tirumala such power? The donation has such power and that too in Tirumala *Kshetram* it gains more significance. But that special significance is felt in the way the donation is made. Devotion and dedication must be there. It is not the quantity or the size of the donation, but the feeling with which the donation is made is important. Just like the *Deepa daana*, any donation, either big or small, if

done with respectful devotion, has a different effect. There is no need to mention the supreme power of charities like giving land, cow, gold, house, and *Kanyadaan* (giving a girl in marriage). If one does not have the capacity to give such big donations, one can find an eligible person and donate clothes, money, fruits, water, milk, or ghee. The Tirumala is a *Kshetram* that gives one a divine opportunity to do that way and attain liberation. The money we donate and the money we put in the Temple *Hundi* must be that which we have earned through hard work and the right means. Nowadays there seems to arise a question. If a portion of the money earned through wrongful deeds can be offered to the Lord will it be considered a sin or merit? But the *Shastra* very sternly propounds that the money earned through wrong means, if offered in charity or donation, will not destroy one's sins committed. One must undergo the result of the sins committed. But even if it is that kind of money, if donated in *Hundi*, it will give some fruit if not entirely. If one is prepared to donate money even if it is wrongfully earned, the equivalent merit will be accrued. With repentance and as an atonement if one gives everything in donation, God's grace will surely be there.

CHAPTER 14

WHY IS LORD'S PRESENCE PROMINENT IN THIS *KSHETRAM*?

Once sages like Sanaka Sanandana asked Sage Sootha. “Why is the Lord present in Venkatachalam with the same glory as in *Vaikuntha*?”

As an answer, Sage Sootha explained, “Once all the sages decided to perform a *Maha Yagna*. That time Sage Narada came there and questioned them thus, ‘For whom are you doing this ritual, and to whom do you wish to offer the fruit of it, and who is your ‘*Yagnabhoktha*’ (the enjoyer), to whom are you planning to present the whole ritual as ‘*Sarva Karma Samarpana*’? Who do you think is the most Supreme One, the ‘*Sarvottama*?’

“That brought about a serious discussion amongst the sages. It is not that the sages were not knowledgeable. For the welfare of the whole world, taking this divine opportunity, it was their effort to prove to the worlds the supremacy of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu. It was to bring to light the mundane situation and that question and discussion happened for our sake, to enlighten us. For good people to know the *tattwam*, the inherent precept and philosophy, the learned ones like these sages indulge in such things. We do many charitable acts, give donations, do noble deeds, perform *Yagnas*, we expend money for all that, but do we give a thought at least as to why we do them? How much do we know the science and philosophy behind

them? Many people donate and give in charity without really seeking anything in return like wish - fulfilment, etc. All the sages started deep discussion seeking the answer for Sage Narada's pertinent questions. They approached Sage Bhrigu and prayed to him to solve this matter. In the whole world, Sage Bhrigu's was the first ‘one-man commission!’

Sage Bhrigu started his quest to find out, who is the supreme most? Who is the enabler of all? Who is the enjoyer of all offerings or oblations? First, he went to *Satya Loka* where he found Lord Brahma in privacy with his consort, Saraswathi Devi. Sage Bhrigu prostrated before them. Lord Brahma behaved as though he had not seen him, because he knew what God's ordained design was as Brahma himself was *Maha Jnaani* and is *Jeevotthama*; he understood that whatever was happening was to prove the Supremacy of Lord Vishnu and that it must get established through this Sage Bhrigu. Hence, Brahma behaved that way. It is our duty to do full-body prostration or at least offer *namaskarams* to elders or the knowledgeable ones when we visit them. And it is the elders' duty to offer them to Lord Krishna saying ‘*Krishnaarpanamasthu*’ and give blessings. If doing such acts of respect and reverence is important to youngsters, it is equally important for elders to accept and bless them; that is *dharma*. Sage Bhrigu thought, ‘Brahma doesn't even know such a small and basic tenet’ and cursed Brahma. “You won't have idol worship in this world!” Due to his curse, we do not see any temples built for

Brahma except in a place called 'Pushkar', where Brahma performed one Maha Yagna. In commemoration of that event, there stands one small temple for Brahma and a lake called *Pushkar*. That is concerning Vayu Deva, both Brahma and Vayu Deva are *Jeevotthamas* of the same orbit, and Vayu Deva himself will be holding the portfolio of Brahma in future *Kalpas*. This means the Brahma of those ages would have been Vayu Deva of previous ages and he himself is Anjaneya. We find Anjaneya's idol or temple in every village or town (Anjaneya is Vayu Deva, so they are temples of Vayu Deva), but when he comes as Brahma in future *Kalpas* there will be no idol worship for him.

After cursing Brahma that way, Sage Bhrigu proceeded angrily to see Maha Rudra in *Kailasa*. *Trinetra*, Lord Shiva, was enjoying private moments with Parvathi Devi and Bhrigu paid his obeisance to them. Lord Shiva is a supreme Jnaani, all knower, and is the controller of mind. What was going on in Sage Bhrigu's mind, Lord Shiva already knew. Shiva was a great devotee of Vishnu and he knew that it was through this sage it would be proved that Lord Vishnu is the supreme most. Hence, he too behaved as though he had not seen the sage coming. The sage, enraged by Shiva's behaviour, cursed him also. "You were so engrossed in your amorous dalliance as to ignore and not pay attention to a sage who came visiting; so you cannot be the supreme most. Let the worlds not worship you but offer worship to you in *linga* form only!" The *shivalingas* we see now getting worshipped

in temples belong to a much later time. If one has to really see the Shivalinga which was worshipped after Sage Bhrigu's curse, it is in the country's most ancient temple in a place called Gudi Mallaram! It is situated at a distance of four kilometers from Renigunta town. One must go and see the temple to know about the curse by Sage Bhrigu. As per the divine ordinance, Brahma and Shiva accepted the curses given to them by Sage Bhrigu who is inferior to them in stature. The Lord decided that the merit earned by Bhrigu beyond his worth must be destroyed and knowing that Brahma and Shiva acted accordingly. From *Kailasa*, Bhrigu reached *Vaikuntham*. Even there the situation was the same. Sri Mahavishnu was enjoying with Lakshmi Devi in private moments. They both behaved as though they had not seen the sage coming in and doing full-body prostration. Experiencing the same scene as in the previous realms, Bhrigu, the three-eyed one, became terribly angry and kicked Vishnu on his chest. As though he had seen him just then, Vishnu served him with utmost respect. He told the sage, "By coming into contact with my body which is very hard, your soft foot must have been hurt." Saying this Vishnu started pressing his feet and offered worship, *Pada puja* by asking Lakshmi Devi to join in the puja. The *Purana* says that after washing the sage's feet as a part of the worship Vishnu had sprinkled that water on himself and had it sprinkled all over *Vaikuntham*. The *Puranic* dictum is, even a speck of dust from the feet of a learned pious brahmin is enough to bestow great wealth

and to destroy all kinds of sins. We all have heard this story about Krishna; though not written in any book, it is often quoted by speakers in their discourses. One day, in Dwaraka, while Lord Sri Krishna was doing puja, Sage Narada came visiting him. He asked Krishna, “You are the suprememost. To whom are you offering your worship? I am keen to know!” To clarify his doubt, Sri Krishna opened his *puja* box which contained another box, and that box had one more box inside and that box had one smaller box and that one had the smallest box which contained some dust. When sage Narada questioned what it was, Krishna said, “It is the dust of the feet of my pious devotees seeking Brahman.”

The Third Eye in the Foot

The story goes that Sage Bhrigu got highly pleased and calmed down after the reverential worship Lord Vishnu had offered to his feet and that, during that *paada puja*, Vishnu crushed the third eye which the sage had in his foot. That act by Vishnu had destroyed the dark ignorance the sage had. That Lord Vishnu is the suprememost was confirmed by Sage Bhrigu. He came down to the earth and revealed to all the sages and seers who were waiting for his verdict that Lord Vishnu was the *Sarvottama*, the most supreme, followed by Lakshmi Devi, after her Brahma and Vayudeva, followed by their consorts followed by Garuda, Sesha and Rudra followed by Srikrishna's eight queens like Rukmini, Satyabhama and the other

six, Jambavathi, Kalindi, Mitravrinda, Neela, Bhadhra, Lakshana, and also the sixteen thousand other Gopikas, followed by Separni, Vaaruni, Paarvatha followed by Indra and Kama. Thus, there are human beings, the jivas who are eligible for liberation, who are existing in various positions of hierarchy in thirty orbits, and that the same differences and hierarchy are there even among demons. These secrets from the *shastras*, Sage Bhrigu explained to all the sages. Hence, while doing *puja*, even the retinue of the deities must be worshipped. While doing so, based on their hierarchy and eligibility, they must be worshipped. Sage Bhrigu could prove the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, but in that process had lost quite a bit. By giving curses to Brahma and Rudra, he wasted all the merit he had gained and accrued by doing severe penance for thousands of years. For the terrible sin of kicking Lord Vishnu on his chest, he had to be born as a demon. When Kalanemi was born as Kamsa, the passion and emotion in him was Bhrigu. By being in the body of Kamsa, he had to endure the hatred for God, that which was against his original nature as a sage. The effect of the sin committed by Bhrigu was highly powerful. The *Bhagavata Purana* says that when Sri Krishna was completing his incarnation, he had to be hit by an arrow from a Vyaadha, and Bhrigu was born as that Vyaadha. He had to suffer being a terrible culprit, a hostile force against the divine. But God is very compassionate. He would forgive the mistakes committed by his devotees in momentary passion, ignorance, and demonic trait.

If a devotee expresses sincere repentance and deep devotion towards him, he would bless with liberation. Vyaadha hit him with an arrow without seeing properly but became deeply repentant for his actions, and to Bhrigu (*Vyaadha*) who kicked him on his chest, the compassionate Lord gave liberation.

CHAPTER 15

LAKSHMI DEVI GOING TO KARIVEERAPURAM

Lakshmi Devi was in *Vaikuntham* while Lord Vishnu was serving and worshipping Sage Bhrigu. She gave warm water for Vishnu to wash the sage's feet. For *Paada puja* and *Brahmana puja* she got everything ready. Along with Vishnu, she too sprinkled on herself *Brahmanapadodakam* with the water after washing the sage's feet, which is considered sacred.

After Sage Bhrigu left, Lakshmi Devi feigned anger. She told Lord Vishnu that Vishnu's chest was her residing abode and that a mere human being kicking at such a sacred place had insulted her very much and that instead of punishing him, she too had to take part in the *puja* and service which he had done to him and that after going through such a disrespectful insult, she thought that staying in *Vaikuntham* was impossible and so she left for Kariveerapuram (Kolhapur).

It was a divine sport, a pretence and god's *leela*. To make their plan work they enacted this love fight. These episodes make the wicked ones, the demons, think about gods as humans and they will fall into the darkness of ignorance leading to their destruction. The benign and the pious ones must see all such episodes as divine *leela*. Lord Narayana and Lakshmi Devi always remained as one, they are inseparable. Lakshmi Devi resides on Vishnu's chest eternally. There is no separation from them. But the time had come for

Narayana to go to the earth and reside on Venkatachalam. Till the end of the 28th *Kaliyuga* he had to protect and bless his devotees by destroying their sins.

He must keep his word which he had given to Lakshmi Devi when she incarnated as Sita.

He must fulfil the boon he had given to Yashoda Devi.

He must make the words of Brahma come true which he had told to one brahmin Madhava.

He must bring *Vaikuntham* to Tirumala.

For all these things to happen and for God's will to prevail, there must arise a situation where the Lord must go to Tirumala. Lakshmi Devi feigned anger and she left *Vaikuntham* by telling the Lord where she was going.

CHAPTER 16

LORD NARAYANA'S VISIT TO VENKATACHALAM

After Lakshmi Devi left *Vaikuntham* for Kariveerapuram (Kolhapur), Sreeman Narayana too left *Vaikuntham* and started on his way to *Bhooloka*. As per the boons he had given earlier to Sesha, to Meru mountain king, to Sita Devi in his Rama incarnation, and to Yashoda Devi during his appearance as Krishna, he had to reside on the earth till the end of the 28th *Kaliyuga*. Hence, he came down to earth to reside on Venkatachalam. Like his other incarnations as Rama, Parasurama, Narasimha, and Vamana, this was not his incarnation. Verily Lord Narayana himself came down to the earth as Venkateshwara in the form of Krishna. After coming down to the earth, acting as though he was suffering immensely due to the pangs of separation from Lakshmi, he got into one anthill on Venkatachalam and settled himself.

It is natural that when even small-time leaders and heads are going from one place to another, their retinue will jump forward and go along with them. And it need not be mentioned how it will be with kings and emperors. Lord Narayana is the ruler and sovereign of the crores of universes. During his incarnation as Rama, Vayu Deva came along as Hanuman, Sesha as Lakshmana and other demigods came along as monkeys on to the Earth. In the same way in *Dwapara Yuga*, during his incarnation as Krishna, all gods appeared in various incarnations to take part in the

divine activity to achieve the purpose – Vayu Deva as Bhima, Sesha as Balarama, Indra as Arjun. This way, the incarnations of Rama and Krishna have manifested to punish the wicked and evil ones and save the righteous ones. Hence all the gods, based on the purpose of those incarnations, had taken their respective forms.

Now, the Lord sat inside the anthill unmoving in meditation for ten thousand years. Vayu Deva had been already there doing penance. In one incarnation, he took birth as Anjaneya on that hill and remained there as Chiranjeevi (eternal being). And about *Sesha*, the whole hill is *Sesha* himself and other gods took form as trees, sages and seers as animals, the *Pitrus* as birds, the Yaksha and Kinneras as rocks on the hill. They all settled down on Venkatachalam and remained in their individual *Sadhana*.

Though Lakshmi Devi, the all - knower, was in Kariveerapuram, she knew everything what was happening. So to appease and protect her husband from pangs of hunger, she asked Brahma that her son should become a cow and requested Shiva that her grandson should become its calf. And she herself donned the attire of a cowherd woman and went to the palace of the King of that area. The name of that Chola King was Chakravarty. This story has been told in an elaborate manner in many *Puranas* — *Bhavishyottara Purana*, *Brahma*, *Varaha*, *Brahmanda*, *Aditya Puranas*, etc. Lakshmi Devi in the garb of that

cowherd woman, sold the divine cow to the queen along with the calf. Because the cowherd woman said that it was not an ordinary cow but a divine one, the queen decided that the milk fed to her son must be very special. It was wrong. Instead of thinking to use the divine cow's milk for the purpose of God's worship and offering, she decided to feed her son with that milk. That is human nature. But it is against *Sastras*. Why Lakshmi Devi gave the cow to the king's palace was because she knew that every day the king's entire cattle would go to Venkatachalam for grazing.

It is said that Lakshmi Devi left *Vaikuntham* and went to Kariveerapuram after getting angry with her husband. If it was so, if she were really angry with him, would she take that much trouble after seeing everything through her divine vision? It was a mere play enacted by the Lord and Lakshmi Devi to smoothen out everything for what had to happen in future. It was their play, a *Leela*. Lord Narayana enjoyed milk, he wanted milk for *Abhishekam*, food offerings made with milk.

(Even now everyday milk is offered to Lord Srinivasa and milk *Abhishekam* is done to Bhoga Srinivasa Murthy, and every Friday *Abhishekam* with milk is done to the main deity — *moola vigraham* in Tirumala). Hence Lakshmi Devi made arrangement for milk offering to Swami who was in the anthill.

That wonderful cow which was in reality Brahma, used to go to Venkatachalam every day to offer milk

Abhishekam to his father, Lord Narayana. Just about reaching the anthill, overwhelmed with *the bhakthi*, the divine cow used to drop milk completely into the anthill from her udders without anybody milking it. One must make note of an important fact here. It is said, any object in the universe, flower or a fruit, Brahma offers it first to the Lord as '*naivedyam*'. So whoever offers anything later, it becomes '*nirmalyam*'. It remains of the offering because everything would be offered first to Lord Brahma. So is there any wonder if Brahma offered milk *Abhishekam* to the Lord that way? This offering by the divine continued every day.

The queen was wondering in the palace as she did not understand what was going on. The cow which she had bought for such a high price had not given even a spoonful of milk. No reason was known. When she inquired with the gopalaka, the cowherd in-charge of the cow, he told her that he had never milked the cow and that he said that under oath. So what had to be done? She thought she would warn him very sternly next time and if the situation did not improve, she would punish him severely. She warned the cowherd of dire consequences — he would be punished by whip lashes. He got terrified and the next day he went behind the cow to see for himself what exactly was happening. He saw the cow to let the milk drop as a steady flow into the anthill on its own. He became enraged and tried hitting it with an axe.

Instantly the Lord, who was inside the anthill in order to avoid the killing of the cow, pushed it aside.

The most compassionate Lord would never allow his devout son to get injured! That too, it was *Jeevothama* who was doing the milk *Abhishekam* with great devotion. Protecting his devotee was the duty of the Lord and his being a benefactor of brahmins would he allow the cow to get hit?

The *Bhavishyottara Purana* says that with that blow of the axe, the Lord's head got injured and split making blood flow high up, as high as seven palm trees. Who was this Lord? As Trivikrama, he grew from small form to stupendous form to fill the whole Universe. In that form when he raised his leg to cover the whole universe, his little toe nail hit the outer expanse of the 100 crores of miles, that thick hard area split and from that split of the outer expanse of the universe had flown out the river Ganga. Could the blow of an axe break open the head of such an extraordinarily strong and powerful Lord? His body was not made of mortal material. It was *Chinmaya achhedhyam*, *abbhedhyam*. The pious, learned ones remembering that episode became overwhelmed with emotion. But those ignorant ones felt that the Lord was like one of them, a mere human. This thought was also his sport, a *leela*. The cowherd, on seeing the spurt of blood, which rose up so high from the head of the divine form that emerged from the anthill, collapsed and died instantly with fear and bewilderment. Immediately the divine cow went to the King's court and started crying dolefully. The King, understanding that the cow was indicating and signalling something important, went

behind it and reached atop the hill. He saw the divine *purusha* who got hurt and was bleeding.

The Lord spoke with the King in a harsh way and said, “When in your kingdom a terrible misdeed like this has happened, you have to bear the punishment for the wrong done. I curse you to become a fiend (evil spirit)!” he cursed. “What wrong have I done, Lord? For whatever the gopalaka had done, why must I be punished? That too, such a terrible huge curse! Why must I be punished for wrong not committed?” The King lamented piteously.

The Lord then answered him thus, “In a household, for any mistake committed by the wife, son, a servant or by anybody in the house for that matter, the head of the house is responsible. In the same manner, for the wrongs committed in his kingdom, the King is responsible. Hence, as the King and as the head of the kingdom, you have to bear the punishment. You cannot escape my curse, you will have to turn into a fiend!” On hearing those words, the King became deeply crestfallen. Providing some solace to the King, the Lord told him that in the future when the marriage would take place between himself and Padmavathi Devi, King Akasharaju would gift him a crown, he would wear that crown every Friday, he would shed tears of joy for about twenty-four minutes, then the King would not suffer as a fiend but would enjoy normally. Why had God given such a big curse and why had he provided some sort of solace later on? This question may arise.

All that has happened was due to the Lord’s divine ordinance and *leela*. Based on each one’s *karmic fruit* their joys and sorrows will come to them. The Lord has no partiality or likes or dislikes. He is free from any blemish. Generally, we find that those who are on the righteous path would go through many difficulties and many wicked ones enjoy all comforts. We cannot judge based on the deeds people do in the present birth. The joys and sorrows one experiences now need not be based on the fruits of their *karma* of this very birth. Fruits of past life merits and sins accrued will result in them during this birth. Those fruits based on what are called ‘*praarabdha karmas*’ accrued in the past life, we expend from that bundle to enjoy either joys or sorrows. That is the dictum of the *sastra*. This principle worked in the case of the Chola king. It does not mean that God is cruel and that he too has passions like affection and hatred. People who think on those lines are blinded by the darkness of ignorance, say the *Sastras*. Protecting the cow is a bounden duty and principle of *sastra*. In a country or a kingdom where a cow is harmed, right from the King to the cowherd are punishable. But the fact was, after coming down to the earth, the Lord had seen only that cowherd first. Probably that is why, even today, a cowherd will have the first *darshan* of the Lord along with the *archakas* in the Tirumala temple.

The above episode has the support and proof in *Bhavishyottara* and *Aditya Puranas*. But in the *Bhavishyottara Purana* there is a difference in the story

of Chola King, for which the response or opinion of mythologists and historians is that there may arise some episodic differences in situational background based on the *kalpa*. It does not mean that what one *Purana* has said is the truth and the other is false. As Sage Vyasa declared, the *Puranas* are three kinds - *Sattwika*, *Rajasa*, and *Tamasa*. The *Sastra* says that for the three kinds of human beings there are three kinds of *Puranas*. And it is not that there is a difference in the text in the *Brahmanda Purana*, but because the story is completely different, one must deduce that there can be differences in that which had happened in one *Brahma Kalpa* and that which had happened in another *Brahma Kalpa*.

As per the *Brahmanda Purana*, when Lord Narayana came down to Venkatachalam, the ruling King of the kingdom was Cholaraja Chakravarthy. He was born to one Naga Kanya and a Gandharva through their Gandharva marriage. Once the cowherd told him about a surprising happening. That every day when the palace cattle go for grazing on the hill of Venkatachalam, they used to milk the cows filling huge vessels and that while bringing them down, at one particular spot all the milk from the vessels used to go automatically into an anthill and that however much they tried to stop that from happening, they were unable to stop the tilting vessels from pouring milk into the anthill. The King was surprised and got very curious. So to find out the truth for himself, he reached that special place.

On the way the King came across a Nishada by name Shabara, who also went along with him to the place where the mysterious incident occurred. The *Purana* mentioned about this Shabara. He was none other than Rangadasu who lived during the time of Vaikhanasa, who killed his own son thinking that he ate away the food before offering it to the Lord as *naivedyam*. After reaching the place, there arose a discussion as to why and how such things were happening. Nishada then explained his experiences. He told that it was a place where the Lord resided and that it was highly sacred and he suggested to the King that the proposal by others to dig up the anthill must be definitely negated and stopped. "Here, divine *purushas* exist. When we don't know the significance, we must keep quiet, not get into trouble by using our temporal intelligence. We all know the story of Sukanya, who went to Sage Chyavana's *ashram* and not knowing that he was doing penance in an anthill, poked a stick into the anthill which pierced the sage's eye causing grievous injury. We all know what trouble it had caused. So, right now, let us pray and worship the Lord," he said. The King agreed and went into deep prayer.

As part of that worship, the King himself arranged for a thousand vessels of milk and with great devotional fervour offered that milk as *Abhishekam* into the anthill. Pleased by his devout prayers and worship, the Lord appeared to him then and there and blessed him with his grace.

Since the King was a meritorious soul, the Lord appeared in his *Satchitananda* form and then turned into a bewitchingly beautiful stone idol with conch and discus along with his *Kati hastham* and *Varada hastham*.

In that very place the King got a temple built and started the temple worship, says the *Brahmanda Purana*. All the present rituals and festivities of the temple are those which that King had introduced. The present day *Brahmotsavam*, *Rathotsvam* and other *Utsava Sevas* and milk *Abhishekam Seva*, etc. were introduced by the King. It is popularly believed that in those days even Brahma and other gods too participated in the *Utsava Sevas* of the temple. Even today Brahma takes on the responsibility to oversee the smooth functioning of the *Brahmotsavam* at Tirumala, proclaim the scriptures. It is for this reason *Brahma ratham* (chariot of Brahma) starts first as a formality during the *vahanotsavam* as part of the *Brahmotsavam* celebrations.

The Chola King had an unflinching devotion for the Lord. When problems arose, he would appeal to the Lord as a submission. He had an immense devotion and faith in the power and the glory of the Lord that he would always protect and save him. As an example, the *Brahmanda Purana* mentioned in detail the story of one Krishna Sarma.

CHAPTER 17

KRISHNA SARMA

Once, when the Chola King seated on a throne was in the midst of the activities of his court, a brahmin by name Krishna Sarma came to the royal court.

He told the king that he belonged to Chandrapur and his father was Kurmachary who was no more and that he had a wife and an infant son and that he suddenly had an unavoidable reason to go on *Ganga Snaana* (bath) *Yatra*. Since his son was just a few days old, he was not in a position to take his wife and son along with him on the long and arduous journey, and that till he returned from his *Yatra*, the king must provide shelter for his wife and son and take care of their welfare. He also said that it was his responsibility as the king. He said that he would be back in six months' time and sought the protection of the king for his family during that period. Though it was a strange request, since the king was generous by nature and had respect for brahmins and he also found the brahmin to be mild-natured, wise, and devout, the king could not refuse his request. Leaving his family in the care of the king, who promised to look after them, Krishna Sarma went on his pilgrimage. The king ordered his workforce and entrusted them with the responsibility of taking care of Krishna Sarma's wife and his son. He instructed them very specifically that they must be provided exclusively with a house to live in and that all the provisions must be provided to them to last for six months and that all

the comforts like servants etc. must be given to them. Apart from that, every week or ten days he used to go and check on their well-being. Two or three months passed that way. As everything was going on smoothly as far as Krishna Sarma's family was concerned, the king turned his attention to his other duties and he did not find much time to think about them later on as he had gotten very busy with his kingly duties. Later on, he had completely forgotten about them.

Doubting if he would get such an opportunity to visit sacred places again, Krishna Sarma did not stop with his *Ganga Yatra*. He visited many other *kshetras* on a long pilgrimage. By the time he returned, it was much beyond six months of time. He went to the king and inquired about his family and requested the king to hand over his wife and son back to him.

The king was stunned. He got terrified in his heart thinking about this brahmin's family and how they were. He remembered to have ordered his servants to provide them with six months of food and groceries. Anyway, as he had ordered his servants, the king thought that they would have taken care of the brahmin's family and that everything would be fine. He told Krishna Sarma that his family had gone to have the *darshan of the Lord of the Hill* and that they would be back by the next day and asked him to take a rest.

When Krishna Sarma went to take a rest, the king called his staff and inquired about Krishna Sarma's family. As per the king's orders, they took care of the

mother and baby son for six months, and once the stipulated six months got over, they stopped taking care of them. So, when they went to check on them, they found both of them lying dead. Their bodies were completely emaciated.

The king was at his wit's end, did not know what to do. Without saying anything to Krishna Sarma, the king left for Venkatachalam to have the darshan of the Lord. He had complete faith in the Lord that he would save him. He cursed himself for failing in his duty as a king in protecting Krishna Sarma's wife and son. Feeling terrible with repentance, the king reached the Lord's *sannidhi*. What could he tell Krishna Sarma the next day? The king prayed to the Lord to pardon his grave mistake and sought him to save him.

The milk *Abhishekams*, the temple festivities, and ritualistic offerings in the temple — all those which were introduced by the king did not go waste — God's grace befell him in abundance. The Lord called for his Commander of the armies, Vishvaksena, and ordered him thus, "In Venkatachalam, there is a *Theertham* called '*Asthi Kota*'. Go to that *Theertham* and take water from that *Theertham*, sprinkle on the bodies of the mother and son in a consecrated manner."

This *Asthi Kootam*, which was mentioned in the *Puranas*, is one among the sixty-six crore *Theerthams* present on Venkatachalam.

Vishvaksena, ordered by the Lord, went to *Asthi Kootam*, collected the sacred water, and gave a

consecrated bath of *Abhishekam* to the emaciated bodies of the mother and son. It was not normal water. In that water resided all the presiding deities of our body and all those deities as per the order of the Lord. The water entered the bodies of the mother and son and invoked the life in them to turn their bodies into healthy living bodies in a moment. Both the mother and son woke up as if from their sleep.

The Lord told the king, “They are not dead. Their vital life-breath is not taken away by Yama Deva. I kept their life, vitality in my safe custody and sent them into a sort of unusual sleep. Krishna Sarma is my devotee, his wife and son are benign in nature and righteous in temperament. You are also my firm devotee, responsible for their safety. Since I know what would happen to them, I protected them myself.” Oh, how compassionate is Lord Srinivasa towards his devotees, how forgiving is he towards their mistakes, how full of sympathy he is!

Krishna Sarma thanked the King for looking after his wife and son. But after coming to know what had happened exactly, he rushed to have the *darshan* of the Lord. To him, who was a devout one, the Lord appeared not in his stone idol form, but as the Satchitananda form and gave his instruction and benediction. That instruction was meant not only for Krishna Sarma but to be followed by all of us. The Lord said that Krishna Sarma had gone on the pilgrimage *Ganga Yatra*, leaving behind his wife and son. It was

fine to go like that, but just by doing that *karma* (work) nothing could be gained. That kind of *karma* was for *Antahkarana suddhi* (cleansing of the internal mind).

For a brahmin, the *Sastra Pathanam* (reading and gaining knowledge of the *Sastras*), *Tatwa Vichaaram* (understanding the spiritual tenets), *Pravachanam* (discourses) are important. Without gaining knowledge, just by doing *karma*, one cannot gain anything. Only through knowledge, devotion and dispassion should be attained. Only by seeking the powerful knowledge about the Lord, devotion and dispassion will be evoked. They in turn will help in gaining knowledge of the self and liberation. After giving instruction to Krishna Sarma, the Lord gave him a boon too. “In your next birth you will get a fine body to do *sadhana* and you will be liberated at the end after enjoying a long fruitful life of *Sastra Pathanam*, *Tatwa Vichaaram*, and *Pravachanam*!” Some may get a doubt on knowing this story, “Lord Srinivasa is supremely capable, supremely powerful of all, Lord of Lords. Why should he think of so many ways to bring back the lives of Krishna Sarma’s wife and son? Why should he summon Vishvakshena? Why should he get the sacred waters of *Asthi Koota* and why must he do *Abhishekam* to their bodies in that water? Why must he invoke the presiding deities to resurrect them back to life? Why should he keep the vital life-breath of that mother and son with himself in safe custody? Does the god not have the power to bring them back to life by his mere intent? Kashyapa himself with his

knowledge and power of Ayurveda could revive and bring back to life the tree along with the woodcutter which was reduced to ashes after being bitten by Takshaka. Does this Lord Srinivasa not possess those powers and capable of using *mantras*? If he does, then why did he do it in the roundabout way?

Lord Srinivasa is capable of doing everything and anything. He is the amalgam of all the more auspicious qualities. He can perform anything and everything. He has the special attributes to be able to do those acts which nobody else can. If somebody has done something, that is because of the grace and ability he had bestowed on them. That Takshaka, presiding deities of the physical body, and Yama Dharmaraja — all of them are under his control. They all can perform anything only due to the power bestowed by him on them. Through this episode the Lord wished to convey these aspects — the power of the *Theerthams* present on Venkatachalam, letting everybody know the power of the *Asthi Koota* waters which none knew earlier and we may never perceive the powers of all the crores of *Theerthams* present on Venkatachalam. So to make us understand, the Lord called Vishvakshena and got the waters from *Asthi Koota* and got the bodies bathed in *Abhishekam*. He could have easily asked the King to do that work as that was his responsibility. But the Lord gave the message to all of us that when someone comes to us for help in a pitiable condition, we must offer to help them ourselves completely or ordain our servants to help them and provide them with relief.

Then what is the explanation about the presiding deities of our body he summoned? The message is that in our own physical body there are benign deities and destructive demons too and that they are doing their work constantly. It is due to their encouragement and support that we either do good or bad deeds. Hence, it is a must during the *Sandhyavandanam* ritual to do even '*Tattwanyaasam*' along with *Anganyaasam* and *Karanyaasam*. The *Sastras* say that every part of our body and its function will be in charge of a presiding deity. All those deities do their duty based on our past merits and sins accrued and as ordained by the Lord. This story also explains that in the merits and sins we gain, a big portion will go to these deities. The presiding deities for the eyes are Surya, the sun god; for the mind, it is Lord Shiva; for our legs it is Jayantha; and for our inhalation and exhalation process of breathing it is *Mukhya Prana Deva*- Lord Hanuman.

The list goes like this –

Maha tattwam - Brahma and Vayu deva; Avyaktha tattwam – Saraswathi; Bharathi Ahamkara tattwam – Garuda; Sesha Rudra Manah tattwam - Indra and Manmatha (Kama deva); Sotra tattwam - Dik Devathas (deities ruling the directions); Tvaga tattwam - Prana deva; Chakshu tattwam - Surya Deva; Nasikaa tattwam - Ashwini Devathas; Jihva tattwam – Varuna; Vaak tattwam – Agni; Paanya tattwam - Daksha; Paada tattwam – Jayantha; Paaya tattwam- Mitra; Upastha tattwam – Manu; Sabda tattwam – Brihaspati; Sparsha

tattwam – Apaana; Roopa tattwam-Vyaana; Rasa tattwam – Udaana; Gandha tattwam – Samaana; Akasha tattwam – Ganapathi; Vayu tattwam – Vayu; Tejo tattwam – Agni; Ada tattwam – Varuna; Prithvi tattwam -Saneeswara.

In this manner, the presiding deities have a specific power over specific body parts and body elements. The *Sastra* mentions that on the right side of the body exist the deities and on the left side exist the demons. Hence, before doing *Sandhyavandanam* ritual, it is mandatory to do the ritual of ‘*Paapa purusha visarjanam*’ (sending the sinful one out). The above episode must be an example to show that there is *tattwa* embedded in every aspect and action.

The Lord’s words, “Knowing what would happen ahead, I kept their life, vitality in my safe custody” are an indication that the Lord is ever ready to protect those devotees who worship him with devotion and faith. Oh, how compassionate he is! The Lord of the Seven Hills is the Lord who gives boons without asking, who comes wherever he is invoked with devotion, blesses with the wishes that are sought by his *bhaktha*. Such a boon-bestowing, generous God He is!

The *Brahma Purana* quotes a similar story about King Thondaman. After coming to know that the wife of the brahmin who was left in his safe custody died, the king reached Tirumala through the cave track which the Lord himself had shown earlier. It was the time when the Lord was sporting with his consorts, Sridevi

and Bhoodevi. Seeing a man, Sridevi hid in the chest of the Lord and Bhoodevi hid in the Flower Well, so proclaim the *Puranas*. So, when the Lord questioned the king why he came at such an untimely moment and during the hours of privacy, King Thondaman lamented that the brahmin’s wife had died and since he did not know what to do, he came running to his Lord. The essence of both the scenes is the same, but there must be a difference as per the ruling *kalpa*.

CHAPTER 18

SIMHAADA

The *Brahmanda Purana* quotes another wonderful blessing that Lord Srinivasa had bestowed on King Thondaman. This too was a boon given to him without being asked. The demon named ‘Simhaada’ was an extremely terrible one. He was naturally very strong and, added to it, he did great penance for Brahma. When Brahma appeared and asked him what boon he would wish, the latter asked that all the demigods, demons, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kinneras, Kimpurushas, and humans, must be under his control and that he should not be controlled by anyone. Brahma granted that boon to him.

Having got such a powerful boon, with arrogance he started harming everybody. Fighting with the demigods and driving them away from *Swargam* (heaven) became his regular sport. All the demigods went to Venkatachalam from *Vaikuntham* and expressed their anguish to Lord Venkateswara. They were blessed by Lord Srinivasa and were asked to go to King Thondaman in the guise of brahmins and seek his help. King Thondaman gave assurance to them as they went to him in the guise of brahmins. After giving assurance, King Thondaman went to Lord Srinivasa to know about Simhaada and asked for the Lord’s protection and grace. Lord Srinivasa ordered him to wage a battle with Simhaada, vanquish, and kill him. The Lord also gave his five divine weapons to King

Thondaman for his help and protection. Giving his conch, discus, mace, bow, and sword, the Lord instructed him to go and help the demigods by fighting with Simhaada. The *Purana* says that Simhaada, with his army numbering one lakh crore, took along his accomplices called Kadarudu, Kharudu, Pingaakshudu, Vikradraka, and Kanaka to wage a war against the demigods. The war took place in the Papanasanam *Theertham* area.

The demigods, along with King Thondaman, started waging the war with Simhaada. While the demigods fought with the armies of Simhaada, Thondaman fought with Simhaada with the mighty divine weapons given by the Lord. Despite cutting off the head of Simhaada a hundred times with the sword, mace, and bow given by the Lord, Simhaada did not get killed but reappeared to fight the battle. King Thondaman did not know what to do despite Simhaada getting killed so many times. The Lord’s weapons were very powerful, so they were able to kill Simhaada, but unable to kill him fully so that he would not come back alive. When King Thondaman was in that perplexed state, Vayu Deva whispered an idea in his ear. “Use the discus, the divine *Sudarshana Chakra*, then Simhaada will get killed”. Till then King Thondaman was using only the other weapons like sword, mace, and bow as he could wield them, but on being advised by Vayu Deva, he contemplated on the Lord and after offering obeisance to the divine Chakra, he hurled it at Simhaada. That *Sudarshana Chakra* as ordained by the Lord killed Simhaada forever.

After the killing of Simhaada, the weapons returned to the Lord. Later King Thondaman offered his salutations and gratitude to the Lord with great devotion and submission. Lord Srinivasa got pleased with him for having waged a war against Simhaada as ordered by him and for destroying his armies and killing him to help the demigods. The Lord told King Thondaman to seek a boon from him. Thondaman told Lord Srinivasa “O Lord, it was because you had so graciously blessed me by giving your weapons that I could kill a demon like Simhaada. It is purely your grace, but the fact that you had given me the weapons is known only to you and me. But if the whole world must know it, you must not wield those weapons in this incarnation of yours and whenever the question arises about the whereabouts of your weapons, the world will come to know that you yourself had given me your weapons. So, by not wielding your weapons, kindly bless me with name and fame.” Though it was an unusual boon he was asking for, Lord Srinivasa agreed and blessed him. Actually, the Lord wields only two weapons, the discus and conch, the others like his bow, mace, and a sword will be with him but in this incarnation, he would not be wielding them. The Lord ordered those weapons, thus, “You provide help whenever King Thondaman requires your help, and whenever I need to use you, you come over to me. Till then you can remain on this hill in your respective *Theerthams* and protect the devotees. Hence, from this day I shall not wield the discus and conch in this

incarnation of mine and I will give *darshan* in the same manner without my discus and conch!” Thus, the Lord gave the boon to King Thondaman and also said, “In *Kaliyuga*, one blessed, pious devotee will get the discus and conch made for me and also will build a *gopuramu*, a temple tower. So, pleased by his devotion, I will appear and bless all my devotees with the beautifully — made discus and conch in my arms to satiate their desire to see me thus and I will exist that way till the end of the apocalypse.

*Kalau kaschin mahaabhaagaha Shankha
Chakrethu kruthrime Kaarayithvaa sthaapayithaa
vimaanaadeenscha mepuna
Tathastathbhakthivasagaha sarva pratyaksha
gocharaha Akalpam nivasishyaami
varaabhayadahasthakaha Urdhvaabhyaamapi
chaanyaabhyaam hasthaabhyaamathisundare
Dadhaanaha shankha chakrecha kalipthe loka
thushtaye*

The king went to his kingdom and the Lord started appearing without his weapons. The weapons reached their respective *Theerthams*. *Kapila Theertham* is *Chakra Theertham* and farther ahead are the other *Panchaayudha Theerthams* like *Shankha Theertham*, *Shaarnga Theertham*, *Nandaka Theertham*, *Kaumodaka Theertham*! In these *Theerthams*, Sage Markandeya took holy bath and went to Tirumala along with a brahmin by name Suddha.

The Lord, without being asked, by beckoning his devotee, blessed him with eternal fame. What the King

did was to show his unflinching devotion and faith in the Lord. Lord Srinivasa bestows everything without being asked for if we have deep sincere devotion for him. He is an ocean of compassion, protector of his devotees. Was this King Thondaman the same as was described in *Aditya* and *Bhavishyottara Puranas* because of the difference in *Kalpas*? The difference is in one *kalpam* because he attempted to get a cow killed by his servant and in that process was instrumental in getting the Lord hit on his head, an indirect sin for which as a responsible employer of his servant who had sinned, he was cursed to become a *pisachi* (ogre). It is considered a sin against the lord, whether committed knowingly or unknowingly. The fruit of such a sin is unbearable misery. With unwavering devotion and faith, if a devotee does meritorious deeds like constructing a temple, like getting *Abhishekam* done to the deity with thousand pots of milk, if temple festivities are conducted with devotional fervour, the Lord himself will beckon the devotee to him and bless him with boons, eternal name, and fame. If we can understand this, then it is enough to make our lives worthy and deserving. We cannot certainly perform such high deeds but if we can contemplate on such lives and pay our respects, it is good enough to make our lives pristine and blessed. To whomever the Lord gives his weapons, they will be able to kill Simhaada because it is not 'they' who will kill but the power of his weapons. The Lord could have easily given his powerful weapons to any one of the demigods who had prayed to him,

but the Lord purposely beckoned King Thondaman and gave him his weapons to bless him with eternal fame. It was a result of his sincere devotion and all the devout deeds King Thondaman had performed. The Lord knows what should be given to us and what is good for our well-being. What we need to possess is heartfelt sincere devotion and dedication.

Pandava Theertham

When Pandavas, after killing their own kith and kin in the battle, were in deep distress and were worried as to how to get absolved from such a sin, Lord Srikrishna advised them to go to Venkatachalam.

They visited Venkatachalam, and on the banks of *Swami Pushkarini* prayed to and worshipped Lord Srinivasa with great devotion, though they were not able to see the deity in the temple. They had taken a holy dip in a *Theertham* which was close by. That very instance all their sins got destroyed. Because they had gotten rid of their sins and were blessed there, the *Theertham* got the name *Pandava Theertham*. It is located to the south of Tirumala at a distance of one kilometer and in the lower area of *Gogarbhram Dam*. This is a *Theertham* which is close by.

CHAPTER 19

SAGE MARKANDEYA

We all know the story of Markandeya who was blessed with a long life by Lord Rudra. As a young boy, with perseverance and power of penance, and with the compassionate blessing of Lord Mahadeva Parameswara, he opposed God of death Yama and conquered death for the sake of his parents' happiness — a young ascetic he was. In *Markandeya Purana*, Sage Veda Vyasa proclaimed that by merely listening to the story of Markandeya, one's longevity is increased.

Sage Markandeya visited Venkatachalam, had darshan of the Lord, offered his prayers to him, and became the recipient of the Lord's grace and blessings. He came to know the power of the Lord and became a learned, knowledgeable *Maharshi*.

Markandeya, as a young boy, after being protected from untimely death by Lord Shiva, decided to go on a pilgrimage. His parents were very old and infirm. His very desire to live long was to serve his aged parents, but the desire to go on a pilgrimage became intensified. According to the *Dharma Sastra*, before venturing on any worldly work or a religious one, it is imperative that one gets the permission of parents. Markandeya followed that.

Loukike vaidike kaarye pitraanugnaa visisyathe — meaning, everything worldly and mundane (like one's

profession, education, building a house, starting a business venture) and everything religious (like performing *Pujas*, offering donations, going on pilgrimage), every kind of such work must be undertaken only after taking permission from the parents and the *guru*, who will bestow more merit. It does not mean that without taking permission no merit will come — it may result in lesser merit. There are a few parents and *gurus* who question the very need of doing charity, going on pilgrimage, and performing *Sandhyavandanam*. The *Bhagavatham* says that one need not take permission from such people who will put hurdles and stop good deeds like that. Parents have a responsibility to teach their children such a righteous, religious outlook. Parents who hoard wealth for their children must also pray that their children become graceful and generous. They must offer worship to the Lord for such a blessing for their children.

The virtuous sage Markandeya prayed to his father for permission. When Sage Mrikanda expressed concern, Markandeya promised to come in to find out about their health and well-being. Most importantly, he assured his parents that in every sacred place of worship during his pilgrimage, he would offer special prayers for their health and well-being.

Sage Mrikanda and his wife gave permission to Markandeya to go on a pilgrimage as desired. Going on a pilgrimage is not for pleasure and happiness; it is a *Vaidika Karma*, a religious ritual as explained by

Indra in the 9th canto of the *Bhagavatham*. It is a means to gain knowledge and merit. One must find out from their *gurus* or the learned ones as to how the pilgrimage must be started, which places of worship they should visit, how to offer prayers there etc. All these aspects and information are given in detail in our *Vedas* and *Puranas*. Who else is better than Garuda who is adept at *Vedas*, who is the vehicle of Lord Vishnu himself? Markandeya got blessed with a long life by Lord Rudra. Due to Lord's wish and his merit accrued in past lives, Markandeya got the divine opportunity to meet Garuda who was in the same orbit as Rudra and Sesha. All the three, Rudra, Garuda, and Sesha are equal in strength and knowledge. What more was required to gain knowledge than meeting them?

Garuda blessed Markandeya and told him, "You go to Venkatachalam. It is the abode of the Lord. Do penance there invoking him to grant your wish." The *Purana* explains that on the advice of Garuda, Markandeya went to Venkatachalam and worshipped Lord Srinivasa very sincerely and assiduously and chanted a *Stotram*. Markandeya, starting with *Kapila Theertham* (called *Chakra Theertham*), took a holy bath in seventeen *theerthams* that include *Indra Theertham*, *Vishvaksena Theertham*, and *Pancha Theerthams* called *Shanka*, *Gada* (mace), *Sharngam* (bow), *Agni Theertham*, *Brahma Theertham*, *Saptharishi Theerthams*. He visited Lakshmi Narasimha cave on his way uphill and on reaching there took a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini*, had *darshan*

of Lord Varaha Swamy, then worshipped and offered prayers by composing this special prayer (this *Stotram* we listen to in Tirumala everyday).

Vinaa Venkatesham Nanaadho nanaadhaha
Sadaa Venkatesham Smaraami Smaraami
Hare Venkatesha praseeda praseeda
Priyam Venkatesha prayachha prayachha
Ahamdooradasthe padaambhojayugma
Pranaamechha yaagathya sevaamkaromi
Sakrutseveyaa nitya sevaa phalatwam
Prayachha prayachha prabho Venkatesha
Agnaaninaa mayaa doshaan aseshaanvihitaanhare
Kshmasyatwam kshmasyatwam Sesha Shaila
Sikhaamane

The above *Stotram* was composed by Markandeya and offered as prayer to the Lord. He completely surrendered to the Lord. Then the Lord appeared to him and blessed him. The *Markandeya Purana* says that while the Lord was blessing Sage Markandeya, there were a few other devotees present there who had come to Tirumala on pilgrimage. After blessing Markandeya, the Lord looked at the person next to him and said, "Your sins got absolved and destroyed; so your troubles will vanish in no time. You get liberated by doing the prescribed *sadhana*." Markandeya was surprised at the compassion of the Lord. But who was

that person who came in the purview of Lord's sight? What kind of sins were committed by him? Markandeya got curious to know about the problems of that person which were to be resolved by the Lord's grace. So, after Lord disappeared, he immediately asked that devotee for all the details.

Suddha

Those devotees by giving the details of his life story gave the answer to Markandeya thus. Everybody has forgotten the name given by his parents, it seems. So they called him "Maha Brahmana." His story is similar to that of *Sarvaabadhha* in the story of Sage Vasistha. He never was interested in *Sandhya vandanam* and other rituals like holy bath, daily worship, and prayers. Though he was a brahmin, he did not have knowledge of the Shashtra, the prescribed and prohibited ritualistic acts. But he was ready to receive charity and so was going everywhere uninvited to charitable events. So, everybody used to call him "Maha Brahmana" in a satirical manner.

He used to accept *daanam*, donations that people give to ward off their misfortune and adversities. It is important to see that the sin accrued through accepting such *daanam* gets destroyed by doing recommended prayers; otherwise, it is considered to be very unlucky.

But he never used to do that prayerful worship to replenish his spiritual aura and energy; so he became a victim of misfortune and troubles. Gradually his family became very poor and suffered from diseases and ill

health; there was no joy or peace. He did not know what to do.

His wife Dharmisthi was a very pious lady, even-tempered and righteous. Because of her bad luck due to the sins from previous births, she had to become his wife and endure all miseries of hell. But Dharmisthi, as her name denotes, is full of *dharma*. For such people Lakshmi Devi's grace will be there, it seems. But her husband never cared for her good words of advice. And unable to bear the situation anymore, she explained the points proclaimed in the *Shastras* and also told him that it was not she who was saying all that, but Lakshmi Devi present in her inner self and pleaded with him to follow and observe the instructions.

When *Karma Dharma Samyogam* takes place, good results will happen. So, in whatever mood he was, he agreed to whatever she said. What she told him was — "The deep penury, ill-health and other terrible hell-like problems we are going through are the result of our sins in our past lives. So at this birth too we are going through bad times. What I have heard from the learned people is that to get relief and redemption from all these sins, the only way is to seek the Lord Venkateshwara's grace and blessings. So immediately go to Venkatachalam, take a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini* and pray to Lord Venkateshwara. That is the only solution. Don't brush off my words. Believe that they are the words of Lakshmi Devi, who is inside. Please do this auspicious blessed act." She thus pleaded with him.

With his wife's encouragement and guidance, unable to withstand the onslaught of troubles anymore, he started on a pilgrimage and reached Venkatachalam. While taking bath in *Kapila Theertham*, he had the good fortune of having the *darshan* of Sage Agastya. He prayed to him with sincerity and feelings of submission. Sage Agastya then saw in his divine vision all the sins committed by him. He told him to go uphill. So, he would have the good fortune to take a holy bath in seventeen *theerthams* along with Sage Markandeya. After reaching the top, he took a bath in Swami *Pushkarini* and repented for the sins. He decided to perform sacred deeds to get redemption from his sins and on seeing the sages and seers he decided to spend time in their company and cast off his sins. This way he came along Sage Markandeya to have darshan of the Lord.

The Lord who saw him standing next to Sage Markandeya said, "From today all your sins got washed away, you would be blessed with all auspiciousness — lead a virtuous life!" Maha Brahmana told his story to Markandeya thus. Since he got the grace of the Lord and was blessed by him, the demigods named him "*Suddha*" (the pure one). Along with Markandeya, this brahmin Suddha went to the *ashram* of Sage Agastya (the area presently near the village called Thondavada). Both of them were initiated by Sage Agastya and got liberated through their *sadhana*.

Koundinya

The *Vamana Purana* has a similar story about a brahmin named Koundinya who suffered severe

poverty. Because of malnourishment and lack of food, he became old even in his youth. He was not learned. He never did *Sandhya vandanam* or other rituals, never worshipped the Lord. He did not have a religious bent of mind at all, never gave anything in charity. This kind of life he led due to the sins accrued in the past life.

But, when the sins got destroyed due to some merit, knowledge dawned on him. He reflected on the way he had led his life, felt miserable and repentant for not having done the prescribed *sadhana*. He got a divine direction from within and so went to Venkatachalam, had a holy bath in *Swami Pushkarini*, had the *darshan* of Lord Varaha Swamy, and remained in deep contemplation of the Lord. Then Lord Srinivasa appeared to him and asked him what he wanted from him. Koundinya submitted to the Lord thus, "I have wasted my whole life. I did not clear the three debts of *Pitru Runam*, *Deva Runam*, and *Rishi Runam*, never followed any of the prescribed rules, never worshipped, and never gave any charity. Though you had blessed me with this body of a brahmin, Oh Lord, I simply wasted it in fallow living. Now I don't want to die because if, I am dying now, I may not get this physical body capable of doing spiritual *sadhana* — I may be born as a bird or an insect. I wish to live longer now and do *sadhana* and leave this body then. But when I feel like doing *sadhana* now, I am afflicted by this untimely old age and my body is refusing to do any *sadhana*." Thus Koundinya lamented pitifully.

The Lord took him by hand and led him to a *Theertham* in Venkatachalam and made him take a holy bath in it. His emaciated old body turned into a strong youthful one, the *Purana* proclaims. By the grace and blessings of the Lord, Koundinya did great *sadhana*, became free from the three debts, and attained liberation. The *Theertham* is *Kumara Dhaara*. As it bestows youth and health, it is called *Kumara Dhaara*.

CHAPTER 20

SKANDA AND BRAHMAHATYA (KILLING OF A BRAHMIN)

Man commits various kinds of sins of which the most terrible and heinous is the killing of a brahmin. The *Purana* proclaims that if one undertakes a pilgrimage to Sri Venkatachalam with sincerity and devotion, with repentance and worldly dispassion, then the sin accrued through *brahmahatya* will be destroyed.

But how to make that pilgrimage, what to do before starting on it, and how much merit is bestowed by the quality of pilgrimage one undertakes. All the details are given in the *Purana*. We must know the significance and power of the *kshetram* first before going there. We can know that by reading the *Puranas* or by asking the learned ones. While doing *darshan* of the *kshetram*, we must contemplate the power of the place, offer prayers with deep respectful devotion. It is suggested that we must take a learned *pandit* along while going on a pilgrimage, go through the *shastras* on the way, listen to the glories of the Lord from the *pandit* and learn the power and significance of the pilgrim places that we are visiting. This kind of *Yatra* bestows more results, says the *Purana*.

When we plan to go to Venkatachalam, we must ensure that we know and understand the power and the glory of Lord Srinivasa, the significance of Venkatachalam, and while having the *darshan* of the Lord, we must contemplate on his glory, we must

check if we are seeking righteous important wishes or unnecessary frivolous ones. We all must especially remember all these things before embarking on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam.

Skanda -Kumaradhaara

Skanda got the sin of *Brahmahatya* for killing Tarakaasura. The purpose of the incarnation was to kill this demon Tarakaasura. So, Skanda questioned his father, Lord Rudra thus, “What should I do to get rid of this sin? Is there a way to get absolved of this? Do I need to take a holy bath in sacred rivers like Ganga? Which sacred pilgrim *kshetras* do I need to visit?” This conversation is found in both *Markandeya* and *Vamana Puranas*. Lord Rudra told Skanda, “You need not do anything. With unwavering devotion and sincere repentance if you chant the name of Lord Narayana once as ‘Narayana’, you will get the merit of taking a holy bath in all the sacred rivers in all the three hundred *Kalpas*.”

Skanda is the incarnation of Kamadeva and in knowledge, dispassion, and strength he is equal to Indra. Both belong to the same celestial orbit. In the *puranas* and *shastras*, *prayaschittam* (atonement) has been prescribed for a few sins. Finally, it is mentioned at the end that one must contemplate and chant the name of Lord Narayana with submission, surrender, and devotion. This is the final remedy mentioned. This may sound very easy, but to attain that state of devotion is the toughest of all. Devotion is not easy to get. It is by

reading the *Vedas* and the *Shastras* that knowledge is gained and that knowledge enables an understanding of the power and glory of the Lord, and through that understanding and by developing dispassion one will get sincere devotion. To get such knowledge one must have inner purity and to get that inner purity one must follow the prescribed dos and don'ts and perform the advised rituals. ”So, chant the name of Narayana,” Rudra told Skanda. Only for an enlightened *Jnaani* like Skanda is the kind of devotion possible.

Rudra also said, “Because you have the doubt and asked me for an answer and as a guidepost to the people in all the coming eons, I also want to tell a solution for those who cannot have the devotion of such an order, as staunch and pristine as mentioned earlier.” The remedy is visiting Venkatachalam, doing penance, offering prayers to Lord Srinivasa, and taking a holy bath in the sacred *theerthams* and by doing all these one can get redemption from terrible sin like *brahmahatya*.”

Skanda did accordingly. The *Padma Purana* says, “Kumaraswamy or Skanda, who was unable to handle the very powerful position and the seat of intelligent ideas and schemes, of a commander of the divine armies, at the behest of his father Rudra followed his idea of going on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam. In one *Theertham* he was taking bath, three times in three *Sandhya* times, worshipped Lord Srinivasa, and did penance near *Kumaradhaara Theertham*. Sriman Narayana appeared before him and gave him the Shakti

weapon, blessed him and disappeared. The *Markandeya Purana* has a concise reference to this episode, but the *Vamana Purana* has an elaborate explanation.

The *Purana* says that Skanda went on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam. On seeing the *sikharam* of the hill he did prostration and by doing so, the *brahmahatya* sin he accrued got destroyed immediately. Even after getting rid of his sin, Skanda reached atop Venkatachalam and took a holy bath in a *theertham*, and gained special *punyam* or merit. The *theertham* where he took bath got that the name *Kumaradhara* or *Kumaradhaarika*. (Kumara is one of the names of Skanda). The *Purana* also says that since Kumaraswamy got emancipation by taking bath in that *Theertham*, it got the name '*Kumaradhaara*.' We may think and wonder, "I have not killed anybody; I do not have any *brahmahatya* sin. So I need not go to Venkatachalam for any redemption."

Many chances are available for all of us to incur that *brahmahatya dosha* or sin because of various deeds we do. By chance, if we have used harsh words or condemned or questioned the greatness of our *gurus*, our parents, our benefactors, or those who have fed us for some time, the father who gave his daughter in *kanya daanam* to aid in our *saadhana*, the learned ones, the great ones — amongst these even if we have hurt anyone with ignorance and uncaring attitude, knowingly or unknowingly – it will result in *brahmahatya dosha*. If we rebuke them verbally,

assault them physically, then the sin accrued can be terrible. To think that one gets *brahmahatya dosha* only by killing a brahmin is sheer ignorance and lack of knowledge of the *sastras*. Also, suicide is another terrible sin. Oh, I have not committed suicide, so I am free from that sin — one should not think like that.

In the *Mahabharatha*, Lord Krishna himself has elaborated these sins of *brahmahatya* and *atmahatya* (suicide). When Arjuna could not kill Karna in the battle, Dharmaraja rebuked him with harsh words. He said, "When you cannot kill Karna, what is the point in having that Gandiva? Throw it away." Earlier Arjuna made a vow that he would kill Karna who had insulted him and his bow Gandiva. Now his own revered brother Dharmaraja insulted him and his Gandiva. If he had to honour his vow, he had to kill his own brother Dharmaraja. Arjuna was in a fix. Then Lord Krishna gave him a solution. He told Arjuna to rebuke and cast aspersions on Dharmaraja. Arjuna then spoke harshly and rebuked Dharmaraja by saying, "You are the reason for this war. Why did you play the dice game and lose it? You have put everybody into deep trouble. You have put your wife and brothers as wager and lost that bet, bringing terrible mental agony to all. We all had to go into the forest in exile. With a desire to possess the kingdom, you became the reason for the war and the killing of our own kith and kin. All that was to ascend the throne gained through blood bath."

Elder brother is equal to one's *guru*. Blaming him and casting aspersions on him is a big sin. If one does

that, it amounts to killing him. Lord Krishna told Arjuna, “Since you killed your brother by rebuking him, it amounts to your keeping up of your vow.” “Oh! All that is fine, but by saying such harsh words about my brother, what use is there for me to live my life at all? I must kill myself for having committed this sin,” so saying Arjuna lamented pitifully. Lord Krishna gave him another solution to that. He told Arjuna, “You praise yourself, talk about your greatness. It is equal to killing oneself”.

So, when one rebukes and talks harshly with elders, it amounts to killing one’s Guru (*guru hatya*) and killing a brahmin (*brahmahatya*). If one indulges in self-praise it amounts to killing oneself (suicide). In today’s world, everybody indulges in both these sins. So everybody would get the sin of *brahmahatya* and *atmahatya*. So, it is a must to go on a pilgrimage to Venkatachalam and offer worship with feelings of great repentance and remember again all the sins committed. One must seek pardon and grace of the Lord.

Nowadays there are many people who believe that they have not committed any sins and so question the need to go on pilgrimage and have the *darshan* of the Lord. When we eat our food, we get the sin from what is called ‘*Pancha Soona Doshas*’. While cooking and preparing our food many living beings get killed in the process of frying, boiling, grinding and cutting, etc. This pertains to vegetarian food. Regarding non-vegetarian food, it need not be mentioned. To get rid

of the sins acquired through this *Pancha Soona Doshas*, one must do *Vaiswa Deva Homam* every day. How many of us are doing this *Homam*? We cannot survive without eating food and by eating food we get this kind of sin! The *Brahma Sutras* broach the topic of how humans accrue sins. Only when born as a human being the sentient beings collect and accrue sins; other creatures like animals, birds, and trees only bear the result of their *karma*. As there is a discretionary faculty in humans, we accrue sins by committing wrongs. But as a child, till the 14th year, even after getting human birth, the effect of sin will not touch them. The result of their sins will go to the parents. When a living being like man maintains even temperament, follows all the do’s and don’t’s prescribed by the *shastras*, practices all the *dharma*s of his religion, becomes a learned one by surrendering completely, and follows the path of *sadhana*, even then he gets every day the number of merits and sins which cannot be exhausted in ten births, so say the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Shastras*. When such a strict follower of rules and *dharma* gets that, what would be the fate of average commoners like us? We may earn that much of sin and merit which cannot be expanded even after taking birth lakhs of crores of times. It is impossible to assess the extent of all that we may accrue and expend that way. There is only one solution for that: whenever possible reading about the power and significance of Sri Venkatachalam and knowing the prowess and power of Lord Srinivasa,

going to Sri Venkatachalam and taking a holy dip in *Swami Pushkarini* repenting for all the sins committed, by visiting the temple of Lord Varaha Swamy, by worshipping Lord Srinivasa, seeking very earnestly forgiveness and redemption from the sins committed, by contemplating on the glories of the Lord, surrendering to him completely and asking for liberation. It may be difficult to remember all the glories of the Lord, so by chanting the stories that exemplify the greatness and glory of Tirumala, the abode of Lord Srinivasa, by praying and seeking forgiveness, one can wash away the dirt of endless sins accrued.

CHAPTER 21

UPARICHARA VASUVU

The story of Uparichara Vasuvu is mentioned in the *Vamana Purana*. He was not just a king, but a highly learned one too.

It is a popular notion that even demigods used to attend his court. One day when the court was in full session there began a discussion, which, according to the *Puranas*, was a very heated and incisive one as all the demigods, sages, seers, and learned ones took part in it. The topic discussed was, “While performing *Yagnas*, is it necessary to offer animals in sacrifice? Was that cruelty required? Is it not sufficient to do *Yagnas* by doing *dhyana* — contemplation?”

The demigods argued that ‘cruelty towards animals’ was accepted by the *shastras* and that the *Vedas* proclaim that for performing the *Yagna*, animal sacrifice has to be given and that the animal sacrificed that way will attain liberation and will reach higher realms. The demigods argued that when a ritual is performed, it must be done based on the rules prescribed by the *shastras*. So, they said that *Yagnas* must be performed by doing animal sacrifice.

Cruelty towards animals is *tamasic* in nature. The *Yagna* can be performed by making the sacrificial animal with flour. “When such a possibility is there, why be cruel towards animals?” This was the argument of sages.

Unable to come to any decision, both parties asked King Uparichara Vasuvu to spell out his opinion.

The King fell into a dilemma. On one side there were demigods and on the other side the learned sages. When they pressed him for an answer, he thought, “The *Vedas* are not created by man and it is proclaimed by the *Vedas* that animal sacrifice is permitted in *Yagna* rituals. And also, in comparison, the demigods are superior to sages, so their knowledge will be higher.” Thinking thus, the king said that the demigods were right in their argument. After hearing his decision, the sages cursed him, saying, “For the sake of gaining appreciation of demigods, without giving proper thought, you gave your decision. It is not befitting the stature of a king to give in to partiality. So, you fall into the land of *pathala* (nether land) to be surrounded by demons and serpents!”

The sages knew that the serpents hated the king and had wrath for him. The king then fell down into *Pathala*.

Uparichara Vasuvu was a very valiant king and he had vanquished demons and serpents in the battles he had waged. Hence, they hated him and were vengeful towards him. Because of the curse, when the king was dropped down into their territory of *Pathala*, the serpents were ready to kill him.

Uparichara Vasuvu was *Satvik* by nature and was a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu. Seeing his devotee was in difficulties, Lord Srinivasa sent his weapon, the

disc to protect him, just the way he sent his disc to protect his devotee Ambareesh from the wrath of Sage Durvasa. Lord Srinivasa did not stop there. He also sent Vayu Deva and Garuda to protect Uparichara Vasuvu and take him safely back to his kingdom.

With the help of the disc Sudarshana and Vayu Deva, the demons and serpents were destroyed. Then Garuda told Uparichara Vasuvu to sit on his back so that he could take him from *Pathala* back to *Bhoothaala* (earth), but Uparichara Vasuvu did not agree to that. He told Garuda, “Only Lord Vishnu has the right to sit on your back, I do not have that eligibility to sit. It is the place of the Lord and if I climb on you and sit, it will amount to doing a sin.” Garuda was pleased with his reply. He lifted him with his arm and transported him to his kingdom. Just as was ordained by the Lord, he made him sit on the throne. He reached the same point from where he was pushed down to *Pathala*. By the blessings and grace of the Lord, he attained his original stature. God’s compassion and grace can do anything. The *Vamana Purana* mentions that Uparichara Vasuvu visited Venkatachalam to pay his gratitude to Lord Srinivasa for the grace he had showered on him and, after worshipping the Lord, got blessed more and received more grace.

Though the *Vedas* talk about animal sacrifice during *Yagnas*, those performing the *Yagna* must have the power to ensure liberation to that animal. Since nobody has that kind of power in *Kali Yuga*, it is prohibited to

sacrifice an animal; instead a replica of an animal can be made with rice flour and be sacrificed to fulfill the tradition.

When we visit Venkatachalam on pilgrimage, while having the *darshan* of the Lord, we must and should remember at least one or two episodes which talk about Lord's power and grace. If we cannot remember it is better to carry the book along and do *parayanam* (reading or chanting). Doing the *parayanam* of all the *Puranams* is superior. If it is not possible, doing *parayanam* of Venkatachala Mahatyam is the next best thing. Remembering all that we have read is the least of all.

CHAPTER 22

JNAANACHALAM – MOKSHACHALAM

We understand from the *Bhavishyottara Purana* how Venkatachalam got that name. The story of Madhava shows that it has the power to destroy sins, and that is how it has got that name.

In the *Varaha Purana* and the *Vamana Purana* too, Sage Vedavyasa explained the reason behind the name of Venkatachalam and in that context gave one more explanation. In these two *Puranas*, the meaning for “*Vem*” was given as *Amrutha* and *Moksha* (ambrosia and liberation). In Sanskrit “*Va*” means *Amrutha* and liberation too apart from the other meaning “sins” and as the *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains, the word “*Kata*” means that which destroys, but these two *Puranas* of *Varaha* and *Vamana* explain that the word “*Kata*” means wealth also. This sacred hill, Venkatachalam has the power to bestow liberation as well as material wealth, hence that name. There is a *saangatyam* between these two words, and it is not difficult to get the affinity.

Till the time we remain afflicted by our sins, knowledge will not be gained and till the right knowledge is gained, liberation cannot be attained. When Swami Jayatheertha wrote the meaning and commentary of *Bramhasutra Bhaashyam* written by Sri Madhvacharya, he gave a detailed explanation about relation between sin and knowledge. When we remain

in the clutches of sins, it is very difficult to do *sadhana* and the focus and attention to study the *shastras* too will not be there. Even if we manage to read them, we may not grasp the meaning, and even if, by chance, we get the meaning, the mind will refuse to put the rules into practice and apply them properly. Only when we are able to put it into practice it is useful; otherwise, the knowledge gained by just knowing the meaning will not help. There will be obstacles coming our way while we are in the pursuit of knowledge. When sins get destroyed, these hindrances and obstacles will automatically vanish and our *sadhana* can be continued.

Hence, when the fruit of sins is there, one may suffer from poverty or, even though wealthy, will not be able to enjoy that wealth. So to have wealth and enjoy it, sins must get destroyed. Once that is done, knowledge, wealth, and liberation will be there. The *Purusha Suktham* proclaims, “*Naanyam panthaha ayanaaya vidyathe*”, meaning, liberation is possible only through knowledge not just by one’s *karma* — work or worship. There is a relation between the story of Madhava getting absolved of sins as told in the *Bhavishyottara Purana* and the explanation given in the *Varaha* and *Vamana Puranas* that because it gives wealth and liberation the hill got the name *Venkatachalam*. In the story of Madhava in the *Bhavishyottara Purana*, after he gets freed from his sins, Brahma Deva foretells his future that in future births he will be born as King Akasaraju, will beget the

Lord himself as his son-in-law and by the grace and blessings of the Lord he would be liberated finally. The Madhava’s story ends in the manner as proclaimed in *Vamana* and *Varaha Puranas* by his attaining wealth and liberation.

CHAPTER 23

THE VARIOUS NAMES OF VENKATACHALAM

The *Bhavishyottara Purana* gives the four names of Venkatachalam. It is mentioned that different names were given for the same hill in each *Yuga* respectively—it was called *Vrishabhachalam* in *Krita Yuga*, *Anjanaachalam* in *Treta Yuga*, *Seshachalam* in *Dwapara Yuga*, and *Venkatachalam* in *Kali Yuga*. The *Purana* explains the reasons for different names in four *Yugas*. In the *Varaha Purana*, many names for Venkatachalam were listed and at the same time, the significance and the reasons behind the names were also given.

1. *Chintamani* : As the hill has the power to bestow boons and fulfill the wishes of the devotees, it has got this name.
2. *Jnaanaachalam* : As knowledge is gained by those who do penance on this hill, it has got this name.
3. *Theerthaachalam* : As the hill has sixty-six crores of *theerthams* of which 108 are considered great ones and 64 greater and 8 highly greater *theerthams*. Hence, it has got this name.
4. *Pushkaraadri* : As there is a *Pushkarini* which has the presence of all the *Sarovarams* of the Universe and the special presence of Devi Saraswathi, it has got this name.
5. *Vrishaadri* : Vrisha means Yamadharmaraja who performed severe penance on the hill and received

boons from Lord Srinivasa, so it has got this name (*Vrishabhadri* is yet another name).

6. *Kanakachalam* : Meru Mountain's son is Ananda and Sesha arrived here to wind around the hill. The Lord had decided to make him his abode. Meru is a golden mountain and his son Ananda too is one golden mountain. Hence, the hill got this name as *Kanaka* means gold.

7. *Naraayanaadri* : As one learned scholar by name Narayana attained liberation on this hill, it has got this name.

Brahmanda Purana – Narayanadri

One brahmin by name, Narayana did severe penance for Lord Srimannarayana and his consorts Sridevi and Bhodevi on the banks of the sacred *Swami Pushkarini*. Pleased with his penance, Lord Narayana appeared and asked him to seek a boon.

“O Lord because of my highest fortune, you have appeared to me. My name is Narayana and I have gone around *Bhooloka* trying to find you. I was able to make Brahma appear and at his behest, I came to this hill and did penance to make you appear before me. This kind of penance ordinary mortals cannot do, so to bless and grace everybody and bestow boons, you have to come and reside on the banks of *Swami Pushkarini* along with your consort Sri Mahalakshmi and your retinue of Adi Sesha, Garuda, Vishvakshena who constantly worship you. And this hill must become

renowned through my name!” Lord Srinivasa gave him the boon by pronouncing “*Thathaasthu*”.

“Whoever it might be - a Brahmana, Vysya, Kshatriya, or Sudra - (a brahmin, trader, a warrior or a menial worker), whether a meritorious one or a sinner, if they worship me after bathing in *Swami Pushkarini* here, I will bless them with the boon to reside in *Swarga* till the time of final deluge, the apocalypse. I will bestow liberation on them. From this day onwards these hills will be known by your name as *Naraayanaadri* and will become renowned.” So saying, Lord Srinivasa gave that brahmin the final emancipation leading to the state of *Sayujyam*.

8. *Vaikuntachalam* : It is said that along with Lord Srinivasa, Vaikuntha has reached here as Garuda. Hence, this hill attained the name of *Vaikunthachalam*.

9. *Simhachalam* : Since the incarnation of Narasimha Swami took place here, it is called Simhachalam.

10. *Anjanachalam* : Since Anjanadevi did penance on this hill, and also as Anjaneya was born here, this hill got the name *Anjanachalam*.

11. *Varahachalam* : As Lord Varaha made this his abode, it has got the name Varahachalam.

12. *Neelagiri* : In *Treta yuga*, during the time of Rama avatar, a great *vanara* (*kapi*) by name Neela did penance on these hills and was bestowed with the boons here. So these hills got the name *Neelagiri*.

And there is another story behind this. Neeladevi was one of the eight reigning queens of Lord Krishna. She got married to Lord Krishna twice at the age of nine as a *bala brahmacharini* (young celibate) and later as the daughter of Agnijith.

Neeladevi did great penance at Kumara kshetra on Venkatachalam wanting only the Lord himself as her husband. She had the knowledge of the power of the hill, the power of the *theerthams* there, the glory and greatness of the Lord. So by contemplating on the auspicious qualities of the Lord who was there in both the forms of Varaha Swamy and Srinivasa, she worshipped the Lord very devoutly. So she became one of the eight consorts of Lord Krishna. Hence the hill is called Neelachalam.

13. *Anandagiri* : Since this hill gives joy to all, it is called *Anandagiri*. Not only that, the Lord resides on *Ananda*, the son of Meru Mountain, hence the name Anandagiri or Anandaadri. When the Lord ordered Garuda to bring *Vaikuntham*, he got it along with the *vimanam* (the *gopuram*) and King Shankaraju witnessed it and while constructing the gopuram of the temple, he brought the same shape to it and since *Vaikuntha Vimana's* name is Ananda, the temple *gopuram* too got that very name — Anandanilayam and the hill too got the name *Anandagiri*. All this is found in the *Puranas*.

14. *Srisailam, Srichalam* : Since Goddess Lakshmi Devi's presence is found in a very significant way, it has got the names, Srisailam, Srigiri, Srichalam.

15. *Srinivasagiri* : Since Lord Srinivasa resides on this hill, it is called *Srinivasagiri*.

In this manner, the *Varaha Puranam* gives in detail the names of Venkatachalam and their significance and the reason behind those names. Today what we hear, the names like Tirumala-Tirupati, were not used in the *Puranas*. In the later times when the *Alvars* praised the Lord the words became popular because, *Tiru* means *Sri*, meaning Lakshmi and the Lord also. Since it is the abode of Lakshmipati (the consort of Lakshmi Devi) it is called Tirupati. The hill on which Lord Srinivasa resides is *Srimala*, meaning Tirumala as *mala* means a hill/mountain. For many ages, this Venkatachalam attained many names and each one is perfectly worthy in itself.

CHAPTER 24

SWAMI PUSHKARINI/ SHANKHA/ SHANKHANA

We understand that the Lord had created *Pushkarini* in Venkatachalam especially to grace Goddess Saraswathi Devi. We understand that this *Pushkarini* is the very best amongst all the sacred ponds in the whole universe. We also understand the details of its power and the results of taking a holy dip in it and also about those who have attained liberation by doing it. But how did it get the name '*Swami Pushkarini*'?

The *Puranas* quote two reasons for that. Since it is more significant and powerful than all the other ponds, it is the *Nayaki*, *Swamini* (head), so has got the name *Swami Pushkarini*. The second reason is whoever has lost his rulership (to be the *Swami*, the head of a kingdom), if he takes a holy bath in the *Pushkarini* with sincerity and devotion, he will regain his lost power to become a king again. Hence, it has got the name, *Swami Pushkarini*. The *Purana* quotes the story of King Shankha or Shankhana to substantiate it. King Shankha was a great and valiant devotee who ruled his kingdom in a righteous manner. It was a large kingdom, he used to exercise his authority strongly. The kings of the subsidiary kingdoms around were not in a position to fight with him. But, as destiny had it, all those kings got united under a pact and waged a war against him and won over his kingdom. This king Shankha, who escaped for life, met his learned *gurus*

and explained his situation, and sought their guidance. Those wise ones suggested, “Go to Venkatachalam, and take a holy dip in *Pushkarini* after praying to the Lord. Then all your problems will be solved and you will regain your lost kingdom.”

He, with unflinching single-pointed devotion and dedication, went to Venkatachalam and took the holy dip in *Pushkarini*. Pleased by his devotion, the Lord appeared to him in the very *Pushkarini* in which he was taking the holy dip, and blessed him.

As ordained by the Lord, immediately after getting blessed King Shankha received a message from the kings who fought against him and usurped his kingdom. All those kings remained united till they fought and won the battle against King Shankha, but later they started fighting amongst themselves as to who must rule that kingdom. Just as King Shankha was blessed by the Lord and he acquired a *yogam* to get back his lost rulership, all those divided enemy kings came to an understanding and decided to give back the kingdom to King Shankha himself. The rulership of his kingdom which he could not retain despite great attempt, King Shankha got back after taking the holy dip in the *Pushkarini*. As the *Pushkarini* has the power to bestow the lost Swamitwam (rulership), it got the name of *Swami Pushkarini*, so proclaims the *Purana*.

Even materialistic wishes are fulfilled. The enemies whom we have within us are far more powerful than the ones outside. Our very own mind is our greatest

enemy. We do not have control over our mind, no control over our sense organs. The power of taking a holy dip in this *Swami Pushkarini* is so great that it will help us gain control over our minds and gain rulership over our sense organs. This is one reason for it being called *Swami Pushkarini*.

An argument took place over many centuries in the presence of Yadava kings. Ramanujacharya contested that opinion saying that *Swami Pushkarini* has the deity, Lord Kumara Swamy. Hence, the *Pushkarini* got the name, *Swami*.

CHAPTER 25

WHY HAS THE INVISIBLE BECOME VISIBLE?

The *Purana* says that Sriman Narayana who came down to Venkatachalam from *Vaikuntham* remained invisible for a long time. He used to manifest in his form and appear to the learned ones, to the demigods in the *theerthams* and in various other places on the hill, based on their spiritual worthiness and their *sadhana*. Hence there are many who worship the very hill as the Lord's form. Some even say that the hill itself is the Lord.

The Hill is non-sentient whereas the Lord is full of sentience, *Chaitanya*. As we have learned earlier from *Bhavishyottara Purana* and other *Puranas*, the main patronage demigod is Sesha, and the mountain reached winding it around is Ananda Mountain, the son of Meru Mountain. Lord Sriman Narayana pervades all over the hill in his very special presence in the *theerthams* and places. Hence, the sages like Sri Ramanujacharya did not place their feet on the hill, but climbed up on his knees, and seers like Vyasaraaya and Vyasa tatwajna never passed bodily excrements like urine or faeces on the hill but controlled them.

We are still in the first phase of *Kali Yuga*. The influence of Kali on us will become very strong in the coming days. It will be a time when *Dharma* is forced to walk on one leg and *Adharma* on three legs. The pious and mild-natured people will be punished cruelly. The rulers turn unjust and wicked and behave in a

demonic manner. Because of the influence of Kali, there will be a possibility of the meritorious ones turning sinful. There will be more people who will do sinful acts in the coming days ahead. Those who can worship directly the sacred hill of Venkatachalam as the very form of the Lord, and those with the *yogam* or eligibility to worship the invisible unmanifest form of the Lord will be much less. Giving deep thought to this, Lord Brahma worshipped and appeased Lord Sriman Narayana who was residing on Venkatachalam in his invisible form.

Lord Brahma appealed to Lord Srinivasa, "The number of sinners has increased and in the coming days of *Kali Yuga* it might increase drastically. The *Naraka Lokas*, the Hells are getting packed to the full, seems as though we may have to create new *Naraka Lokas* (hells). The necessity to control the number of sinners is urgent. Because of the influence of Kali and because of the boon you gave to Kali, there is no chance of sins getting less. We have to somehow put a check on the numbers reaching the *Naraka Loka*. So, we need to show them a way to get rid of sins and to get absolved from them. For those who are doing penance, *Yagnas*, and other rituals to absolve themselves of sins, those who are doing *sadhana* to please you, you are manifesting and destroying their sins. But now, you please grant the wish that you will appear on the hill of Venkatachala and will destroy the sins of those who come to have your *darshan*." Granting Brahma that wish, Lord Srinivasa manifested on Venkatachala hill, so proclaims the *Purana*.

The deity which we see in the sanctum of the temple on Venkatachalam is the manifestation of the Lord. He is the form of blissful consciousness. To meritorious souls and knowledgeable ones, he will appear in his *Chetana* form (full of divine vitality and life) but for others, he will appear to be an idol. With Shanka, chakra and Kati, Varada hands, with golden serpent adornments on his upper arms, with a dazzling crown on head, bejeweled in all the other adornments, with a golden waist belt studded with precious nine gems and with a small dagger in that, the Lord stands on the *Padma Peetham* with his feet visible, to be able to make his devotees have their *darshan* and get blessed.

The *Varaha Purana* also says that sages Sanaka and Sanandana too prayed to the Lord. Hearing their submission and also Brahma's wish, the Lord appeared in his *Vigraha* deity form to be visible to everybody.

We must observe one thing in Brahma Deva's prayer to the Lord. He said that the present *Naraka lokas* may get filled with the ever-growing number of sinners and that the situation may necessitate creating new *Naraka Lokas*. It was an exaggeration. In the creation of the Lord, *Swarga Loka* and *Naraka Loka* will have ample space to accommodate any numbers. The *Upanishads* clearly claim that.

One more thing: The visit of Lord Sriman Narayana to Venkatachalam bringing along *Vaikuntham* happens only in the 28th *Kali Yuga*. In other *Kali Yugas* such

a possibility will not happen. It is because of our good fortune we are in the 28th *Kaliyuga*. We have the great divine opportunity to have the *darshan* of the Lord to get rid of our sins. *Shraddha* (faith and diligence), *Bhakti* (devotion), and *Paschattapam* (repentance) should be followed. We know how many sins we are committing; others need not tell us. If we want deliverance, we must remember all the wrongs and sins committed by us. Repenting sincerely we must go on a pilgrimage to Tirumala, have the *darshan* of the Lord, surrender to him completely, and seek his grace and blessings to destroy our sins and chanting this CHAPTER which praises the glory of the Lord. Only when it is done, we will receive the Lord's blessings who is compassionate enough to pardon the sinners.

CHAPTER 26

LORD VARAHA (VAKULA MATA EPISODE)

We have learnt the story of King Chola from the *Bhavishyottara Purana* — the Lord residing in the anthill getting wounded by the gopalaka (shepherd) and for that reason, the ruler of the kingdom King Chola getting cursed by the Lord.

Lord Srinivasa, who was residing in the anthill, one day came out of it and was going about in the forest. He saw in a distance Lord Varaha Swamy coming with his retinue. Frightened, Lord Srinivasa went back into the anthill.

Lord Varaha Swamy is also Lord Sriman Narayana. On Venkatachalam, he manifested in his two *avatars* (incarnations). Lord Varaha Swamy, after rescuing and protecting the earth (Bhoo Devi) from the demon who was in the sea, made this Venkatachalam his abode. So, the hill got the name ‘*Varahachalam*’. Lord Varaha Swamy was growing leguminous pulses on the hill with his retinue while he was returning after killing the demons who came to steal the crop. Lord Varaha having seen Srinivasa slipping into the anthill called him to come out. Srinivasa came out and met Varaha Swamy.

It is a very significant moment when two incarnations of the Lord came together. All the demigods showered flowers on them. It is wrong to think that Srinivasa was the embodiment of all the beauty and Varaha Swamy lacked that beauty and grace. The

Purana proclaims that the Lord in all his incarnations like *Matsya*, *Kurma*, *Varaha*, *Narasimha* and *Vamana* exuded great charm and beauty. Srinivasa in his human form and Varaha Swamy in Varaha form, both looked equally enchanting. The Lord is above all the Manmathas in grace and beauty.

Lord Srinivasa asked Varaha Swamy for a piece of land on the hill. Lord Srinivasa was already living on the hill in an anthill in the Varaha Kshetra without seeking any permission. As he met Varaha Swamy accidentally, he asked for a piece of land to stay.

In today’s world, the situation is the same for the lands owned by the government. First, occupy illegally and then legalise it by bringing pressure on the government officials. Even government brings in rules and schemes to make these activities legal under *Akarma - Sakrama* scheme. Lord Srinivasa seems to have shown the way. Varaha Swamy told Srinivasa that no land would be given freely, and that some money must be given for that.

Lord Srinivasa said, “I don’t have anything with me to give you now, but in the future crores of devotees will visit me for *Darshan*. When they come, they will have your *darshan* first and then only they can have my *darshan*. First, you will receive the *Abhishekam Seva* every day, then only for me and even food offering, *Naivedyam*, will be offered to you first, and to me later. “

Varaha Swamy agreed to that proposal and gave a piece of land to Srinivasa. The conversation that took place between Varaha Swamy and Lord Srinivasa was meant to be an eye-opener for us. Varaha Swamy and Lord Srinivasa are not two separate forms, but are the same. They are two forms of Lord Sriman Narayana.

We remain in a strong illusion that the land belongs to us and also the house that we have built. But the fact is, the whole land belongs to the Lord; it belongs to Lord Varaha Swamy who rescued the earth from the demons who had hid it in the sea. If we have the conscience that we are living on the land bestowed by the Lord, it is a great thought.

Lord Srinivasa did not give any money to Varaha Swamy, but that everything, right from *Abhishekam Seva* to food offering, it is Varaha Swamy who receives first and later it is his turn. We must live with the understanding that the Lord is the owner of everything and that we have been given the privilege and convenience to enjoy everything. The *Shashtra* says that before taking our daily bath, we must take '*mrittika snana*' (mud bath) and while taking it we must remember Lord Varaha Swamy. All the food items must be first offered to the Lord as *naivedyam* and after that they must be consumed. When Lord Srinivasa told Varaha Swamy that the food offering would be made to him first, it means that we have to offer to the Lord first as Naivedyam and then partake of it. The Lord removes all the *doshas* (negativity) from the food

by taking in the essence of it. After coming to an agreement and giving the land to Srinivasa, Varaha Swamy asked him, "Who else will stay with you?"

Srinivasa replied, "I don't have anyone." Varaha Swamy said, "In that case, I will send a woman-helper by name 'Vakula', who will cook food for you and help you with all the daily chores." So saying, he sent Vakula along with Srinivasa. In the *Purana* her full name is mentioned as Vakula Maalika. She was a very fine-tempered person who was blessed to pray in the *Pushkarini* which has the presence of Devi Saraswathi. Saunaka and other sages asked Sootha Muni about the story of Vakula. Sootha Muni said, "She is Yashoda herself."

CHAPTER 27

YASHODA

Fruit or result, according to one's merit or *punya*, means that the Lord bestows the fruit as much as one's spiritual practice and penance. The Lord gives only that which one seeks. It is the divine resolve.

Since Devaki and Vasudeva asked the Lord that he should be born as their son, he fulfilled it. Yashoda's wish was to see and enjoy the childhood pastime (*leelas*) of the Lord as his mother and he granted it to her. If Devaki and Vasudeva had not asked the Lord, he would not have been born as their son. Similarly, if Yashoda had not asked the Lord, he would not have shown her his childhood *leelas*.

Though Krishna married many times and had 16,108 wives, Yashoda as his mother never had the opportunity to witness and participate in even one marriage ceremony. Much later Yashoda expressed her desire to him saying "I want to perform your marriage and behold it too." Krishna told her, "Not now, but in the future, in the 28th *Kaliyuga*, when I marry Padmavathi Devi, you will enjoy that fortune as Vakula and perform my marriage."

To make all that possible, Lord Varaha Swamy sent Vakula Devi to be with Lord Srinivasa. This story gives us an important message that when we have the *darshan* of the Lord and seek wishes, we must not use our mundane intelligence. We must be careful.

We are filled with many thoughts, desires, and wishes.

We decide to ask some, but when we stand in front of the deity, we will not remember them. We ask for something instead of something else. We do not know what is good for us, what we are worthy of! What are we when compared to Devaki and Vasudeva? Where are we in the spiritual practice? What is the amount of merit we have accrued? If Devaki and Vasudeva could not seek wishes in a proper way, will it be possible for people like us? We should never forget the fact that God knows what is good or bad for us. Instead of asking that or this, we must pray to him, "Since I don't know what is good and favorable for me, O Lord, keep in view my worthiness and welfare, you help me do my spiritual practice and bless me with whatever you wish to give me." It is God's responsibility. He is full of compassion. He is capable of giving us much more. If we place the responsibility on him, he gives us more. Whatever he gives, we must accept it as his blessing and enjoy it.

We feel more troubled, not by what we lack, but what the other person has. We do not realize that he got it because of his merit or *punyam*. In one village, two people were living in houses next to each other. There was severe competition between the two. When one of them went to the forest and started doing penance, the other one too went and started doing penance sitting right in front of him. Pleased with his penance, Lord appeared in the first person and asked him to seek a boon. That first person fell into deep

thought. He asked the Lord, “Will you give a boon to the other person, Lord?” For which the Lord replied, “Yes.” “Then give me the double of whatever he asks for,” said the first person. The Lord went to the second person and asked him what his wish would be. He said, “Swami, what boon did you give that fellow?” The Lord replied, “He wanted the double of whatever you ask for!” After a long thought, he asked for the boon, “Lord, make me blind in one eye” so that the other person would lose vision in both his eyes...! We must get rid of this desperate mindset.

CHAPTER 28

Coming Together of the Lord and Padmavathi Devi

Vakula Devi was rendering devoted service to Srinivasa. One day with the wish to go hunting, Srinivasa sent a message on an astral plane to Vayu Deva. In the form of a horse, Vayu Deva appeared at once. No one can control Vayu Deva except the Lord and Sri Mahalakshmi Devi. Hence, Lakshmi Devi though separated from her Lord due to a romantic dispute (*Pranaya Kalaham*), became the reins of that horse who was none other than Vayu Deva. The *Purana* explains in detail how Srinivasa adorned himself and got ready to go on hunting. He applied the mark of *Urdhwa pundra* with *Gopi Chandanam* (white or yellow ochre) and ruby red *tilak* on his forehead and mounting the horse Srinivasa went for hunting. Actually, God always hunts — animal, bird, insect, man, or demi-god — whoever dies, in the God’s hunting activity - symbolically. Apocalypse shows that right from the gods like Brahma to any being with *Chaitanya shakti*, all the sentient beings perish in the hunting by God.

Such an Almighty God need not go on hunting purposefully, but the *leela* or the sport of the Lord is that to achieve some purpose in this world he will act according to *karma*. With his enchanting looks that can cause passion, even in Manmatha, Srinivasa kept hunting and killing those animals whose longevity was over and he came across one elephant. When Srinivasa

chased that elephant, at one point, the elephant knelt down on his knees and with his trunk offering obeisance to the lord, the elephant sought *saranagathi* by completely surrendering for protection. As the lord is always compassionate towards those who surrender unto him, he let off the elephant without killing it.

As he looked in the direction of the elephant going away, he saw a damsel who was most enchantingly beautiful going about in the forest along with her handmaidens. The sages like Sounaka asked Sootha *mahamuni*, “Who is that damsel who had come across the special glance of the lord, and what is her story?” Sootha started telling them this way, “The king by name Suveera had a son by name Sudharma and his son was Akasharaju. Though the righteous king had everything, the fact that he did not have progeny was troubling him much. He used to express his pain by saying “What is the point in having a big kingdom? A son is a must for the continuity of the clan. How will the *pitru karyams* (rituals for the departed souls) be continued? Will I be able to do *kanya daan* (performing a daughter’s marriage) in this lifetime? As a childless one will I be cursed to go to hell?”

In this world, people have a wrong notion that those who are childless will never attain liberation. The *Shastra* seems to be conveying a confusing message regarding this. But Sri Madhwacharya explained what were the ideas and thoughts of Sri Veda Vyasa in his work *Sri Mahabharata Taatparya grandham*.

It is not true that those who are childless will go to hell. By seeking knowledge, by living a life based on *dharma*, by practicing spiritual injunctions carefully, though childless, one can attain liberation based on their meritorious deeds. Sinners and wicked people, purely based on the merit of their children and through the rituals like doing ‘*dharmodaka*’ and *pinda pradaana* (both are rituals/rites done for the dead), they too attain salvation. If one is not pious and does not practice spirituality and if one’s children do not believe in performing rituals for their elders’ liberation, then they are condemned to hell. The *Sastra* says that it is purely through an individual’s knowledge, spiritual practice, and the meritorious deeds performed, that the individual attains liberation.

The story of Madhava in the *Bhavishyottara Purana* is an example. After doing the rites (*pitru karya*) on the banks of *Kapila theertham*, and after visiting the sacred Seshachala Mountain, Madhava got absolved of his sins. Lord Brahma said these words to him, “You will be born as Akasharaju and the Lord himself will become your son-in-law.” This shows that Akasharaju’s birth had a divine purpose — to become the father-in-law of the Lord, to be blessed by the Supreme as his son-in-law. After consulting his *gurus* and many learned men, Akasharaju decided to perform a *Maha Yagna* to beget children. Before performing the *Yagna*, the area was to be consecrated for the sacred purpose and the land tilling began. That area is the present Tiruchanur. While the land was thus being

tilled ceremonially by Akasharaju, the plough came in contact with a golden lotus. In that lotus, he found a brilliant shining, beautiful girl baby. Wonder-struck, the king remained confused as to what he should do. Then the voice from the sky instructed him, “She is meant for you. Accept her as your daughter and bring her up. She is the form of Lakshmi Devi. The Lord himself will marry her”.

Akasharaju gave the divine child to his wife and said, “She is our daughter. Just because you haven’t carried her in your womb for nine months and deliver her, you cannot neglect her in any way. We must bring her up as our own daughter with great love and affection.” The king completed the auspicious *yagna* he had started. Later the king was blessed with a son by the name Vasuda. The girl baby found in the golden lotus grew up as Padmavathi Devi. “This is Akasharaju’s daughter, whom Lord Srinivasa saw,” Sootha told Sanaka and other sages.

CHAPTER 29

DOES GOD TOO EXPERIENCE THE TORMENTS OF KAMA OR LUST?

Before we listen to/read the story of the Lord’s marriage from the *Bhavishyottara Purana*, we need to know that the story in the *Purana* depicts the worldly way, and hence, we as human beings may think that the Lord too got tormented by thoughts of *Kama*, that he experienced fever due to those feelings, that the Lord too, like human beings got worried whether he would ever get married, that he got worried about his financial condition, that he was not sure if anybody would lend him money, that he did not feed those who visited him fearing the expense, that he lied to get married, and so on. The Lord had to enact as a human being to show the ways of the world, to mirror the influence of *Kali Yuga* in the mundane matters. God is all-powerful, nothing is impossible for him. He creates all the illusion or *maya* for the *tamasik* people (ignorant dark minds) who think that the Lord was also a mere human and that he too had drawbacks, feelings of joy and sadness, wealth and poverty, etc. But the *sattwik* people will see all that as the *leela* of the Lord (the sport of the lord).

If we don’t understand that the Lord is above *Kama* or passion, there is a chance of us falling into the darkness of *tamas*. That will lead us to a major catastrophe. We must become resolute in our minds about that *tattwa* which shows that the Lord is

untouched by all this. We must connect the story with the knowledge gained by learning the *Sastra* and then understand the essence of it.

The *Padma Purana* tells us the story of Sukaacharya. Sukaacharya was the incarnation of Rudra Deva (Lord Shiva) and was the son of Sri Veda Vyas. This *Padma Sarovar* (lotus temple pond) in Tiruchanur is where Padmavathi Devi was found as a baby. It is also called Yogi Mallavaram. It exists even now in the southwest direction of Tiruchanur, at a distance of half a kilometer. There is an ancient temple of Parasareswara Swamy too. Parasara was the father of Vedavyasa and was the grandfather of Sri Sukaacharya. The Parasareswara Shiva Linga in the temple was installed by Parasara. It is believed that it is the Ashram of Sukaacharya where he performed severe penance. The *Purana* clearly mentions why he had done the penance there in the *Padma Sarovar*. Though he was an incarnation of Lord Shiva, his mind was not stable and was in a wandering state always, it seemed. So, he came to Venkatachalam. There he went to a *theertham* called *Vrathatee Varthani* and chanting the powerful, sin destroying prayer of Vishnu — the *Vishnu Sooktham*, he took a holy dip in it. As Sukaacharya was in the water contemplating on the most valorous and auspicious form of Sriman Narayana, he heard the celestial, divine voice saying, “To the southeast direction of the hill on which Sriman Narayana resides, at a distance of twelve miles, to the north of the Swarnamukhi banks, there is a special

lake called *Padma Sarasu*. If you go there and do penance you will attain a steady resolute mind. Sriman Narayana, the well-wisher of all the living being, will appear to you.”

As directed, Sukaacharya reached *Padma Sarasu* and started doing penance. So powerful and severe was his penance, it astonished the gods — Indra and other demigods. Unaware of who he was and why he was doing penance, Indra tried to disturb his penance, frightened that he was trying to usurp his own throne. He sent the celestial dancers and beauties like Rambha to prevent him from doing his penance. He told them, “For the welfare of the *Deva Loka*, you must disturb his penance. With your beauty and amorous ways, you must lure his mind away and hinder his penance.”

But Sukaacharya’s mind was steady and undisturbed on his goal. He continued his penance resolutely. Who was he? He was the controller of the mind, the Rudra. Earlier, when Sage Bhrigu went to *Kailasa*, was he the same one who was engaged in sexual union with Devi Parvathi? Is he the same Rudra who had to bear the curse that he would not have idol worship but only in the form of *Linga*? Why did Rudra behave that way in front of Bhrigu? It was through Sage Bhrigu that the highest supremacy of Lord Vishnu was to be established. Rudra, the all-knowing, wise one, knew what was ordained. For the divine act to happen as his share of work in that process, he remained quiet and accepted the curse. We must know that it was not done because of

ignorance or due to lust. Rudra is such a selfless devotee of Vishnu and a wise one. What is the best way for all of us to gain control over our senses? Only through spiritual practice, we can gain control over our senses and only that will lead to dispassion or *Vairagya*? Without dispassion, it is impossible to attain spiritual knowledge.

To attain that what is the best way? One must think deeply, with prayers and fasting one must gain control of one's mind and senses. While writing the meaning of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* by Madhwacharya, Jayatheertha explains the important idea propounded by Vedavyasa. The most significant way is the contemplation on God along with his associate demigods, that too in the order of hierarchy.

More than the gods in charge of senses, the gods in charge of material wealth are superior to them and the gods in charge of the mind are still more superior to them and the god of Intellect is superior and more than them are the gods of higher philosophy and more powerful than them is the Goddess of Nature (*Prakriti*) Lakshmi Devi and the superiormost, most powerful supporter of all is Lord Sriman Narayana. The power and position of Gods increase in that order, and based on their power they will bestow their blessings on us. We must contemplate on them accordingly. Senses are inanimate nature. Surya, Moon, Varuna, *dikdevathas* (gods in charge of the directions) and Yama are in charge of the senses. We must first surrender ourselves to

them and then through their grace, attain control over our senses.

More powerful than these gods controlling the senses are the gods controlling the material world (*ardhaabhimaana devathas*). They exist in the mundane material matter and provoke the senses of man. Even when we are able to control our senses, if we get lured by the material, there is a danger of losing control over our senses because these gods controlling the material are more powerful than the gods controlling the senses. These *ardhaabhimaana devathas* are — Uma Devi, the consort of Rudra, Vaaruni, the consort of Sesha, and Sowparni, the consort of Garuda Deva. They exist in matter and provoke the senses. Hence, their grace is important. So, we all need to worship them devoutly. More superior to them are the gods controlling the mind — *manoabhimaana devathas*. They are Garuda, Sesha, and Rudra. For the mind not to get attracted and remain dispassionate, the grace of these *manoabhimaana devathas* is required. We must worship them to get their blessings and support.

Next, even if the mind runs after the material worldly attractions, it is the intellect that tells us what is good and what is bad for us through discretionary power. The presiding deity of the intellect is Saraswathi Devi. She bestows us with wisdom and discretion. So, we must worship her and gain her grace.

And the presiding deity and as the controller, Maha Tattwaabhimani Brahma Deva is the one who can

invoke Saraswathi Devi and our wisdom. So, we must worship him and get his grace.

Lakshmi Devi is the one who can control Brahma, who is the *Chittabhimani* and *Maha tattwaabhimaani* and the only one God alone can control is Lakshmi Devi. There is none who is equal to God or above him. He is the supreme one, the all-powerful one, the superiormost one, the ruler of all. He is on a par with only himself, none other can be there. Everybody is under his control and if someone possesses any power it is due to his grace. We must understand this philosophy. We must know the difference and distinction between the strengths and powers of these *tattwabhimana* gods. Worshipping and praying to all these gods is the best way to control the senses. *Jayatheertha* explained the opinion as expressed by Vedavyasa. Here, he explained the position of Rudra Deva.

Rudra Deva has the immense power to help the crores and crores of living beings from the torment of lusts or *Kama* and to save them from falling a prey to their senses and drowning in the sea of the mundane world.

Sri Sukaacharya was the very incarnation of Rudra, the controller of mind. What can the celestial dancers sent by Indra do to him? The beauty and the power of lust the celestial dancers have are under the control of Devi Uma, the *ardhaabhimaana* goddess who wields power over all the forces of attraction. Her husband is

Rudra, the controller and ruler. So, these celestial dancers cannot do anything to the incarnation of Rudra.

Rudra, the most powerful one, is capable of giving dispassion and detachment. It is most dangerous to think that Rudra, coming under the torment of lust and desire wanted to engage in sexual union with Parvathi Devi and hence, ignored Sage Bhrigu. Knowing fully well that the sage came following the direction of the Lord and knowing the divine ordinance to prove the superiority of Lord Vishnu, to help him move forward in the divine work, Rudra acted as though he was immersed in the joys of a householder.

Sukaacharya, who was the incarnation of such Rudra, would never get distracted by the beauty or amorous advances of the celestial dancers.

Sukaacharya's life was full of spiritual practice. He had shown to the world how spiritual practitioners should be. One must not eat anything, however hungry, without offering it to the Lord first, not even water, so proclaim the *Shastras*. Those who partake of the food offered to God will get the *punyam* or merit of a lifelong fast. Sukaacharya, as a part of his penance, observed all these. He stood in the midst of five fires and did penance. Many do penance to attain *Swarga*, the heaven, to enjoy the pleasures of heaven and have a physical relationship with the celestial angels like Rambha and others. So, the celestial dancers who were sent to disturb Sukaacharya were surprised by his resoluteness in his goal and they did not understand why he was doing penance if not for gaining proximity.

They wanted to know from Sukaacharya himself to get their doubt clarified.

If at all Sukaacharya wanted, it was not a big thing for him to drive away those celestial angels, or burn them to ashes, or even curse them. But he did not wish to waste the powers gained by doing great penance. He did his penance to gain merit and the grace of God, but not for his self-gain. Sukaacharya then prayed to Lord Srinivasa of Venkatachalam. “The great *Ramayana* and the *Maha Bharatha* proclaim strongly and clearly that if one looks at a woman with the wrong intention, first self-respect and shame will leave. A king must have these feelings of shame and caution. When he feels what his subjects are thinking about his behavior, then it is known as restraint and caution due to fear of shame. Without these thoughts the power of discretion will leave, the pious nature will leave without which one cannot understand about God or *dharma* or sins and merits. All our actions will be witnessed. It is imperative that one undergoes the result. Knowing this is being devout and pious. A connection with a wicked woman will wipe away all righteousness and piety. I need protection from such wicked women. O Lord Srinivasa, please take care of me and manage this situation.” Thus prayed Sukaacharya. Lord Srinivasa awakened the sense of wisdom in the celestial dancers’ minds, so they thought, “Though what we are doing is under somebody’s instruction, what we are doing is something wrong; disturbing the penance being done by great souls is a terrible sin.” So, with

repentance, they prayed and offered obeisance to Lord Srinivasa and went back leaving Sukaacharya in his penance as before. When Sukaacharya understood that he had the grace and blessings of Lord Srinivasa, in an extremely joyful state, he danced. By such grace of Lord Srinivasa, Sukaacharya never felt the pangs of lustful desire ever. Sukaacharya was none other than Rudra, who burnt down *Kama* or Manmatha to ashes. Such was the power of Sukaacharya. Whenever he experiences the torments of lusts, does the God he worships come under such pain? God is above and beyond *Kama*. He does not have any mental disturbances. With such knowledge, we must hear the coming part of the story. Just to reveal to the world how human beings behave under the influence of Kaliyuga, God appears as though he has some shortcomings. We must understand that all that is his *Leela* (sport) and we must not think that it is all real and fall into the blinding darkness of ignorance (*Tamas*).

The Bhagavatham, too, has similar thoughts. Though the Gopa women became extremely enamoured of the Lord, he gave them joy based on their *karma* — the fruits of their merit but never had any desire for them. God is above and beyond the feelings of *kama*.

Sukaacharya who attained *siddhi* after doing penance in the *Padma Sarovar* (Lotus Lake) decided to offer something in gratitude to the Lord. Thus, he performed a *Yagna* named ‘*Samyana*’ and offered his own self-control over the senses, by forming it into a sculpture, as the *Yagna phala* (the fruit of the *Yagna*) to the Lord.

He made the idols of Krishna and Balarama and got them consecrated in Temples in Tiruchanur. Even today those temples remain on the premises of Padmavathi Devi temple. They are directly opposite to the main entrance of the temple. Padmavathi Devi's temple is not directly opposite, but is in the north direction from these temples. There is a mention of these temples in *Bhavishyottara Purana*. Lord Srinivasa, while sending Vakula Devi to King Akasharaju seeking the alliance with his daughter, advised her to have *darshan* of Balarama and Krishna in Tiruchanur on the way. These temples were consecrated by Sukaacharya.

The *Padma Purana* proclaims that Sukaacharya had got 108 houses built, chosen highly learned scholars and those capable of performing Vedic rituals and *yagnas*, presented them with those houses to reside in, built temples of Krishna and Balarama in the central area of those houses and established a *Brahmin Agraharam* by the name Tiruchukkanooru (Tiruchanur) to help propagate and strengthen the Vedic tradition. In the later part of the story, it is mentioned that Srinivasa, only after having *darshan* of Sukaacharya and accepting his hospitality, had proceeded with his marriage. Srinivasa made the whole world believe that he had fallen in love with Padmavathi Devi on beholding her and that he had suffered torments of desire. Sage Narada had described in the *Padma Purana* the extraordinary beauty of Padmavathi Devi. He explained that Padmavathi Devi, who had the greatest attributes of Lakshmi Devi in her, had all the 32 supreme qualities

as prescribed by the *Shashtra*, and that she would be the one to wed the very lord of the Universe.

Sage Narada Appearing before Padmavathi Devi

When Padmavathi Devi, along with her handmaidens was strolling in the garden, she met an old brahmin. Lord Srinivasa, who was beautifully bedecked, went hunting on the horse which was no other than Vayudeva himself. All these incidents prove to be the preamble for the union of Srinivasa and Padmavathi and finally for their wedlock.

Sage Narada was always instrumental in making divine work happen, to help fructify events. Now, he appeared as an old man before Padmavathi Devi to facilitate love to blossom between Sriman Narayana and Padmavathi Devi. When Padmavathi Devi was ruffled by fear on seeing him, he explained and pacified her saying that he was like a father figure to her and that he wished only auspiciousness for her. He convinced her to show her palm to him to read her destiny and pronounced that only Lord Sriman Narayana would become her consort. He described the auspicious bodily features for such fortune. He thus evoked feelings of curiosity and thoughts on Lord Srinivasa to help the auspicious event of their marriage to take place. He disappeared after sowing the seed in her heart.

After chasing the elephant, Lord Srinivasa enquired about Padmavathi Devi's details as to who she was and introduced himself that he was Krishna residing in

Venkatachalam and that his parents were Devaki and Vasudeva. She also told him about her lineage. She mentioned that she belonged to *Atri gotram*. She conveyed subtly her liking towards him by warning that he would be punished by her father King Akasharaju if he came to know about Srinivasa coming there and speaking with the ladies of the palace. When he refused to leave, she made her handmaidens throw stones at him to drive him away in order to protect him. The stones did not hurt Srinivasa but grievously hurt the horse as designed by the Lord himself and Vayudeva left from the body of the horse and it fell down dead, and the *Purana* also explains how in that tussle Srinivasa's hair got tousled and how his clothes too got displaced when he acted as if he was running away frightened.

Vakula Devi on seeing Srinivasa refusing to eat food and looking dejected as if he lost something valuable, went to him with a plate of food and questioned him about his state. She said "Eat your food Srinivasa... are you feeling unwell? Is it some trouble through evil spirits? Please tell me the truth." He however remained silent. After some time, Srinivasa revealed to Vakula Devi the real reason, "No evil spirit can harm me. I myself am the most powerful. On hearing my very name any evil will run away in fright."

Eko Vishnur mahadbhootham prudhagbhootha nyanekasaha

Trinlokaan vyaapya bhootaatma bhunkthe viswabhugavyayaha

Mahadbhootham means that which is the most supreme. Even when Srinivasa told Vakula Devi that there was no problem whatsoever, she insisted and cajoled him to tell her the truth. Srinivasa revealed that he saw Padmavathi Devi and since then he felt that without her his life was a waste and that he deeply desired to marry her. The Lord himself gave the great fortune to Vakula Devi to mediate and facilitate his wedding to take place with Padmavathi Devi.

Who is Padmavathi Devi?

When Srinivasa told Vakula Devi about his having seen Padmavathi Devi in the royal orchard and getting deeply attracted to her, Vakula Devi asked Srinivasa, "Who is she that could evoke love and passion in you? What is her story?" Then Srinivasa told in detail about Padmavathi and her previous life.

"During *Tretha Yuga* when Lord Rama along with his consort Sita and brother Lakshmana was in exile in the forest, the demon Ravana abducted Sita by deception. On seeing Ravana's original form of a demon, Sita loudly wailed calling out "Hey Rama... Hey Lakshmana". All the animals and the birds in the forest made screeching sounds in worry. Hearing that ruckus Agni Deva who was in the *Patala loka* came up to *Bhooloka* and stood before Ravana and told him. "You must have abducted her thinking that she is Sita, but she is not Sita, she is the wife of a *Brahmana*, she just resembles Sita. When Lord Rama left to be in exile in the forest, fearing you, he left Sita Devi, the

daughter of King Janaka in my safe - keeping. He took this Brahmana woman with him. Since I like you very much, I am revealing all this to you,” he said convincingly. Ravana held Lord Shiva and Agni Deva in great esteem. Agni Deva after convincing Ravana thus sent Vedavathi, who was with his wife Swaha Devi and took Sita Devi along with him. Agni Deva with his magical powers turned Vedavathi into Sita Devi’s form and sent her with Ravana.

The *Purana* describes one more reason as to why Vedavathi came to be with Agni Deva. In her previous birth, Vedavathi was a brahmin lady with attractive looks. Getting attracted to her, Ravana desired to have physical union with her and when she declined his approach, he tried to use his might to enjoy her. Vedavathi who was highly moral in character cursed Ravana and gave up her life. She cursed him that “If ever you try to have sexual union with anyone forcefully, your head would be blown into smithereens.” She came to be in the protective fold of Agni Deva in her next birth. Her birth itself was to end Ravana’s life. Agni Deva turned her into the physical form resembling that of Sita. She had the power of Indra within; hence she could oppose Ravana courageously.

The Sita, who was in Ravana’s *Ashoka Vana* was, in reality, this Vedavathi, not the original Sita. After killing Ravana, to protect Sita from social blame, Rama asked her to do *Agni Pravesha* that is, entering into

the fire to prove chastity. When Sita entered the fire, two forms of Sita came out from the fire. Rama recognized his consort Sita, asked her, “Who is this, who looks as auspicious as you are?” Sita Devi explained to Rama, “She is the one who suffered great distress meted out by Ravana. She is Vedavathi who did penance in the presence of Swaha Devi, the wife of Agni Deva. My wish is that you should marry her.” Then Rama replied, “In this incarnation, I am an Ekapatnivrata (monogamous); in *Dwapara Yuga*, I will have many wives. So, I can fulfill this wish in the 28th *Kali Yuga*. Till then I will keep this Vedavathi in the protective safe - keeping of a *Brahmana*.”

In the 28th *Kali Yuga*, the infant found in a golden lotus by King Akasharaju while tilling the land near the *Padma Sarovar* (Lotus Pond) for performing the *yagna* was that Vedavathi. Since she was found in golden lotus (*Padma*), she was named Padmavathi and was raised by Akasharaju and his wife as their daughter. Srinivasa thus explained to Vakula Devi that Padmavathi was Vedavathi herself.

CHAPTER 30

VAKULA DEVI GOES TO NARAYANAPURAM

When Srinivasa told Vakula Devi that he had fallen in love with Padmavathi and that life would seem futile if he did not get married to her, Vakula Devi told Srinivasa, “I shall go and speak with Akasharaju and finalize the alliance for your marriage with Padmavathi.” To that Lord, who is ever - contented, who pervades everything, who does not need anybody, but is needed by all, the ever-blissful one, for whose grace even the innumerable *Anantha Brahmas*, *Anantha Rudras* perform penance for eons together, even the future Brahmas and Rudras do *sadhana* (spiritual practice) to attain the bliss of his *Swaswaroopa*, to such a Lord, can he feel the pain of love and passion for Padmavathi Devi? When Lakshmi Devi herself proclaimed that all her knowledge, power, strength, beauty, and wealth are but due to the blessing of the Lord himself, will such a lord forego sleep and food by getting disturbed with passion for her? It is purely to bring the *tamasic* natured people under his *Maya*. The devout ones and the *sadhakas* understand it as the *Leela* (divine sport) of the Lord. To believe that the Lord too falls a prey to pains of passion and pleasure, it is out of sheer darkness of *Tamas*.

Why Lord Srinivasa had to develop a passion for Padmavathi was due to the word he gave Sita during his incarnation as Lord Rama — the word to marry

Vedavathi who had borne all the sufferings on behalf of Sita – and, as he was monogamous right then, he would marry her later in the 28th *Kaliyuga*; to the boon he gave Yashoda that she would not only see his marriage but also perform it; and to the boon Lord Brahma had given to Madhava that in Madhava’s future birth as Akasharaju, he would beget the very Lord as his son-in-law. He would bless all those who would witness his marriage as also the devotees who perform his marriage in temples and in their homes. It was due to his utmost compassion for his devotees that Lord Srinivasa behaved as if he were smitten with passion.

Lord Srinivasa explained to Vakula Devi what she must do on her way while going to Akasharaju to mediate for his marriage with Padmavathi Devi. He told her, “After taking a holy dip in *Kapilatheertham*, you must have the *darshan* of Kapileshwara and offer obeisance, then have the *darshan* of the Balarama and Srikrishna deities in *Padma theertham* established by Sukaacharya and get their blessings and then must offer worship in Agastheswara temple and also, if you come across any sages and seers on the way, you must pay your respects, and only after taking their permission should you proceed. If you do all this with the devout resolution, then the work will be fruitful.” So saying, he created a horse and sent Vakula Devi on it. The significance of the Lord’s instruction is specially mentioned in the *Skanda Purana* and in the *Bhagavatam*.

While travelling if we are preoccupied with some thoughts, we may not pay any attention to some temples which are on the way. We may not be able to have a *darshan* and offer worship there. Sometimes there may be a powerful presence of the Lord there, or there may be other associated gods, too. So, to save us from such a sin, we must pray to the Lord in his Hayagriva form. This has been mentioned in the “Narayanavarma” section of the *Bhagavatam*. Vakula Devi was going on that trip to finalize the Lord’s marriage. She might not have needed any of these rituals as instructed by the Lord. But it was to give instruction and guidance to the world that Srinivasa asked her to perform all that. As told by Srinivasa, when Vakula Devi was offering her worship and getting *Abhishekam* done at Agastheswara temple, King Akasharaju and his retinue along with the handmaidens of Padmavathi Devi were also present in the temple offering worship and *Abhishekam*. When Vakula enquired about the princess, they told her, “Our princess saw one young man in our royal garden and since then she has been suffering from fever arising out of the fear that young man caused, and is bedridden. Our king consulted our guru Brihaspati and he suggested that offering *Puja* and getting *Abhishekam* done in Agastheswara temple will help her to recover as Agastheswara is the controller of the mind and that by his grace her mental anguish will reduce. So, on behalf of our princess Padmavathi, we have visited this temple.” Then when asked why she had come to the temple, Vakula Devi told them her side of the story that

she was Vakula and that by the grace of Lord Varaha she got the good fortune to serve Srinivasa.

We need to understand that in her very name *Bakula Maalika* the reason for her birth is explained — *Va/Ba* = to the Lord with the power to bestow salvation, *La* = who can provide service and care to that Lord who can give bliss and salvation, *mee* = along with Lakshmi Devi. Particularly Lakshmi Devi provides care and nurtures everybody, she is the one who cares and serves the Lord. She gave the opportunity to Vakula by residing in her. By the design of the Lord, having met the handmaidens of Padmavathi, Vakula asked them to take her to King Akasharaju and his queen Dharani Devi. Meanwhile, Srinivasa was restless with anxiety about the outcome of her visit, *whether she had reached the destination, whether she would be able to get the work done successfully*. We must not forget our duty and remain complacent after delegating our work to somebody. Srinivasa gave a message through his anxiety that till our work is done successfully we must pursue it with perseverance. It is a work-related principle. And for human endeavors, God’s grace is also required.

Before Vakula Devi reached the palace of king Akasharaju, he decided to go to Narayanapuram and make preparation for her arrival and smooth conduct of her role. He donned the role of ‘*Kuravanji*’ (a soothsayer) and went there to predict the future.

CHAPTER 31

THE SOOTHSAYER

Why must God don the role of a woman-soothsayer? Great people believe that doing such things is below their status and is insulting. God has given a message that, to achieve any goal and succeed in our work, it is fine to do things that may appear inferior in nature. For those who are wholesome in everything, there are no distinctions or insults. See how God himself had gone to see that the work was completed. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains this aspect in a very interesting manner.

Srinivasa as the woman-soothsayer looked like a very old lady, in a tattered saree, wearing chains made of liquorice seeds around the neck. He made the whole universe as the wicker basket that he carried on his head, made Brahma Deva as an infant, and carried him on the hip after tying him in his saree, made Rudra as the supporting cane stick and entered the streets of Narayanapuram. He is God; he can turn the whole universe as per his wish. If he so desires even Brahma and Rudra can turn into infants and walking sticks. Taking them along that way, the Lord proved his highest supremacy. (We must understand that the infant is not an incarnation of Brahma: there is no incarnation of Brahma on this earth. He just manifested temporarily as an infant as per the Lord's order befitting the situation).

When this woman soothsayer started going about the streets of Narayanapuram announcing loudly that

she would predict people's future perfectly as it was, and that she would give whatever one asked for, the palace handmaidens heard her and conveyed the same to queen Dharani Devi and they also suggested, "If we ask her about the mysterious ill-health of Padmavathi Devi, probably she may do something about it." Queen Dharani Devi ordered that the soothsayer should be brought over to the palace. The soothsayer at first feigned as if she did not want to go, saying, "Are you calling to insult me or truly you want to hear me out and go out?" Only when they promised to treat her well with respect, she proceeded to go to the palace.

First, she suggested that Queen Dharani Devi have a sanctifying bath and, though she was the Lord herself donning this role, she chanted the invocation *slokas* of gods, prayed to all the auspicious *theerthams* and *kshetrams* and pronounced their power and significance and then started her predictive words. She then said an oath on her wicker basket and on Lord Shiva and again sent her obeisance to the auspicious places in the Himalayas.

Why did she do that? It is to show to the world that despite having great knowledge and prowess if there is no God's grace, everything will be a waste. To predict the future, the power of words and their sanctity is important and for those words to turn true, God's grace and blessing must be there. If the protective armour of God's grace is there, with or without the required knowledge, the right words will flow out.

Unaccompanied by the grace of God, the words uttered will not become true. Though the soothsayer was Lord Venkateswara himself, she chanted all the names of the Gods, she prayed even to Lord Venkateswara also and started her oracle. All that happened that way was to send a message to his devotees.

The soothsayer woman told the queen thus, “Your daughter spotted a fine young man in the royal garden and she fell in love with him and developed this fever due to that deep passion. Only if you get her married to him, can she be saved or she may die.” Dharani Devi was crest-fallen with worry, but she said, “How can you say like that? You say that if we don’t get her married to him immediately, she may die. Without even knowing who he is, where he lives, how can we get her married to him? What should I do?” She questioned her, “If you want to be freed from your sorrow, if you want your daughter Padmavathi to get well, you immediately decide and take a resolve that you will get her married to him. She will become normal soon.”

Why did Lord do that way? If we look at it from the worldly point of view, it may look as though he did the groundwork ready by making Padmavathi’s parents agree to the marriage before Vakula Devi arrived there. Their marriage would anyway take place, the birth of Akasharaju and the finding of Padmavathi Devi in a lotus — all these events happened to make the marriage a certainty.

According to the *shastras*, it is meritorious even to make a resolution to do something good. The couple, Akasharaju and Dharani Devi, was anyway deciding to perform the marriage. But a resolution and a decision made in the presence of the Lord would bring more merit. To bestow that merit, that *punyam*, on Dharani Devi, the Lord did all that.

The *Bhavishyottara Puranam* described one episode that happened when the soothsayer was giving her predictive oracle or divine advice. While she was talking, Brahma Deva who was in the form of the little child started to wail loudly. Then the soothsayer said, “This baby is always hungry. Please get him something to eat, something that is cooked or uncooked, something prepared now or prepared anytime, get him something to eat.” It was the royal palace and the soothsayer was predicting the future of Padmavathi Devi. So, sweet rice porridge was brought in a golden plate as ordered by the queen. But the crying child refused to eat that even after much persuasion. So, the soothsayer said angrily, “You are used to eating only roots. You must have the good fortune to eat this kind of food.” She ate the porridge herself. What is the meaning of that? Why did Brahma Deva refuse to eat? How did the Lord consume that? In reality, God never eats the *Naivedyam* (food offering) we offer in physical form. He leaves it as it is but partakes of its essence and, because he looks at it, the power of his vision destroys any negativity present in it and that becomes ‘*Prasad*’. Offering anything to God means

— the *Paramatma* present in our *atma* and the one in front as the deity (*chala*, *achala*) and the one present in the offering we made — all the three are the same *Paramatma*, the all-pervading Supreme soul, knowing this unified presence of God is our act of offering *Naivedyam* to the Lord.

We can understand the philosophy behind this. The main entity is God, the one in the idol form is also God and He accepts only the essence of the offering we make. But this rule does not apply to God when he manifests as an *avatar*. For example, in his *avatar* as Lord Rama, he ate the fruits offered by Sabari, during the *Maha Bharata*, as Lord Krishna He ate the skin of banana when offered by Vidura and ate butter, milk, and curd in the houses of *gopikas*. And He ate the food cooked by Vakula Devi every other day. Hence, as the lady soothsayer, He ate the porridge offered and later accepted the hospitality of Sukaacharya.

But Brahma Deva could not accept the food of mortal beings. He did not have his manifested form in *Bhooloka*. He himself took the form of the baby, so he did not eat the food that was offered.

Similarly, when the form of God exists as the inner soul of everybody, will that form consume the *Naivedyam* in the physical form or the subtle form? When the God inside of us is gone, it means we are gone and dead and when God is inside the *jeevatma*, will He experience hunger along with the *jeevatma* He is in? But for Him this food is not required.

There is a *sloka* — ‘*Dvaasuparna*’. There are two birds, of which one eats and the other does not. But the one who is eating gets weak and the one not eating is fine. This is the secret of the *atma-Paramatma*. When we are taking food, we must eat with the belief that the food is being offered to the *Paramatma* existing inside. The *Shastra* says that one must eat food as if doing a sacred *Yagna*.

To convey all these points of Godly philosophy these events have happened. The Queen Dharani Devi still harbored some doubts in her mind. “When nobody has sought the girl’s hand, why should we do *Kanya danam* (give the girl away in marriage)?” In those days of yore, according to the tradition, the groom’s side must seek the alliance and request the girl’s hand in marriage. Hence, Dharani Devi was doubtful and unsure. Without knowing who the groom was and without no one approaching from the groom’s side, these thoughts ran through her mind. The soothsayer woman gave an answer to that as though reading her thoughts. “You don’t worry about it at all — after I take leave of you, an elderly woman will come to you with the marriage proposal seeking *Kanya daanam*. She would be from that man’s side whom Padmavathi saw in the garden and fell in love, and also the man to whom you decided to give your daughter in marriage. You give your consent to her request.” So saying, the soothsayer left. Dharani Devi confirmed from her daughter Padmavathi that she was in love with Srinivasa and that he was the cause of her fever.

Just as the soothsayer left, Vakula Devi entered along with the handmaidens of the queen. Hearing all the information from Vakula Devi, King Akasharaju noticed that his queen Dharani Devi appeared sad and crest - fallen, and he did not have an idea of what to do. He decided to discuss it with his guru Brihaspati and so sent his son Vasuda to *Swargam* (Heaven) to bring along Brihaspati. His son Vasuda is a manifestation of Chandra Deva. During the churning of the milky ocean, he emerged as the younger brother of Lakshmi Devi, and even in the next birth, he was born as the younger brother of Padmavathi. Since Vasuda had the divine attribute, he could go and bring Brihaspati quickly. Brihaspati was a *Jnani* so he knew who that man was with whom Padmavathi fell in love.

With great joy he advised King Akasharaju to give his daughter in marriage to that man and earn blessings. Brihaspati felt overwhelmed by the fact that he was chosen as an instrument to fix the marriage of the Lord himself. But he humbly told, “I am not as learned as Sage Sukaacharya knows more about the Lord. We must consult him too. He resides near the *Padma Sarovar*.” This is an indication to show that Rudra Deva (Sukaacharya) is higher than Brahma in comparison. King Akasharaju immediately sent his younger brother Thondaman to bring along Sage Sukaacharya. The *Purana* describes how Sage Sukaacharya behaved after coming to know of the Lord’s marriage. He became frenzy and threw down his *kamandalam* (the urn with a handle that is used

for water), pulled out his sacred thread and his clothes made of fiber, and started dancing like a mad man. Why did he behave like that?

When one experiences too much joy or too much sorrow, one tends to behave madly, displaying overwhelming emotions. Sukaacharya was a *sarvasanga parityaagi*, one who is unconnected to anything worldly. He was dispassionate in outlook, he never did anything for selfish reasons or desires. Even penance he did was for the sake of God. Nothing could move him except that which was godly. For his penance, the wish he sought was having the *darshan* of the Lord and his blessings. More than having the *darshan* of the Lord, performing his marriage — what fruition of good fortune! Sukaacharya thought and felt that his *kamandalam* (urn to carry water) and his sacred thread were not required anymore. His behavior shows how even the most dispassionate can get excited when it comes to God-related issues. This is the wonderful relationship between God and his true devotee. It is not due to the fruition of one’s *karma* we can have the *darshan* of the Lord. Even after attaining knowledge, one must not let go of doing *karma*. The *Brahma Sutras* proclaim that there will be bliss in such liberation.

Sukaacharya immediately started and went along with Thondaman and reached Narayanavanam. King Akasharaju discussed everything elaborately with Sukaacharya who said that “Lord Narayana himself is

Srinivasa. He is the personification of all auspicious qualities in entirety, He is blemish-free, He is the Supreme most, He is the supporter of all, He is the ruler of all, He is the one who is responsible for the creation, sustenance, and dissolution, He is causative of all, He bestows knowledge and releases one from bondage, He is the foremost of all.” So saying, Sukaacharya told Akasharaju to give consent to the marriage. Despite all that *Purana* says, Akasharaju took all the precautions necessary as a father. He gathered all the information required from Vakula Devi like what is Srinivasa’s *gotram* (Rishi clan), his birth star, the details of his parents and his relatives. He would come to know that Srinivasa’s parents were Devaki and Vasudeva, his birth star was ‘*Shravana*’ and his *gotram* was ‘*Vasistha*’. Vakula Devi asked Sukaacharya, “Respected sage, do you need to ask for information about Lord Srikrishna? Are you not aware?” She knew that Sukaacharya had taken upon himself as his life-goal to propagate the *Bhagavatham* written by his father. The *Bhagavatham* is all about Lord Krishna alone. Sukaacharya told Vakula Devi, “You know everything; I too know everything, but you have to give information and be the mediator. Hence, I did not tell anything.” Dharani Devi had one nagging doubt why a twenty-four-year-old groom who is fully eligible for marriage did not get married till now?” The same question she asked Vakula Devi, *Is there anything lacking in him?* Cleverly, she said, “Though married for long, the father of Ganga (Sri Maha Vishnu) had

no progeny; hence this marriage!” After checking horoscope compatibility and confirming that they both matched very well, Sukaacharya and Brihaspati convinced King Akasharaju and made him write a letter to Srinivasa. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains in detail the letter written by Akasharaju to Srinivasa. He wrote with great respect and reverence, knowing that he was addressing the very Lord himself. He requested Sukaacharya himself to go to Venkatachalam and deliver the letter to Srinivasa personally.

What other fortune did Sukaacharya want than doing God’s work and getting God’s *darshan*? Taking the opportunity as a great blessing Sukaacharya went to Venkatachalam.

Srinivasa was waiting with great anxiety and worry. Vakula Devi had not returned yet. He entertained doubts such as whether Akasharaju agreed for the marriage to take place or not, why so much delay in Vakula Devi’s coming back. When Srinivasa was awaiting the arrival of Vakula Devi with trepidation (all this was just acting), he saw Sri Sukaacharya coming and seeing him, Srinivasa ran towards him eagerly and asked him whether it was successful. Sukaacharya affirmed in the positive and said it was fruitful. All this *Leela* of God is to show human nature and behaviour. Srinivasa embraced and honored Sukaacharya for having brought the good news. He offered his reverence to the letter sent by Akasharaju by doing *namaskarams* and carried it on his head with due

respect. He felt overjoyed after reading the letter. “In my *avatar* of Sri Rama, I embraced Hanuman who brought news of Sita’s whereabouts, now, I am embracing you, to honor you for having brought this joyous news.” Saying so, Srinivasa embraced Sukaacharya. The pleasure and honor of his embrace was bestowed only on Vayudeva (being Hanuman’s father) and Rudra deva (as Sukaacharya). They both are so meritorious.

Srinivasa responded very respectfully to the letter sent by Akasharaju giving his consent to the marriage. Srinivasa mentioned the auspicious time of marriage *muhurtham* as *Vaisakha Shukla Dashami* — the tenth day of the waxing moon in *Vaisakha* month. He also mentioned that his side would come over in the traditional manner for the marriage. He sent Sukaacharya with the letter after paying due respects to him again.

To Sukaacharya (Rudra Deva) for having done such a personal work as a service towards him, Lord conferred the position of ‘*Sesha*’ to him. In *Brahma Kalpa*, and during his manifestation as Lord Rama, as a recognition of the great service Anjaneya (Vayu Deva) had done to him, in the coming future *Brahma Kalpa*, he conferred the position of Brahma on Anjaneya. God is so compassionate that he will unfailingly show his grace for a devotee’s service and devotion.

After Sukaacharya left with the letter, Vakula Devi arrived. She told Srinivasa that she brought good news

for him. She had convinced Akasharaju and Dharani Devi for the marriage. Srinivasa did not reveal that he already knew the news. Srinivasa pretended that she took the whole responsibility for herself and had taken the work to fruition, and expressed his gratitude to her. As she was relating everything excitedly, he displayed more enthusiasm and excitement and gave her immense satisfaction and happiness as a way of his blessing.

A little later after hearing the good news, Srinivasa became dull and told Vakula Devi, “It is not right for me to get married. I don’t want this marriage!”

Vakula Devi was stunned and questioned Srinivasa, “What is this decision? In all your previous *avatars* you had got married umpteen times. I never had the good fortune to witness even one of them. I got this birth after doing severe penance. You had promised me that I would be able to witness your marriage in this birth. After so much effort and after convincing the parents of Padmavathi Devi, is it right on your part to say no to this marriage? We don’t even have any reason to say no. You truly liked Padmavathi and they too consented. Now, why do you have such thoughts?”

Srinivasa replied thus, “Akasharaju is a king. He has many relatives, well-wishers, friends, and a long list of retainers. He is very wealthy and has great authority and power. What about me? I am a nobody. It is a common maxim that for marriage or for enmity,

both sides must be equal in every way. Marriage between opposites is not right. What will people think? They will say that the groom's side is poor. How insulting would that be?"

Was this meant as a test of Vakula Devi's knowledge and understanding? Vakula Devi, as a *Jnani*, knew very well to whom she was offering her devout services and also a reason. So, she smiled and said, "O my son, why do you try to pull me into this *maya*. I know that you are the Lord of the fourteen worlds, you are the suprememost and the best of all. Akasharaju is a mere titular king. Only through your grace, somebody will get good opportunities. Who is he before you? If you just think once, all the gods and demigods right from Brahma will come and stand before you with folded hands. They think that it is their good fortune to serve you. And as far as material wealth is concerned, you are the consort of Lakshmi Devi and you are the causative factor in everybody's wealth. You are blessing all of us, including Padmavathi Devi, Akasharaju, and me, and all others waiting to witness your marriage through your divine *leela*. Stop testing me anymore and show your grace and compassion." What the Lord told was right and what Vakula Devi told was also right. The Lord did not have parents or any relations. None could be called his own. In fact, he is *Apraakrutha*, *Swaramanudu* - one who doesn't need anybody's support (including Lakshmi Devi's). But in the present manifestation and other manifestations in this material world, for the sake of doing good to

his creation, the Lord has everybody. He is needed by everybody, so he belongs to everybody.

After listening to what Vakula Devi said, Srinivasa with a smile summoned Garuda and Sesha. They appeared in front of him instantly. He instructed Garuda to convey the news of his marriage to the gods and invite them all to it immediately. He sent a letter to his son Brahma. If Brahma was informed, he would call all the gods to assemble and instruct them to start immediately for the Lord's marriage. Here we need to talk about something. When Brahma instructed all the Gods to attend the marriage, they wanted '*vaarshikam*' for themselves, which in the present-day parlance means extra money, like a bonus. For them, money means wealth — the wealth of knowledge, the wealth of merit (*punyam*). Brahma usually distributes this kind of wealth to all the gods for the work they do for the world. Apart from that, every year Brahma scripts a '*Jnana Patra*' (knowledge filled paper) and disseminates special knowledge of all the Gods. That is what is called '*Vaarshikam*'. The message in this episode is to show how, in this *Kali Yuga*, people demand bribes to do any work. Gathering all the three crores of Gods as a huge confluence, Brahma Deva started the journey. After being informed by Garuda, all the celestial beings like *Kinneras*, *Kimpurushas*, and *gandharvas* along with the sages and seers started too. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* says that the Brahma's full retinue of gods and demigods going for the marriage was more than ten lakhs in number and,

equaling this number, others from different *lokas* (worlds) had joined. There was a difference among gods and demigods in the way they served the Lord during his marriage based on their hierarchy.

While Srinivasa was eagerly awaiting the arrival of his son Brahma and others, Garuda and Sesha updated him about their progress in the journey — like Brahma crossing the Himalayan Mountain range along with all others, crossing the river Ganga, and after crossing the river Godavari they approached the river Krishna, and so on. The *Purana* explained this in detail.

When Lord Srinivasa came to know that Brahma and others had started after taking a holy dip in *Tumbura theertham* which was close by, he couldn't wait any longer, so rushed to greet them. He embraced Lord Brahma affectionately, gently touched Lord Rudra on his head, shook hands with them, waved at the others, smiled at everybody, and acknowledged others through the gesticulation of his eyes. His way of acknowledgement was in line with their eligibility. He embraced Vayu Deva affectionately.

As Srinivasa was welcoming everyone warmly, he spotted Vishwakarma. "Though everybody came near me, He is standing afar in arrogance. Remove him from his post and appoint someone who has devotion for me," Srinivasa said to Indra. Vishwakarma whose name was Vardhaki, prostrated at the Lord's feet and requested him to pardon him. Srinivasa looked at Indra and questioned him, "When so many gods, demigods,

sages, and Brahmans had come to attend the wedding, why were no amenities provided?" He ordered a beautiful and palatial edifice for the assembly with a length of fifty *yojanas* and a breadth of thirty *yojanas* to be built. Indra saw to it that Vishwakarma built it instantly.

Srinivasa also told Indra, "When these three crore gods, demigods, *gandharvas*, the celestial beings, and the sages and the learned Brahmanas go over to *Narayana Vanam* to attend the marriage, will it not cause a problem to the king Akasharaju to provide accommodation to all of them? So there also this kind of buildings must be built, take Vishwakarma and have him build the necessary cottages for everyone, in consultation with Akasharaju." That's how a huge city-like construction of buildings came up near and around *Narayana Vanam* through Vishwakarma.

Lord Srinivasa delegated the work to each of the gods, like, Shiva to organise the provision of comforts and amenities to seers and sages, Shanmukha to invite everybody and ensure respectful attention, Agni Deva to oversee the cooking and serving, Varuna Deva to ensure water provision, the Vasuvus to look after the cleaning and washing of vessels, Sage Vasistha to supervise the rituals and *pujas*, Yama to ensure punishment of the wicked and protection of the pious ones, Kubera to offer donations and charity to Brahmanas, Chandra Deva to provide light and brightness, and the Navagrahas to make the food

platters with leaves. It doesn't mean that God's work cannot happen without the help of all. God is most competent in every aspect; it is only to bless them and give them merit that the Lord had delegated work to them.

After everybody was welcomed warmly, Srinivasa suddenly looked worried and moody. When Brahma asked him for the reason, Srinivasa said, "What is the use of everybody attending when my Mahalakshmi hasn't come? To me, it seems no one has come." When someone is getting married a second time when the first wife is still alive, it is natural that the first wife should not be present at the marriage. But here the situation is different.

The marriage took place as per a special wish sought by Lakshmi Devi in *Treta Yuga*. It was a promise made in *Tretayuga*. It was not right to fulfill a wish when the person to whom it was promised is absent.

During the time of *Ramayana*, after killing Ravana and before taking back Sita, Rama ordered her to take a test to prove her chastity by entering into the fire and Sita Devi came out unscathed and as pure as ever. But from the fire emerged two Sitas. The Sita, who was held captive in Lanka was not the original Sita, but she was the daughter of Fire God and she was a replica of Sita in physical appearance. Sita Devi requested Sri Rama to marry the other Sita, who, instead of herself had spent one year in Lanka in great distress. Rama responded this way, "Yes, I shall marry her and fulfill

your wish. But not in this *avatar* as Rama because I made a resolve that I shall follow monogamy and have only one wife. And in the following avatar as Krishna in *Dwaparayuga*, I will marry 16,108 women. As I had fixed that number, I cannot marry her then also. But in the 28th *Kaliyuga* I shall definitely marry her and fulfill your wish".

Sitadevi is also none other than Lakshmi Devi herself. Without Lakshmi Devi, how can Padmavathi Devi's marriage take place? We must know one scriptural secret. They are never separated, the Lord and his Lakshmi Devi. They are always together in unison. God has manifested in many forms and in many avatars, some of them benign and some fiery. According to the individual merit of the jivas, they will experience his benign presence or his fiery passion. In Balarama, and in Sesha there is fiery passion in the measure of God's one gray hair. We know that God got married in his many forms. In almost every form God married only Lakshmi Devi. As Rama he married Sita Devi; as Krishna, he married Rukmini and Satyabhama, the forms of Lakshmi Devi. So, when Krishna married 16,108 women, who were they? They were all the devotees of the Lord who got him as their husband because of the boons they got from the Lord himself. They were not eligible to marry the Lord on their own merit, but for the boon to materialize which they got from the Lord. Each one of them was a small '*amsha*' (part) of Lakshmi Devi. Similarly, Lakshmi Devi's exceptional presence must be there in

Padmavathi Devi, and also for the sake of the world, Lakshmi Devi also must be present in her own form. So, Srinivasa wanted to invite Lakshmi Devi for the marriage, who left *Vaikuntham* and went to Kariveerapuram (Kolhapur) after a love tiff with him — though she resides in his heart forever. Who should go and invite her? If invited, will she come and attend? To these questions, Srinivasa gave the answers himself. “We shall send Surya Deva to invite her as she has great regard and affection for him. I know it well.” These poetically expressed words are also to be understood literally: Lakshmi Devi resides in the lotus (Padma) as her seat and the lotus blooms when the sun rises. That is why he said that Lakshmi Devi likes the Sun God.

When Surya’s name was considered by the Lord, the former became concerned and shook with fear and said, “This matter is big and mighty. It is between couples who had a fight, what word will cause friction again cannot be foreseen.” Surya thus expressed his worry, because he did not believe that Lakshmi Devi would give consent to his words, though the Lord himself believed otherwise. So even when Srinivasa assured him by saying, “You go, she will surely come,” Surya mumbled and asked, “What do I tell her?” Srinivasa said, “Tell her that I am very sick and only if I place one hand on Brahma and other on Shiva that I am able to even get up; tell her that I am too weak even to walk.” Surya God is a *jnani*. Very learned and wise, he knew that Lakshmi Devi, who was wise and an all-

knower, would know that no ill health or disease could ever touch the Lord. He is one who is blemishless; he is the personification of all auspicious attributes; and he himself is Dhanvantari (the god who cures all diseases). When I myself know that the Lord will never be afflicted with any disease or ill health and that he is the one who can cure others’ diseases, will Lakshmi Devi, who knows everything, not know? Surya was aware of that fact and so said, “If I tell her all that you had asked me to tell her, will she believe me at all?” Surya expressed his apprehension. Then Srinivasa assured Surya Deva, “Lakshmi Devi will get under the influence of my *Maya*. You don’t worry, go to her.”

If we believe what was said here, it will be a mistake. Lakshmi Devi herself knows everything. She does not have any illusion or ignorance. All this is a drama enacted by the Lord and Lakshmi Devi. We must know that. Lakshmi Devi herself is the suprememost *Chaitanya* or the energy in everybody. For us to get to the essence of this, we must know that in Sanskrit ‘*Maya*’ has another meaning, ‘*Ichha*’ (desire to do something). When Surya deva invited her, Lakshmi Devi would know that it is God’s wish that she should attend and so she would go. If we believe that she came to Venkatachalam just by what Surya deva said, then it will be a serious mistake in our thinking. In the same way, the expression, ‘*maya mohitha*’ can be interpreted as - ‘*uhitha*’ - without any question or debate, ‘*mohitha*’ as per God’s wish. Those who do anything believing that it is God’s wish, they are *Maya mohithas*

(influenced by illusion) like Lakshmi Devi, who had but one small *dosha* (mistake) that even she did not understand the Lord fully. But since she has complete knowledge of everything and had the power of truth, she could understand the wish of the Lord and would attend the marriage without having any unnecessary thoughts.

After Lakshmi Devi reached Venkatachalam, the management of the entire event of the marriage rested on her and Vakula Devi. In the presence of Lakshmi Devi herself, all the women anointed Srinivasa with oil and massaged him with besan flour as part of the ritual auspicious bath and gave him camphor *harati*. The next ritual that followed was “*punyahavachanam*” (purifying the environs) and “*kula devatha sthaapana*” (setting up the family deity for offering *puja*). Who is the family deity of this Lord, himself being the overlord of all gods? Srinivasa gave an answer to that “*Sami Vriksha* is my family deity” and saying so he did *puja* to the Sami *vriksha* which was in *Kumaradhara* and when the question arose as to where to set it up for *puja*, Srinivasa said in the frontyard where Varaha Swamy resided. In that instance, Srinivasa remembered that everybody was invited, but he forgot to send an invitation to Varaha Swamy himself who was just next to his own abode. Srinivasa himself went to invite Varaha Swamy personally.

But Varaswamy said, “I am very busy with work. The Sami crop is ready and thieves are waiting to steal

it. I need to be here to protect the crop. I have become old too, and I don’t have much strength. Vakula Devi will attend on my behalf. Let the ceremony happen successfully, my blessings and best wishes shall always be with you.” (He probably must have said like that because he might have felt that despite being neighbours, he remembered him now). The ritual of setting up the family deity for *puja* was done. Srinivasa told everybody to start the wedding. His intention was instead of arranging food for everybody here, the cooking and the expenditure could be avoided if Akasharaju’s hospitality could be enjoyed there by all. It was better to take everybody there he thought. But Brahma Deva objected to it. “After invoking and doing *puja* to the family deity, feeding as a part of the ritual must be done. And, the little children, sages, and seers are hungry. Only after serving food fully to their satiety shall we all start for the marriage.” “Yes, that may be correct, but where do I have the money for that?” Srinivasa said, for which Shiva said, “Because of financial situation how can we lose our prestige and honour in front of everybody? By borrowing money, we should complete this auspicious occasion in a befitting manner.”

Srinivasa was doubtful whether someone would lend him money. Brahma Deva said, “Summon Kubera,” and when, on being summoned, Kubera made delay, Srinivasa became angry and remonstrated him, says the *Purana*. Along with Brahma, Rudra, and Kubera, Srinivasa reached the peepul tree on the

western side of *Pushkarini*, thinking that the matter of loan could not be discussed in front of all. When Srinivasa asked Kubera for money as a loan, Kubera humbly said, “Swami, why are you asking like this? The entire wealth is yours — I am just taking care of it as a keeper on your behalf. You can take as much as you want.” Then Srinivasa said, “Give me based on the rules of present *yuga*,” for which Kubera said, “Then write a promissory note and take a loan with compound interest as per the *Kaliyuga Dharma*”.

The Promissory Note Given by Srinivasa to Kubera

The one taking the loan is Srinivasa (the debtor) and the one giving loan as debt is Kubera (the creditor). To meet the expenditure of his marriage, in the year *Vilambi*, in the month of *Visakha*, on *Shukla Paksha Saptami Thithi* (seventh phase of waxing moon), fourteen lakh gold coins with the emblem of Rama was given to Srinivasa with the commitment of paying interest. An agreement from Srinivasa was taken that the principal amount along with interest would be paid back to Kubera. One year after the marriage, the full amount would be cleared over a period of a thousand years. This was the content of the promissory note given by Srinivasa to Kubera. The three witnesses were, Brahma, Rudra, and the *ashwattha vriksha* (peepul tree). Srinivasa also wrote in the note, “In the future, my devotees will offer money either ethically earned or unethically into my *Hundi*. I shall clear the debt with that money.” All this is the *Leela* of God, to show us the way people in society behave.

Srinivasa asked Kubera to have the money in his custody and spend it for the marriage. There are so many messages embedded in this whole episode. After setting up the *puja* for the family deity, one must feed people and satisfy them, and not send them away without serving food to them and that as per the *Dharma* of *Kaliyuga*, one must uphold one’s honour and when one borrows money from somebody without fail it must be returned. Srinivasa made Kubera say something very significant like “The wealth we possess is not ours; it belongs to God and we are enjoying what he gave. One must believe strongly that one’s own earning, or the wealth got from forefathers as legacy, all of that is what is given by God. When we spend money to perform our responsibilities and duties, we must remember that always.”

Srinivasa had one more doubt. “Money could be arranged by borrowing, but there is so much work to do. Who will do all that work?” Rudra Deva said, “O great one, stop this *Leela* of yours. Despite knowing everything you put us in an uncomfortable position by asking like that. We are all ready to serve you. Just order and delegate work, we shall do.” That is the magical power of God. Work was delegated to each god, based on their eligibility and ability. Agni Deva was given the charge of cooking and preparing food; Shanmukha, the six-faced god, was put in charge of inviting and taking care of guests; Vishwakarma was in charge of providing all the amenities to the guests; Kubera was in charge of finances for all the expenditure;

Vayu Deva was appointed to provide a cool and soothing breeze. Agni Deva, who was in charge of cooking, said that there were no cooking utensils and containers, to which Srinivasa said, “O if it were to be a function in your house, everything will be available. If it is for my marriage, nothing will be there. But why any utensils, cook in the *theerthams* (temple ponds)”. In each of the *theerthams* and ponds, one of the food items was prepared. As per Srinivasa’s order to Agni Deva, rice was made in Swami *Pushkarini*, lentil items (pappu) were cooked in Papanasanam, rice porridge with jaggery (*bellam paramaannam*) was made in Akasa Ganga, vegetable curries, and ghee melting (*kooralu, neyyi kaachatam*) in *Deva Theertham*, Tamarind rice (*pulihora*) in *Tumbura Theertham*, many other dishes in *Kumara Theertham*, other soups, chutneys, and spicy pickles in many other *theerthams* were prepared.

In this manner with the power of gods, very wholesome and sumptuous food was prepared. Brahma Deva told Srinivasa, “Only after the food offering to God, all the guests will be served. So, you must have food first.” But Srinivasa following the rule of a host said, “All the guests have come to attend the auspicious event in my house. I cannot eat before they are served.”

Brahma asked him again, “None of the sages, seers and Brahmins will partake of food if it is not offered to God as *Naivedyam*. So, to whom should it be offered?” Srinivasa said, “I am manifest here in

another form as Narasimha on the hill in Ahobilam. Offer the food to him as *Naivedyam* and serve everyone.” Brahma Deva offered the prepared food to Narasimha. It was like divine providence for the sages and seers to partake of the *prasadam*. That is why after doing *puja* and offering food *Naivedyam* to the gods (deities in idol form or in *Saligrama* form) in whichever form we are, we offer the same to Rama, Brahma and others as *Nrushima prasadam* by chanting this *mantra*.

Ramaa dayo devaaha sanakaadyaa
sukaadayaha

Sree Nrushimaprasaadoyam sarve guruhnaantu
Vaishnavaaha

The *Bhavishyottara Purana* explains in detail that *Naivedyam* was served to everybody only after doing the above procedure of *Vysvadevam* and that under the guidance of Shiva the serving leaf-plates were arranged from *Pandu theertham* (this *theertham* is at a short distance on the south of the presently existing Gogarbhham Dam) to Srisailam and based on the hierarchy and eligibility everybody was made to sit accordingly and *prasadam* was served to all. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* gives in detail the right way for a host to serve food and honour guests. First water must be sprinkled on the leaf-plates and wiped clean after which ghee must be served as a means of purifying it. Then traditionally salt must be served first and then all the other items in their specific place in the leaf-

plate according to the *sastra*. After serving food in the manner explained above, Agni deva told Srinivasa that food had been served. Then everybody chanted this *sloka*

Eko Vishnur mahadbhootham prudhagbhootha anekyaha

Treen lokaan vyaapya bhootaatma bhunkte viswabhugavyayaha

“Vishnu, who is omnipresent, who has the power to grow to the size of the three worlds and swallow all the three, existing in the small bodies of *jivas*, he eats what the *jivas* are eating.”

While this *sloka* was being chanted by everybody before partaking of the *prasadam*, Srinivasa offered his obeisance to everybody by standing with a vessel of water in hand and said, “To all the knowledgeable ones this small quantity of food may not be sufficient to satiate, but O great ones with the power of penance, since you are compassionate by nature, knowing that I don’t have anything, please accept this little food offering as a sumptuous offering and make us feel blessed,” and he said “*Krishnaarpanamasthu*” (May fruit of this be offered to Lord Krishna). Everybody ate with gratitude with the thought, “The food you offered us is like ‘*amrutham*’ - the elixir that leads us to liberation.”

The *Purana* mentions that Srinivasa gave food, *tambulam* — betel leaves and nuts along with *Dakshina* (giving money as a mark of respect) to

everybody based on their hierarchy and eligibility. He gave the learned brahmins one gold coin with Rama emblem, to Vedanta scholars half of it, to *brahmacharis* half of that.

Then Srinivasa, Brahma, Shiva, Lakshmi Devi, and rulers of the worlds — all had food together. By then the sun had set, says the *Purana*.

After everybody had their food, they all rested there in the night and in the early morning while auspicious music was being played, Srinivasa and the whole of groom’s team started on their journey to Narayanavanam, the city of Akasharaju.

As the marriage party descended the hill and was reaching *Padma Sarovar*, Sukaacharya came and affectionately invited Srinivasa to his *ashram* to accept his hospitality. As he was accompanied by thousands of others, Srinivasa told Sukaacharya that he need not take the trouble as they planned to be guests of Akasharaju’s hospitality. But Sukracharya said pleadingly to Srinivasa, “If you eat it, would mean all have eaten.” Vakula Devi reminded Srinivasa of the help Sukaacharya had done while mediating for his wedding and asked Srinivasa to oblige Sukaacharya’s wish. Srinivasa consented.

Srinivasa told Sukaacharya, “I will come alone and accept your hospitality,” and entered his *kuteera* - thatched small hutment. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* mentions that Sukaacharya served ‘*chintatokku pachhadi*’ (chutney made of tamarind and spices) and

‘*pulusu*’ (thin gravy-like item with lots of vegetables) to Srinivasa. In that manner when Srinivasa was inside the ashram of Sukaacharya, the gods, sages, seers, and Brahmanas, based on their temperaments mistook the action of Sukaacharya. A few said, “When so many of us are here, how can Sukaacharya offer food only to one, is it not an act of insult to all of us? Is it right on the part of Sukaacharya? Has he done it knowingly or unknowingly? He is a *jnani*, a learned one, so he must have done this with arrogance.” Such were their thoughts, and a few even got an idea to harm Sukaacharya. Meanwhile Srinivasa, the Lord, after enjoying his meal, belched with satiety. That’s it; everybody outside felt full in their stomach and they all belched. Even those who had wrong ideas and thoughts about Sukaacharya too experienced the same feeling of having enjoyed the hospitality offered by Sukaacharya. “*Hariryatra bhunkte tatra bhunkte jagatrayam*” is the *mantra* chanted while doing the *hastodakam* ritual.

Eko Vishnur mahadbhootham prudhagbhootha nyanekyasaha

Treen lokaan vyaapya bhootaatma bhunkte viswabhugavyayaha.

If we satisfy God it will ensure that every being in the three worlds is satisfied. In any house where food offering as *Naivedyam* is offered to God, the *Sastra* says that it amounts to offering food to all the living beings in that house. To explain this phenomenon this

episode was described elaborately in the *Bhavishyottara Purana*.

On *Ashtami tithi* everybody spent their time in Sukaacharya’s ashram. The next day on the *Navami tithi*, they started their journey and reached Narayanapuram. Akasharaju very respectfully offered all the honours to the groom Srinivasa and his retinue and saw to it that they were comfortably housed in the exclusive place in the marriage venue. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* says that Srinivasa told Akasharaju, “Everybody is very tired after the journey, and feeling hungry. Make arrangements for their food.”

CHAPTER 32

KALYANAM ON A FRIDAY OF VAISAKHA SUKLAPAKSHA DASHAMI

In the early morning of *Dashami tithi*, Srinivasa had his auspicious bath and explained to Vasistha, the official *purohit*, about the rules followed generally.

“Since the *muhurtham* (auspicious moment to solemnize the marriage) is in the night, all the five of us, Lakshmi Devi, Vakula Devi, Brahma, you, and I — must not eat food during the day. In the same manner, from the bride’s side, Akasharaju, his wife, his daughter who is the bride, Thondaman and their *purohit* — these five should not eat food”.

Srinivasa told Kubera, “Kubera, tell Akasharaju to organize serving of food to Brahmins; the auspicious time of *muhurtham* is in the third quarter of the night, after which eating food by brahmins is a taboo.”

The *Purana* explains in detail how Akasharaju along with his retinue welcomed Srinivasa to the marriage venue after honouring in full measure befitting a bridegroom like Srinivasa. In the assembly hall built by Vishwakarma, Srinivasa was discussing the *sastra* and related rituals with learned sages when Akasharaju along with his wife Dharani Devi came and worshipped Srinivasa and made him sit on Airawata of Indra and accompanied by Brahma, Rudra, Kubera, Garuda, Sesha, Vayu, Varuna, Indra, Yama, Lakshmi Devi. Akasharaju led them all to the Royal Palace.

The *Purana* says that the wife of Thondaman showed *Kumbha Harati* (vessel filled with vermillion water to ward off any evil eye) to Srinivasa and then welcomed him respectfully.

To wash the feet of Srinivasa the water from Swami Pushkarini was brought at the behest of Akasharaju. After washing Srinivasa’s feet, Akasharaju sprinkled the sanctified water ‘*Vishnupadodakam*’ on himself, on everybody present, and over his kingdom. At the auspicious time for marriage, Akasharaju gifted one crore gold coins to Srinivasa, who told Akasharaju, that he did not want them, but asked him to get gem-studded ornaments to adorn all over his body.

Akasharaju did *kanya daanam* (offering daughter in marriage) to Lord Srinivasa. The *Bhavishyottara Purana* gives a description of the following ornaments given to Srinivasa: A crown weighing a hundred *tolas* (8 kilos), a waist belt weighing the same, ornaments that adorn his shoulders — ‘*bhujakeerthulu*’, ‘*noopurams*’ two serpent shaped upper arm ornaments, long pearl ear hangings that reached his shoulders, *navaratna* (nine gems) studded armlets that weighed 32 *tolas* (256 grams), two serpent-shaped bracelets, 111 *tolas* (8kgs and 88 grams) weighing waist thread studded with diamonds, gold sandals, a gold dinner plate weighing 60 *tolas* (480 grams), tumbler, and *panchapatra* (which are used while doing puja), sixty-four silk garments.

After pronouncing the *Pravara* (the details of lineage), Brihaspati and Sage Vasistha directed the *kanya daanam* procedure ritualistically.

The *Pravara* reads like this as quoted in the *Purana*. “Padmavathi, the bride is the great-granddaughter of Suvira of *Atreyasa gotram*, the granddaughter of Sudharma, and the daughter of Akasharaju, is being given in wedlock to the bridegroom Sri Venkateswara who is the great-grandson of Yayati, grandson of Surasena and the son of Vasudeva of *Vasistha gotram*”.

The *Bhavishyottara Purana* mentions in detail all the marriage rituals like, ‘*Kankanadhaarana*, (tying of sacred thread to the wrists) *Mangalasootra dharana*’ (tying of the auspicious thread called *mangalya* around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom), the blessings and benedictions by the sages by sprinkling the yellow rice (*akshanthalu*) mixed with the precious nine-gems, *navaratnas*, and the king honouring the Brahmans by giving gifts, etc. The *Purana* also says that Akasharaju donated thousands of crores of cows in charity to brahmins.

At night, along with the newlywed bride and groom, everybody had a sumptuous wedding meal. The marriage rituals continued for four more days starting from the next morning. The fifth day was the ritual of ‘*appagintalu*’ (officially handing over of the bride to the groom’s family). It is said that Akasharaju and Dharani Devi smeared a little milk to the navel of Padmavathi Devi and then bequeathed her to Srinivasa. After doing which Akasharaju and Dharani Devi wept inconsolably. Seeing them Padmavathi Devi’s uncle Thondaman and her brother Vasuda too cried; so also

the sages and seers who attended the marriage too shed tears. All this is described in the *Purana* in detail.

The *Purana* explains how Srinivasa took Padmavathi Devi for the ‘*gruhapravesham*’ ritual (entering the groom’s house for the first time) to the venue reserved for the groom’s party and how he later made Padmavathi Devi mount on Garuda, along with him and took her to his abode as also the best finery and the innumerable gifts given by Akasharaju before bidding farewell to his daughter Padmavathi Devi.

The list of the items sent by Akasharaju as ‘*Saare*’ (a ritualistic benefaction of gifts and presents before sending a married daughter to her home for the first time - trousseau) along with Padmavathi Devi are as follows. “Three hundred kilos of green gram, jaggery, and tamarind in equal weight, thousand pots of milk, hundred pots of curd, fifteen hundred leather containers full of ghee, two hundred vessels full of sugar, two hundred pots of honey, many vessels full of oil, bags of mustard, fenugreek, asafoetida, rock salt, pepper, cucumbers, mangoes, banana bunches, pumpkins, root varieties, gooseberries, raw bananas, five thousand cows, and a hundred goats. All the items were carried on ten thousand horses and a thousand elephants. Apart from all these materials, two hundred female handmaidens and three hundred menservants were sent along. The best silken clothes and finery, gem-studded cot, mattress, and pillows were also given as gifts. Pleased by all these gifts given with pure devotion, Srinivasa bestowed salvation to Akasharaju, says the *Purana*.

Narayanapuram, the place where Srinivasa Kalyanam took place, is located at a distance of 50 kms from Tirupati. It has two temples dedicated to Srinivasa and Padmavathi and they are under the control of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. As the marriage of the Lord took place here, there is a special presence of the Lord there. The temple authorities made arrangements for daily *Kalyanam Seva*. Getting the *Kalyanam* performed in Narayanapuram is very special. The temple authorities must also make facilities for people to perform their children's marriage there, by constructing wedding halls and encourage that activity.

Srinivasa announced to all that he had taken a vow that he would not climb the hill for the coming six months and hence would reside in *Agasthya Ashram*. Srinivasa sent away all the gods, sages, and seers after honouring them with worthy gifts. Lakshmi Devi went back to Kariveera Puram.

This *Agasthya Ashram* was located in the present area of Chandragiri/Thondavada/ Srinivasamangapuram. These three villages are within a distance of two kilometres from one another. The Kalyana Venkateswara temple is located in Kalyana Mangapuram. The belief is that Srinivasa lived here after his marriage for six months as he did not climb the hill as per his vow. Very close to this place is Thondavada which has Agastheswara temple. It has the Shivalinga established and consecrated by Sage Agasthya on the banks of Suvarnamukhi River.

CHAPTER 33

LORD SRINIVASA'S DUAL FIGHT WITH A DEVOTEE

When Srinivasa was staying at *Agasthya Ashram*, he got the information about the King Akasharaju's health deteriorating and that he was on his death bed; hence Srinivasa must go there along with Padmavathi Devi.

Srinivasa along with Padmavathi Devi started post-haste for Narayanapuram. King Akasharaju offered his final obeisance to Lord Srinivasa and then breathed his last to attain liberation. In the final moments of his life, he sought a wish to be fulfilled by Srinivasa — to take care of his brother Thondaman and his son Vasudaan.

Akasharaju's son Vasudaan performed all the final rites to his departed father and sages like Vasistha and Agasthya, as the '*bhokthas*' (the ceremonial eaters during such death rites) ate the food offered in the *Shraddha karma*.

Later Srinivasa, Padmavathi Devi and Vakula Devi returned to the *ashram* of Agasthya.

After the death of King Akasharaju, there arose a question as to who should ascend to the throne as the ruling king. As the younger brother of Akasharaju, Thondaman claimed his right to become the king after the death of his older brother, but Vasudaan claimed the kingdom as his heir. Both of them got into a verbal duel.

Both of them even decided to wage a war to claim the kingdom. Whoever would win the war would inherit the kingdom. With this understanding, they both started making war preparations. With the support of their own friends and relatives, they started gathering their soldiers. They decided that the battlefield would be to the south of Narayanapuram.

They went to Srinivasa to seek help during the battle. They wished that Srinivasa must fight only for them individually. Srinivasa was caught in a fix and went to their private chamber to discuss with Padmavathi Devi. He told Padmavathi, “This is a fight between your brother and your paternal uncle. It is a very delicate situation. You give a good thought to it and suggest to whom I must give my help and support. I cannot help both of them; only to one is possible.”

Padmavathi then expressed, “Between the two, my brother is younger and is helpless and, is solely dependent on himself without even our parents being there. It is correct and justified to help him. My uncle can protect himself without anybody’s help.” Srinivasa knew that what she said was perfectly right and decided to help Vasudaan, but since Thondaman was his devotee, instead of direct help, he gave his *Shanka* and *Chakra* to Thondaman and proceeded to go and help Vasudaan.

The battle was waged fiercely. Srinivasa destroyed the chariot and horses with his arrows. Not able to witness the destruction of his army, Thondaman used

the *Chakra* given by Srinivasa as a weapon on Vasudaan and on seeing that, Srinivasa, in order to protect Vasudaan, came in between and stopped the *Chakra*. And the powerful *Chakra* hit Srinivasa on his shoulder and he fell unconscious. The demigods watching the battle from above were perplexed at the situation.

Seeing the condition of Srinivasa, both sides stopped the battle for a while and started paying attention to Srinivasa. Padmavathi Devi, having learned it through the messengers, rushed along with Sage Agasthya to the battlefield. She sprinkled water on Srinivasa’s face and brought him to consciousness and provided him with some aid.

After regaining his consciousness and seeing Padmavathi, he questioned her in anger as to why she came to the battlefield and what work women had in such a terribly fierce battle. Then Sage Agasthya pacified him by saying that Padmavathi came to bring a peace treaty between the two warring sides and he also felt that it was right on her part to do that. Then Padmavathi Devi prayed to Srinivasa, “Please save your devotees. This battle does no good to anybody. Since both Thondaman and Vasudaan are fighting for the kingdom, you please divide the kingdom into two parts for each of them to rule. Let this battle end by convincing both of them.”

Srinivasa did not consent to that suggestion. He said, “Waging a war for justice is *dharma* followed by Kshatriyas, the rulers. I shall kill Thondaman and

his son and will see to it that my brother-in-law Vasudaan gets the kingdom which rightfully belongs to him. Or else I am ready to die for the cause.” Srinivasa said this very emphatically. Padmavathi got highly perturbed and requested Sage Agastya to intervene and do something to convince Srinivasa. When Padmavathi pleaded that way and Sage Agastya convinced Srinivasa, he became composed and he agreed to summon both the parties for talks. He asked for their opinion again. Since both were Srinivasa’s devotees, both agreed to a peace treaty and said that they would go with whatever Srinivasa decided.

Srinivasa then equally divided the kingdom into two parts and made Thondaman the king of the one half with Thondamanaadu as its capital and made Vasudaan the king of the other half with Narayanapuram as its capital. Srinivasa conducted the coronation ceremonies and stayed with both of them for a few days, so proclaims the *Purana*.

Vasudaan gifted to his sister Padmavathi Devi, a 16th portion (32 villages) of the area from his kingdom that he got as his share.

Another *Purana* says that Srinivasa himself asked both of them, “As I was prepared to even die fighting in the battle, both of you must give me a share of the 16th portion in your kingdoms respectively.” He spread his upper garment on the floor and asked them to contribute. They both consented and gave 32 villages to Srinivasa.

Why did God do something like that? He could have got the peace treaty between both Thondaman and Vasudaan at the very beginning without the ensuing battle. Why did God fall unconscious with the blow of his own *Sudarshana chakra*?

Everything was his *Leela*, a divine sport. When the very Lord who can bestow liberation was standing in front of them, they both — Thondaman and Vasudaan — asked for material boons like the kingdom and support in the battle. To create an illusion, *maya*, that he was a mere human and that he too could fall unconscious, he acted in that fashion. The one who was deathless and eternal created an illusion by saying he was ready to die waging the battle. When the Lord could create an illusion in the mind of his own devotee Thondaman and Vasudaan who was born in the Moon *amsha* (aspect), who are we, after all?

CHAPTER 34

THE FIVE-THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD TEMPLE

Thondaman was a great devotee. He was a great ruler, too. Though it was seen that he was related to Srinivasa, sometimes he used to get a feeling as though he too was a god. He was constantly contemplating on Srinivasa that “For the marriage ceremony, all gods like Brahma and Rudra attended as also the sages like Suka, Vasistha and Agastya. Vishwakarma came to Narayana vanam and made all the arrangements. At the behest of Brihaspati, Thondaman’s brother Akasharaju sent him to Sukaacharya, but on hearing about Srinivasa, why did Sukaacharya behave like a madman in his happiness?”

Thondaman’s thoughts continued on the lines of introspection. “Srinivasa when sought for help in the battle gave me his *Sudarshan Chakra* and *Panchajanya Shankha*, and when I used the Chakra on Vasudaan, to protect him Srinivasa took the blow on his shoulder and if the most powerful *Chakra* could not kill him then he must be Sri Maha Vishnu himself. It was, for this reason, the three crores of gods and demigods and even Brahma had attended his marriage. Most important, the fact that Lakshmi Devi herself came to oversee the marriage rituals meant that he is surely Sri Maha Vishnu only.” Thus, Thondaman came to his conclusion.

Immediately Thondaman went to *Agastya Ashram* to meet Srinivasa. He, after chanting paeans and paying

obeisance to Srinivasa, fell at his feet. “O Supreme Lord Srinivasa! You are not a human being. You are Sri Maha Vishnu who controls the creation, sustenance, dissolution, the cosmic rules, knowledge and who releases from the cycle of birth and death, who is omnipresent, who is the Supreme Protector of the worlds as the Supreme Lord. Till now I remained ignorant of this and saw you just as my worldly relative. This life is a bubble that can burst any moment, all the worldly pleasures, the kingdom, the wealth — everything is temporary; worshipping your divine auspicious feet is the only way to attain liberation. I proved my ignorance by asking you to help me in the battle. Forgive me and bless me, O Lord. It is due to some merit in my earlier life that I have this connection with you and able to see you and I gained the knowledge that you are Lord Srimannarayana... bless me O Lord,” Thondaman pleaded with Srinivasa falling at his feet.

Seeing Thondaman’s sincere devotion, Srinivasa lifted him up and said, “I am pleased with your devotion. Through you, there will be good fortune to perform a *Seva* to receive my blessings. Your brother Akasharaju got me married to Padmavathi Devi and made me a householder. It’s already been six months since we were married, now my decision is to go up the hill and live there with Padmavathi. But I don’t have a house to reside in there. I am giving you the responsibility to build a temple for me there on the top. You will be remembered forever in the annals of history for doing such a magnificent work.”

Thondaman, with overwhelming joy, gave word to Srinivasa that he would complete it with utmost dedication and devotion.

As Padmavathi Devi and Vakula Devi went along, Srinivasa took Thondaman to the hill and showed him the land on the south side of the *Pushkarini* gifted to him by Varaha Swamy.

*Atryiava kaaryam rajendra chaityam
poorvamukham Shubham*

Gopuradwaya samyuktam Praakaaratraya mavyayam

Saptadwaara varopetham dehaleethoranaanvitham

*Dwajastambhavaropetha sarvalakshana
samyuktam (Bhavishyottara Puranam)*

“O king Thondaman, I want you to build the temple as per the specifications I mention now — the main entrance must face the East direction; there must be two *gopurams* (ornate towers), three *prakarams* (boundary walls), and seven doorways. Build the temple in this fashion. There must be all facilities like *Asthana mandapam*, *Yaga Mandapam*, *Snapana mandapam*, *Vastraala gadi*, *Bali Peetham*, *Dwajastambam* etc. Srinivasa also explained to Thondaman how to build it with a plan. He showed two tamarind trees (*tintrini vriksham*) and told Thondaman that he had a special liking for both the trees as they had provided shelter and protected him. “Don’t touch them or harm them. And also, this *sampangi* flowering tree (*champaka* flower tree) is

the favourite of Lakshmi Devi, don’t touch it. When the temple boundary is being built, you must take care that no harm befalls these trees. And the kitchen should be built in the south-east direction. There is *Bhoo Teertham* in front. It is in a dilapidated condition. You must get it renovated with a stone structure around. The well in this *Bhoo Teertham* was constructed by you in your previous birth.” Srinivasa told Thondaman.

Thondaman became very surprised and prayed to Srinivasa, “O Lord, please tell me about my previous life. Why did I get this well dug? And for whom?” When Thondaman questioned with such excitement, Srinivasa narrated to him his previous life details.

In the past in Chola kingdom, there lived a brahmin by name Vaikhanasa in Krishna Kshetram on the banks of River Haridra.

Vaikhanasa was very mild by nature, never used to perform anything for self-gain. Whatever he did, he did it with belief that it was God’s direction and will and he used to do everything to please the Lord. His favourite God was Sri Gopalakrishna Swamy. Without seeking anything else, he prayed to the Supreme Lord only for liberation and with his assiduous penance pleased the Lord. Appearing before him the Lord told him, “The self-manifested Lord Venkatadri, Srinivasa is the deity for you to worship. Only when he appears, you will attain liberation. He is Lord Narayana Himself. At the age of *Kaliyuga* he manifested in the form of Srinivasa. Worship that Lord who is on the banks of

Pushkarini and get liberated,” Lord Gopalakrishna Swamy told Vaikhanasa.

We came across this topic in earlier CHAPTERs too. Gopalakrishna Swamy is also a God, can he not bestow liberation? Since he himself is Srinivasa, then why should he only bestow liberation on Vaikhanasa? The *Brahma Sutras* explained it and established that. Every person born, *jeevatma*, attains *Moksha* or liberation only through *Swaswaroopa Ananda* — that is, by beholding the *Bimba Roopa* of the Lord, not merely by looking at favourite deity. The Almighty Lord exists as a distinct special *Bimba roopa* for every *Jeevatma* and for Vaikhanasa the *Bimba Roopa* God is Srinivasa. Gopalakrishna Swamy is his favourite deity. To convey this deeper significance of *Sastra*, this whole thing was created.

Lord Srinivasa in the form of a magnificent idol is in an anthill covered till the knees under a tamarind tree that is on the south side of the *Pushkarini*. That idol was made by Shankaraju at the end of *Kruta Yuga*. Lord Srimannarayana appeared to Shankaraju in the form of Lord Srinivasa in the *Pushkarini* along with his celestial temple tower. He ordered Shankaraju to build the idol and the temple tower in an exact way as he had shown him and told him that by doing so, he would attain liberation.

The temple structure built by Shankaraju then in *Kruta Yuga* became dilapidated over time and the idol of the Lord remained in an anthill under the tamarind

tree. So, you go to Venkatadri, take out the idol, after consecration, establish it, worship it and attain liberation.” Gopalakrishna also added. “While you are on your way to Venkatadri you will come across a boy by name Rangadasu belonging to the class of *shudras* from Pandya kingdom. He is also a great devotee of mine (Krishna *bhakta*). The consecration and establishing of the idol must be done by both of you. That Lord Srinivasa whom you both will worship will fulfil your wishes. You will become famous as “Gopinatha” from then on,” saying so Lord Sri Gopalakrishna disappeared.

As instructed by Lord Gopalakrishna, Gopinatha started on his journey to Venkatadri. He met Rangadasu on the banks of river Suvarnamukhi. After taking a holy dip in the river Suvarnamukhi, they went to Sukapuri (*Tiruchukkanooru*, the present Tiruchanur) and had *darshan* of Srikrishna and Balarama in the temples; thereafter they proceeded towards Venkatadri.

After reaching uphill, they first took a bath in the sacred *Pushkarini* and in a sanctified manner dug up the anthill and removed the most powerful and beautiful divine idol of the Lord. They both cleared the whole place by removing bushes and cutting down the trees around, but left the tamarind tree and *Champaka* tree (which is Lakshmi Devi’s favourite) untouched. They established the Lord’s idol towards the west and built walls around it with the stones that were there and covered the top with stems of grass. Thus, they built a temple for the Lord.

Everyday Gopinath worshipped him and offered *naivedyam*. Rangadasu dug up a well in the area between the temple and the *Pushkarini* and raised a nice garden from which he offered flowers for daily *puja* to the Lord. Rangadasu planted various fragrant and beautiful flower plants like jasmine, hibiscus, *champaka*, *Tulasi*, and especially lotus and oleander (*karavira pushpam*) and other varieties and took good care of them. He used to make beautiful garlands with those colourful flowers and offer them for the worship of the Lord. In that manner, both of them served the Lord for seven years.

As this was going on that way, one day a *gandharva* by name Kundala came by his aerial vehicle along with his wives and got down on the banks of *Pushkarini* and took bath in the *Pushkarini* and also indulged in amorous sporting in it with his wives. On seeing the *gandharva* women engaged in such erotic scenes, Rangadasu got excited and ejaculated. Gandharva along with his wives came out of *Pushkarini* and after wearing clothes left that place in his aerial vehicle. Rangadasu whose mind was preoccupied with *Gandharvas* sporting in the water felt very repentant. He threw the flowers in the *Pushkarini* that he had gathered earlier, took bath again in *Pushkarini*. He collected flowers again, made garlands, and went to the temple. By then it was past the usual *puja* time, so Gopinadh asked him why he was late in coming to the temple. Overcome with shame, Rangadasu did not respond. But when questioned again firmly, he explained everything that had happened.

Then the divine voice of the Lord spoke as '*akashavani*'. "Your mind got excited by erotic thoughts. It had happened due to my '*maya*' only. When the mind is not controlled, spiritual practice, '*sadhana*', cannot take place properly. Without a steady mind, one cannot attain '*siddhi*'. Your body has become dirtied by your lustful thoughts. You discard this body in *Pushkarini*. With the merit that you gain from leaving your life in this sacred place, you will be born in a very great Royal family as a son to king Sudharma and you will become the king of the Tonda Region. As a king, you will enjoy physical pleasures with many women and you will enjoy the kingship of a kingdom. In this present birth also, you would get fame as my most devout devotee who had built a temple for me. You don't leave this body in an unnatural way of committing suicide. You live here till your life leaves you naturally at some point. Till then serve me with devotion. You must be in this place till the last moments of your life," So pronounced the divine voice.

Rangadasu spent nearly a hundred years in the service of Lord Srinivasa worshipping him devoutly. He died due to age-related natural causes and next he took birth in the clan of *Chandravamsham* as the son of King Sudharma and Nagakanya. He became famous as Thondaman. He was the younger brother of King Akasharaju. Because of his past life influences in his fifth year itself, he became a great devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Thus, Lord Srinivasa explained the past life of Thondaman. He said, “In your past life, you got this well dug to take care of the garden. This is the same *Bhoo Teertham*.”

As per Srinivasa’s advice, Thondaman got the well cleaned, constructed a new wall around it. He built the temple facing the East. With highly skilled sculptors, he got beautiful sculptures made for the temple tower. In the northwest corner of the tower, he got ‘*Vimana Venkateshwara*’ established. He embellished the tower with golden *kalashams* (auspicious cone-like vases). Thondaman got the temple built in a most magnificent manner as per the instructions given by Lord Srinivasa. In one very auspicious *muhurtham* (time fixed to start any important work) Lord Srinivasa along with Padmavathi, after taking consecrating bath ritual, entered the temple. The families of Thondaman and Vasudaan, sages and seers were present then and the whole event happened under the guidance of Brihaspati and Vasistha. The temple tower was named “*Ananda Nilayam*” as it bestows “*anandam*” (happiness) in abundance. For the convenience of pilgrims who climb the hill on foot, Thondaman got steps laid for a distance of nearly eight kilometres. The *Purana* also mentions that he built covered shelters for pilgrims to rest on the way climbing uphill, got wells dug along the way, and had also made arrangements for distribution of buttermilk to pilgrims.

We came to know in the episode where the wife of a Brahmana was saved, how Srinivasa blessed the Brahmana and brought his wife and child back to life

and saved Thondaman from getting the *Brahmahatya dosham* — the terrible sin of killing a brahmin. The same story got repeated in other *Puranas* with minor changes according to the norms of the *Kalpa*.

In the story mentioned here, Srinivasa got angry with Thondaman whose negligence and inability caused the death of the brahmin’s wife and child. To appease Lord Srinivasa, Thondaman had to go through lots of struggles. The story goes like this:

There was a brahmin in Srirangam who, after his father’s demise, wished to immerse his *asthikas* (ashes of burnt body) in the river Ganga and so joined a group of pilgrims and went along with them taking his wife and young son too. By the time they reached Tirupati, he came to know that his wife was pregnant. He felt that with a young son and pregnant wife it would be very difficult to carry on the journey to North India. But he was not keen to go back. He had heard that King Thondaman was very generous by nature. So, he reached out to him for help.

The brahmin explained to Thondaman his dilemma and difficulty and also said, “O king, when one’s wife is pregnant, she can be sent to her parents’ house, or to her inlaws’ house, or to her maternal uncle’s house or to the King’s place for safety and protection. As I cannot take my wife and son along, and as I cannot go back after starting on my journey for *Pitrukarya*, to immerse my father’s ashes in the river Ganga, and as it may take six months or more for me to return, till then

I seek your protection for my wife and son. Grant me that, O king.” So pleaded the brahmin. The king agreed and also gave some money to the brahmin for his journey.

After convincing his wife about this arrangement, he brought her to introduce her to the King. Seeing her beauty, the king got perturbed. He thought, “She is so beautiful and people are not trustworthy; she will require strong protection — I have to be very careful.” He told the brahmin that he could proceed on his journey without any worry as he would take good care of his wife and his son.

The king then built one house in a secret place and made the brahmin’s wife and son stay there. He made all arrangements, like food items and groceries to last for six months and ensured all the amenities to make both of them live happily and safely there. He got the main door to the house secured by strong iron chains and posted a few soldiers there for security.

For a few days the king personally came and enquired about their well-being but in due course of time due to the pressures of his kingly duties he forgot about them.

After two years, the brahmin came back after fulfilling his ordained *pitru karma* at Gaya and also after visiting other pilgrimage spots. When he asked the king about his wife and children, the king was stupefied. He trembled with fear at the mere thought of something going wrong with them. But regaining

his composure, he told the brahmin, “Don’t worry about your wife and children. Your wife delivered a girl baby. They are doing well. My daughters went to see the weekly ritual of Friday *Abhishekam* (auspicious ritual) to Lord Srinivasa and your wife and children too joined them. They may come back in a day or two, tomorrow or the day after. You go and take a rest now.” So, saying he got all the arrangements made for his stay and rest.

Very naturally he spoke with the brahmin and sent him, but the fear that something bad would have happened to the brahmin’s wife and children made him wail loudly, “Surely, they would have died. What a terrible thing has happened. With this sin my whole clan will get destroyed”. When the doors were opened to the house, the mother, son, and infant daughter all were lying dead.

The king took his son along and went to the Seshadri to plead and appeal to the Lord.

He fell at the feet of Lord Srinivasa and cried aloud. When Srinivasa questioned him as to why he came to him in such an unusual hour, the king remained completely silent. But Srinivasa understood what had happened. He thought inwardly, “What you did is a very terrible sin. Cannot be pardoned at all. But even when my devotee is a bad and wicked person, I cannot give him bad luck or poverty.” So, he told Thondaman, “Considering your sincere devotion towards me and the service you do unto me, I shall bring them back to

life. I will be known that in *Kaliyuga* I saved King Thondaman from a terrible sin. Now, you send your son to bring the mortal remains of those three.”

Thondaman’s son collected the bones of the three dead and brought them wrapped in a basket. Lord Srinivasa placed them on rocks near a sacred *theertham* which was close to *Pandu theertham*. He then took a bath and with water collected in his cupped palms, sprinkled it on the bones. All the three got back their life — brahmin’s wife, his son, and the daughter. All the demigods like Indra and others, who were seeing this episode from above, showered down flowers and named the *Teertham* as “*Asthi Teertham*”. *Asthi* means bones. Not only that, they pronounced that the water from this *Teertham*, if sprinkled on the bones of those in *Naraka* (hell), would send them all to *Swarga* (heaven) immediately.

Srinivasa handed over the people he brought back to life, brahmin’s wife, his son, and the newborn daughter, to king Thondaman and said, “Since I received favour from you, I am returning it in a hundredfold better way, and also your elder brother Akasharaju is close to my heart; hence I helped you in this matter.”

Srinivasa also said, “From today I will remain silent, will not speak with anybody except with those who are very close to me. In *Kali Yuga*, I may speak through others, in whom I shall enter and make them utter my words.”

Since then, in the form of Saligrama idol, in Tirumala temple, Lord Srinivasa has been receiving worship from his devotees.

King Thondaman handed over to the brahmin his resurrected family members. After hearing the whole unbelievable episode from the king, the brahmin questioned his wife to reveal truthfully where she had gone. She replied, “O my husband, it is a divine *Maya*, I cannot express in words. I had seen the worlds that are spread expansively in the belly of the Lord, I had seen many *lokas* (worlds) like mountain ranges, I had seen Lord Brahma and other gods” Then the brahmin’s young son Raghava said, “Yes, I too had seen Lord Shiva and his *Ganas* (retinue) in the belly of the Lord.” The baby daughter also said, “O father, I have seen the seven seas, caves, mountains, trees, gods, and demons also in the belly of Srinivasa.”

Hearing what all the three said, the brahmin felt ashamed of himself and said, “My birth is futile. My penance is futile; my study of the *Vedas* is futile. All of you have witnessed the vast universes existing in the belly of Lord Srinivasa. Even with severe penance, one cannot see Gods like Rudra and others.” He felt sorry for his own unfortunate fate. He left for his native place after praising the King gratefully.

The king started self-introspection and recollected the whole episode and the words Srinivasa said. Though Srinivasa showed his utmost grace, Thondaman felt that Srinivasa was angry with him for his sin and act of

negligence. To please Srinivasa again and appease him, what would be the best way? He thought. But he asked his *guru* sage Angirasa to give an idea. Angirasa told him, “Worship Srinivasa with thousand *Tulasi* leaves.”

Then king Thondaman got a thousand gem-studded golden *Tulasi* leaves and did “*Sahasranama Puja*” (thousand names in praise of the Lord) at the feet of Lord Srinivasa every day continuously for three months.

Even then, Lord Srinivasa’s anger did not reduce. Then the king fell at his feet and pleaded with him to forgive his sin and the terrible negligent act. He begged that he should be shown the earlier grace which he enjoyed. Without appearing to him, Lord Srinivasa spoke in his divine voice, “O King, in *Bhooloka*, the earth, I have many devotees. But no one is like you. After becoming the cause for the death of a brahmin woman and her children, how are you asking for forgiveness and redemption from such a heinous sin? Because of your brother’s meritorious deeds, I have saved them. You feel arrogant that in the three worlds there is no other devotee like yourself.” Lord Srinivasa expressed his anger.

He also added, “Since you felt confident that I am available and will protect you, you acted in a very negligent manner. From now on, I shall bless my devotees by remaining invisible to them.” So saying, he turned into a stone idol. As per Lord Brahma’s wish, Lord Srinivasa gave him a boon that he would

remain on this earth till the end of *Kaliyuga* to protect and bless his devotees.

King Thondaman was aghast for redemption from the sin committed by him. He worshipped the Lord every day with golden flowers and golden *Tulasi* leaves. After some time, one day, the king found the flowers and *Tulasi* leaves that he had offered to the Lord’s feet were pushed aside and instead, there were clay flowers and *Tulasi* leaves smeared with clay at the Lord’s feet. With amazement and worry, he pleaded with the Lord himself for an answer. “There is no way anybody could come here and worship you, then how come these muddy flowers reached your feet, Lord?” Then the divine voice of the Lord was heard which told Thondaman, “There is one particular devotee close to my heart, and his name is Bhima. He lives in so-and-so village in his very kingdom. I accept the worship he does there.”

The king decided to meet the special personal devotee of the Lord and went to the village where he lived. It was a small hamlet. He was a potter by the name Bhima. His hut was surrounded by pots and pans placed in the sun for drying. The king entered the hut by opening the bamboo door with his head bent, but once inside his crown fell down after touching the low roof of the hut. Disturbed by that sound, Bhima who was doing his *puja* questioned, “Who is that?” Then the king Thondaman responded, “King Thondaman has come to meet Bhima.”

That answer surprised Bhima very much. “The king coming to meet me in my hut? What does the king know about me and how?” The same questions he asked the king. Then the king said, “Lord Srinivasa of Tirumala told me about you and about your devotion. The clay flowers that you offer here in your *puja* are being accepted and received there by the Lord.” Bhima was overwhelmed on hearing that “Do I really have such great fortune...I don’t have any means or opportunity to go to the hill, when can I have the *darshan* of the Lord?” He pitifully cried. That’s it, the Lord who vowed that he shall remain invisible, appeared in Bhima’s hut.

When Bhima fell at his feet, flat like a stick in ‘*danda pranama*’, the Lord lifted him up and said, “Bhima, I am feeling hungry, can you give me something to eat?” Bhima called out his wife and got corn porridge cooked. He broke one new pot into two and in one of the two pieces served the Lord hot porridge. Pleased and satisfied, the Lord said, “I am pleased with your devotion. I shall bless you with ‘*Sayujyam*’ (liberation from the cycle of birth and death and stay in higher worlds). The *Purana* mentions this episode in detail.

Seeing all that had happened, King Thondaman prayed to the Lord and asked him, “O Lord, and then what about me?”

The Lord said, “In this lifetime of yours, you will not get liberation. In the next birth, after your spiritual

sadhana gets complete, you will get ‘*Saaroopya*’ liberation. (Liberation from the cycle of birth and death and attain the divine qualities and looks similar to the Lord). At this birth, you need to still struggle and fight with *rajogunas* like mundane likes and dislikes,” saying it the Lord disappeared.

As was mentioned earlier here, fulfilling the wish of Lord Brahma, Lord Srinivasa would remain in the form of *archa moorthy* (idol that receives worship) in *Ananda Nilayam* till the end of the 28th *Kaliyuga*. Though the Lord exists in the idol, only the elevated souls on the path of *Jnana* can see him as the *Chinmaya Chaitanya Roopa* as the form of supreme consciousness. All the other devotees will see the Lord as the idol of *Saligrama* sculpted according to the description of the Lord seen in the vision by Shankaraju as bliss consciousness form. The idol with four arms, one in *Varada mudra* (boon giving protective *mudra*), the other till his waist, with palm pointed downwards to his feet and two upper arms, adorned by beautiful jewellery and a crown, with Sridevi and Padmavathi Devi on his chest, with gem studded waist belt, in golden yellow robes — in this magnificent form the Lord gives *darshan* to his devotees and destroys their sins and sorrows.

According to another *Puranam*, the version is different. When the brahmin’s wife and children died due to the unpardonable negligence of King Thondaman, Lord Srinivasa, on the pleading of the

king, resurrected them, but his anger with Thondaman continued. He thought about Thondaman, “You are overtly overconfident that I am easily available to you, that I would take care of everything but from now on from being a visible person I shall become invisible.” The Lord manifested himself as a stone idol. But before that he told Thondaman that though not visibly present, he would observe everything, he would fulfill the wishes of his devotees, and he would destroy their sins and give redemption to them by merely having his *darshan*. This shows that the *Saligrama* idol is not man-made. The Lord manifested himself purely with his divine will.

In *Ananda Nilayam*, Lord Brahma had lit two “*Akhandā Jyothi's*” (lamps that remain glowing eternally). He pronounced that the two lamps would continue to glow till the end of *Kaliyuga* and in the end, they would go out on their own and that is when Lord Srinivasa would return to his abode of *Vaikunta*. Then the temple tower of *Ananda Nilayam* will collapse on its own. The new *Krutayuga* will begin from then onwards.

Lord Brahma, after lighting the *Akhandā Jyothi's*, as a great well-wisher of the living beings, inquired with Lord Srinivasa as to what more he could do for the sake of human beings' welfare.

Then Lord Srinivasa instructed him, “O son Brahma, make arrangements for rituals like *Dwajaarohana* (hoisting the temple pennant as the

auspicious beginning of a ritual), *Rathotsavam* (chariot festival) and every day during these festivities, I should be taken around in a procession of various vehicles specially designed for the purpose. And, make arrangements for food offering as *naivedyam* thrice a day, cooked only by highly learned brahmins who are adept at the study of Vedas, and my ‘*Kalyanam*’ (auspicious marriage ritual) should be performed thrice a day.”

Then Lord Brahma summoned the King Thondaman immediately and told him, “You see to it that Vishwakarma makes various beautifully designed vehicles, various chariots embellished with beautiful canopies, beautiful whisk fans, and other items.” Then he summoned Vishwakarma and introduced him to the king. In no time, Vishwakarma created all those mentioned by Lord Brahma and King Thondaman, the *Puranam* proclaims so.

Lord Srinivasa instructed Thondaman that the kings of all kingdoms along with their retinues must be invited to come and enjoy the festivities that were planned in his honour as ‘*Srinivasotsavas*’. The *Puranam* gives in detail the kings and the names of their kingdoms who had visited, namely, Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Kashi, Khamboja, Kerala, Virata, Kuru, Jaangala, Pegundala, Barbara, Pandya, Chedhi, Matsya, Sindhu, and a few more kings from other kingdoms. They all came on elephants, horses, palanquins and a few came walking holding the decorated canopies and whisk fans. On their way, they fed brahmins as a mark of respect.

The festivities started after the Sun entered *Kanya Rashi* (the constellation Virgo, in the month of *Bhadrapada*) and on the *tithi* of *vidiya*, the ritual of *Dwajaarohana* (auspicious hoisting of a flag) took place. The previous day itself, the mud from anthill was collected from the forest in a ceremonial manner and the ritual of '*ankuraarpanam*' took place. A gem-studded beautiful palanquin which would be carried by people was brought to Lord Srinivasa and Lord Brahma prayed thus, "O Lord, do sit in this palanquin and go around the temple in circumambulation."

Then Srinivasa said, "O son Brahma, the four-faced one, when I blessed and gifted the *Vedas* to the worlds, you were still a child. Now, the ordained rituals of the *Vedas* have grown multi-fold. I would like to test your knowledge now." Then Lord Srinivasa conducted an assessment of Brahma's knowledge of the *Vedas*.

Brahma fell into deep thought. Can he withstand the questioning by the Lord? But not able to do anything else, he reluctantly took the test. The *Purana* mentions that Brahma faltered here and there, but by the grace of the Lord, he amended the mistakes in a moment, and with the power of the mantras (incantations) from the four Vedas, Brahma created four idols with the *amsha* (part) of Lord Srinivasa.

The *utsava vigraham* was named - Srinivasa

The second one - *Ugra Srinivasa*

The third one - *Sarvaadhika Sama*

The fourth one - *Lekhaka*.

That is how Lord Brahma named the four idols which are there in Tirumala even today, though this is a debatable issue even as there are similarities in the names popularly known. The deity, the idol that is taken in procession during the festivities is called 'Malayappa Swamy.' Lord Brahma created only the idol of Lord Srinivasa. But Malayappa Swamy will have both Sridevi and Bhoodevi on either side. One more is Bhoga Srinivasa, a silver idol. How this idol got into the temple worship is clearly explained in the stone inscription of 960 AD. Princess Samavayi got it made at the behest of Yamunacharya and that the idols of Malayappa Swamy, Sridevi, and Bhoodevi were kept in worship in the place of Ugra Srinivasa idol. There is a piece of historical evidence to this. During earlier days it was the idol of Ugra Srinivasa which was taken out in procession as *utsava moorthy* and on one such celebration, a huge fire accident took place on Tirumala hills. Then Lord Srinivasa entered into the body of one devotee and made him talk. He said that in Malayappa Kona, there were three idols of himself along with Sridevi and Bhoodevi and he also told the directions to reach that place. The Lord also mentioned that those idols must be used as *utsava moorthies* and Ugra Srinivasa idol must not be taken out from the sanctum for procession purpose as he is '*ugra*' (wrathful).

Then when people went in search of the idols as mentioned by the Lord, they were found exactly in that place in Malayappa Kona. Hence, he is called

‘Malayappa Swamy’. Malaya means mountain, a hill. Lord Srinivasa’s idol called ‘*Lekhikaa*’ has been in the temple from time immemorial. He is the *koluvu* Srinivasa, the one who sits in the *Darbar* when the daily almanac details (*Panchanga Sravanam*) are read out and when the details of temple revenue are reported to him.

‘*Sarvaadhika Sama*’ is the one created by Lord Brahma, which is receiving the worship now as *Bhoga* Srinivasa.

Like that, with the idols created by Lord Brahma, the very first *utsavams* (festivities) called Srinivasotsavams took place. Since then, Lord Srinivasa has remained in the invisible form in the temple’s Saligrama idol, giving *darshan* to his devotees and blessing them. Brahma Deva stood at the helm of affairs and got all the *vahanams* made as ordered by Lord Srinivasa, got the list fixed for which vehicle to be used on which day, what food offering (*Naivedyam*) for each *vahanams* was decided and with strict vigilance, Brahma Deva saw to it that the *utsavams* were performed smoothly and perfectly. Hence, Srinivasotsavams were named ‘*Brahmotsavams*’.

During these *utsavams*, in front of the *vahanam* is a smaller chariot which is the *Brahmaratham* in which Brahma sits in the chariot and conducts the festivities smoothly. This is the belief. The tradition continues even now.

The *Puranam* gives the details of all the *vahanams* in an elaborate manner about the palanquin that men

carry, *Sesha Vahanam*, (the seven hooded *Sesha*), *Hamsa vahanam*, (Swan), *Simha Vahanam* (Lion), *Mutyala Pallaki* (palanquin decorated by rows of pearls), *Kalpa vriksham* (the wish yielding tree) *Mohini alamkaram* (decoration like *Mohini avataram*), *Garuda Vahanam* (*Garuda*, the mighty divine eagle), *Hanumad Vahanam* (Lord Hanuman carrying the Lord and his consorts), *Mangalagiri Vahanam*, *Airavata Vahanam* (celestial elephant *Airawata*), *Surya Prabha*, (Sun), and *Chandra Prabha* (Moon) chariots, palanquins, all these were introduced by Lord Brahma. During these festivities the Lord is given an auspicious bath called *Swapana tirumanjanam*, then at the end, He is given ‘*avabrhuta snaanam*’ (an auspicious bath ritual that concludes the festivities) and afterwards *Dwajaarohanam* (bringing down the flag as a mark of the final ritual of the festivities). The next day the Lord and his consorts will receive “*Pushpa Yagam*” (floral worship).

After the *Pushpa Yaga*, the way the kings and other dignitaries offered worship in the form of *Archana* (doing *puja* to his feet) and *neerajana* (*harati*), the way they offered gifts and presents in his honour, and the way they all bowed down respectfully and fell at his feet in complete surrender — all this is described in the *Puranam*.

Even to this day, every year Lord’s *Brahmotsavams* are performed in the same manner as in times of yore, though some changes are brought into keeping the present-day situation in mind. Whenever there comes

adhika masam (an extra month in the Hindu Lunar Calendar to keep the lunar and solar calendars aligned), two *Brahmotsavams* will be performed. They were started as the Lord's *Kalyanotsavam*, an auspicious marriage ceremony of the Lord. During the reign of Vijayanagara kings, many emperors and kings donated many villages as an endowment to the temple, for performing ten *Brahmotsavams* in a year for ten months on Tirumala hills to Lord Srinivasa, and the other two months in the year, they would be performed at the Govindaraja Swamy temple in Tirupati. All these festivities are accessible to everybody to enjoy them.

Till 1801 the tradition continued. When the East India company took charge of the running of Tirumala Temple, the first thing they did was to confiscate all the 417 villages which were gifted to the temple, and stop all the revenue from the villages to reach the Temple and along with that all the festivities and the *Naivedyams*. They gave permission only for the daily rituals to be performed to the Lord and cancelled all other paid *Sevas* that were fetching revenue to the Temple. It was arranged that the Tahsildar would release funds for daily expenditure of the Temple and all the money and gifts like gold and silver ornaments offered to the Temple *Hundi* would reach only the coffers of the East India Company.

Since then, even during the reign of rulers of other faiths, and even after 1933 when the Temple came under the Endowment Law of the government, the dictum pronounced by the East India Company had been

continuing. The *Brahmotsavams* are mainly conducted for ordinary devotees. For them to get the *darshan* of the Lord is very difficult, paid *Sevas* are expensive, even if one is willing, the *Sevas* will be overbooked and remain unavailable. For an ordinary devotee, the chance to see the Lord many times in a day, to participate in the festivities, to be able to give *Harati* to the Lord with rupee coins is possible only during these *Brahmotsavams*. Nowadays, devotees come in huge numbers running into lakhs and to provide accommodation, food, and *darshan* for them has become extremely difficult. Most of the people who have a deep desire to visit Tirumala, due to the difficulties mentioned above, are staying at home to watch the *Brahmotsavams* live through TV channels.

When I (PVRK Prasad IAS) was the official Advisor to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, I gave the suggestion that *Brahmotsavams* should be conducted every month on the Tirumala hill to enable common devotees to participate and enjoy as it was during the Vijayanagara king's rule. If to conduct *Brahmotsavams* continuously like that seems difficult, at least four in a year can be performed, to begin with, and then it can be extended to one every month as time progresses. And my idea also was to perform *Navaratri Brahmotsavams* in a very grand manner as *Maha Brahmotsavams*.

The temple built by King Thondaman was in 28th *Kaliyuga* of *Swetavaraha Kalpam*. We are still in the same 28th *Kaliyuga* of *Swetavaraha Kalpam*.

By 2011, it was 5112 years since this *Kaliyuga* had begun. Is the existing temple the same as what King Thondaman had built?

Thondaman used to climb up the hill and worship Lord Srinivasa every day. When he became old, he found it difficult to climb up the hill, so on his prayerful pleadings, Lord Srinivasa along with his consorts used to come down to Thondaman's house in their idol forms and received his worship, the *Purana* describes it beautifully.

Once, after coming as usual in his idol form, Lord Srinivasa stayed back in another form in a Temple which is now called - "*intikochhi koorchunna Devudi Gudi*" (the Temple of the Lord who came home and sat). This temple is situated in a place called Thondamanaadu which is near a village called Erpedu close to Srikalahasthi. (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams adopted this temple in 2008 and took it under their fold).

CHAPTER 35

RETURNING OF LAKSHMI DEVI

The *Purana* says that Lord Srinivasa sent Surya Deva to invite Srimahalakshmi, who was in Kolhapur, for his marriage with Padmavathi and gave her the responsibility to oversee the ceremony as a fulfillment of the boon he gave it to her as Sita in *Tretayuga* and that Lakshmi Devi after the marriage of Srinivasa and Padmavathi had gone back to Kolhapur.

Then, how is it that on the chest of Lord Srinivasa's idol in Tirumala Temple, Lakshmi Devi resides eternally? When did she come back from Kolhapur and how did she come back?

Even when Srinivasa was spending time happily with Padmavathi after their marriage, in his heart of hearts he was missing Lakshmi Devi and wished that she should come back to him. This thought was for the sake of the mundane world. It was already mentioned that there was never a separation between Lakshmi and Narayana and that there was a special divine presence of Lakshmi Devi in Padmavathi Devi.

Srinivasa thought like a normal human being. "I am leading a married life with Padmavathi, but if Lakshmi Devi is not with me, things may not work out well for me. I owe so much money to Kubera as per the loan I have taken from him. Only if Lakshmi Devi is pleased, comes back to me, only with her grace I may be able to clear my loan. Hence, I must please her

and somehow get her back into my chest.” A very strong desire arose in Srinivasa.

Padmavathi Devi too was wanting Lakshmi Devi to come back and be with them. “If Lakshmi Devi in Sita’s incarnation had not taken my side and had not asked for the wish, could I ever have married Srinivasa? I must do something favourable to her in return.” Padmavathi Devi thought and pleaded with Srinivasa to bring Lakshmi Devi back from Kariveerapuram by convincing her somehow and she also said, “I shall spend the rest of my life serving you both.” Then Srinivasa left for Kariveerapuram to bring back Lakshmi Devi.

Lakshmi Devi is an all-knower. She knew that Lord Srinivasa would come to her. She thought the newly married couple must enjoy their privacy and happiness. If she started residing again in Srinivasa’s chest it might prove to be embarrassing to Padmavathi Devi. But if Lord Srinivasa came to her and requested her to come back, she would not have the heart to refuse his request. So, she decided that it would be best to hide somewhere inaccessible to Srinivasa. She left Kariveerapuram and proceeded to *Paatala loka* (netherworld) and stayed back there with her devotee, Sage Kapila who worshipped her joyously.

Sage Agasthya, after Lakshmi Devi left Kariveerapuram, built a temple and established an idol for Lakshmi Devi and consecrated it to receive daily *pūja*. The idol in Kolhapur Temple is the same one.

Srinivasa came looking for Lakshmi Devi in the guise of a royal prince and not finding her, he started worshipping the idol in the temple established by Sage Agastya.

One day, the divine voice (*Akashavani*) spoke to Lord Srinivasa, “O Lord, please give audience to what I say. You go in the south direction from here, across the river Krishna, and to the north of the river Suvarnamukhi, create a pond/lake on its banks. You procure the golden lotus from *Devaloka* and plant it in the pond. With the golden lotuses blooming in the pond, you worship Lakshmi Devi. You have to do penance for twelve years sitting on the banks of the pond, praying to Lakshmi Devi. Then she will be pleased with you and appear before you and she again will start residing in your chest.”

So, Srinivasa in the guise of a prince went to Sukapuri (which is in the north direction to the river Suvarnamukhi) near Venkatachalam. With his spear, he dug up a pond that got filled with clear water. Srinivasa then sent *Vayu Deva* to *Swargaloka* and got the golden lotus from there. He planted it in the pond and for the golden lotus to remain in bloom always, Srinivasa constructed a Temple in the north direction of the pond and established *Surya deva*’s idol inside because the lotus blooms when the sun rises. Then Srinivasa started a severe penance for Lakshmi Devi in the guise of a prince.

Indra Deva, who was not aware of all this, thought that the prince was doing a severe penance to usurp

his post as Indra. So, he ordered his celestial damsels Rambha and others to disturb his penance. Those celestial damsels came along with Vasantha (spring) and Manmatha (Love God) and created a very attractive pleasant season around the pond. To distract the prince from his penance they started dancing evocatively. Srinivasa getting vexed with their antics used his “*Maya*” on them and went back into his meditative penance. Then Rambha and others have failed in their mission and went back to *Swargaloka*. In that manner, Srinivasa did severe penance unwaveringly for 12 years. Then in the thirteenth year, during the month of *Karthika*, on the *Panchami Thithi* of *Shukla Paksha*, on a Friday, in the star of *Uttarashada*, the thousand-petalled lotus rose up and bloomed. In that lotus was seated Srimahalakshmi holding a lotus in her hand, fully adorned with the finest jewellery, wearing lotus garlands around her neck, with a most enchanting smile, looking like the most magnificently beautiful lady of the three worlds. When Srimahalakshmi appeared like that Brahma and other gods came down to *Padma Sarovara* (the lotus pond) to have her *darshan*. Even the sages like Narada, Suka, Agasthya, and Vasistha came along with many devotees.

Lakshmi Devi, who appeared in that magnificent manner, went to Srinivasa and put the garland she had in her hands around his neck and offered her salutations to him. Precisely then he lifted her up and placed her on his chest permanently, for eternity.

The celebrated woman saint-poet, Tarigonda Vengamamba described this scene beautifully in one of her devotional verses.

Loosely translated, it reads as follows:

From the milky ocean how a lady
with the gait of a swan reached unto Hari

From the beautiful lotus pond rose up

Srimahalakshmi and reached unto
*Sriramaasatipati**

And raising her hands placed a lovely garland
around his neck as her bracelets clinked musically
Hari beholding her lovingly

Lifted her up with his two hands

And placed her on his chest

Lord *Chakradhara**

[**Sriramaasatipati* - Sri Mahavishnu, husband of Sri Ramadevi.

**Chakradhara* - The one who wields the chakra Sudarshana]

The lotus pond which is in Tiruchanur now is the one created by Srinivasa, the lotus pond in which he planted the golden lotus from *Swargaloka*. Even today it is the same temple in which Srinivasa established the idol of Suryanarayana to the east of the lotus pond. This temple is being managed by Tirumala Tirupati

Devasthanams. When you visit Tiruchanur next, do go to this powerful temple of Suryanarayana.

Lakshmi Devi had a special liking for Surya Deva. He came to Kariveerapuram at the behest of Srinivasa to invite her to the marriage of Srinivasa and Padmavathi. In the same way, for Srinivasa and Lakshmi Devi's union also, he resided in the temple on the banks of the lotus pond and helped them reunite. Having the *darshan* of this Suryanarayana Swamy at Tiruchanur will please Lakshmi Devi immensely. The Padmavathi Devi, who is in Tiruchanur temple is not Padmavathi Devi, the daughter of Akasharaju, but she is the manifestation of Sri Mahalakshmi Devi who appeared in the thousand-petalled lotus in the lotus pond. It is that very Lakshmi, who is in the form of the idol/deity in the Temple of Tiruchanur.

Even now, every year on the *Suklapaksha Panchami Thithi* in the month of *Karthika*, the day when Lakshmi Devi appeared first in the thousand-petalled lotus, the *Brahmotsavam* of Padmavathi Devi is celebrated and she is given the auspicious bath. There is the famous *Panchami theertham*. On the same day, in Tirumala temple, Lord Srinivasa will be offered ritualistic *puja* and *naivedyam* early in the morning and from the temple, turmeric, *Tulasi* garlands, silk robes, food offerings will be brought down with temple honours to Tiruchanur. That is being followed as a tradition. Before the auspicious gifts reach the temple, they will be welcomed respectfully in a festive manner.

Then, once they are adorned to the idol of Padmavathi Devi, she will be taken to the midpoint on the banks of the *Pushkarini*, the lotus pond and the Suryanarayana Temple, and will be given “*Snapanam Tirumanjanam*” and later in the lotus pond *Chakra Snaanam* (to *Sudarshana Chakra*) will be performed. The *Tulasi* garlands sent from Tirumala will be offered to Padmavathi Devi and later will be distributed to the devotees present there. It is considered most auspicious and beneficial to take a bath in the lotus pond at the same time when *Chakra snehanam* is being given to *Sudarshana Chakra*.

Lord Srinivasa blessed the pond that it would become renowned as “*Padmasarassu*” (lotus pond) for being instrumental in uniting Lakshmi Devi and himself and that those who take a holy dip in the pond on the *Suklapaksha Panchami Thithi* in the month of *Karthika* will be blessed with the grace of Lakshmi Devi.

So, pronouncing, Lord Srinivasa sitting on his vehicle Garuda, along with Lakshmi Devi, left for Venkatadri.

Bhavishyottara Puranam - Rahasyaadhyayam

Sage Vyaasa explained this as an exchange of conversation between Shiva and Parvathi. The only remedy to get rid of *Kaliyuga* bondages is having *darshan* of Sri Venkatachalam and attaining the grace of Lord Srinivasa.

In *Kaliyuga* the number of sinners will be exponentially higher than the number of meritorious and pious people. According to the scriptures, those who marry outside their faith and creed do not have eligibility to learn the ‘system of *Swaadhyaya*’ or practice rituals. Even if one is careful and chooses not to get into that unconventional practice, that *dosham*, if it happens through the daughter or a son, then also to practise the ordained rules is very difficult.

Only Lord Venkateshwara can protect us from the dangers arising out of such profane practices. There is no *Kshetram* better than Sri Venkatachalam, no deity better than Lord Srinivasa; there is no *mantram* (incantation) better than Sri Venkateswara *mantram*; there is no *darshan* or devotion better than that towards Lord Srinivasa; there is no better path that bestows liberation than the knowledge of Lord Srinivasa; there is no devotional contemplation better than the contemplation on Lord Srinivasa; there is no Lord better than Srinivasa who can fulfill one’s desires. This powerful instruction was given by Sri Rudra Deva to Parvathi Devi in this ‘*Rahasyaadhyaya*.’

Rudra Deva also said that it was the quintessential knowledge established by the *Vedas*. Rudra Deva, the Parameswara, also explained the glory of Venkatachalam and the significance of taking the holy dip in *Swami Pushkarini*. “When even gods like us pray for the good fortune to reside in Venkatadri, what to say about mere mortals?” Sree Venkatachalam is

the Supreme land that bestows Liberation. On the hills of Tirumala one can get *Sayujya Mukti* and those who shed their mortal link in this sacred *Kshetram* will attain ‘*Swaswaroopanandam*’. That is the power of Tirupati.

“The *mantram* of Lord Srinivasa has 9 syllables. It must be chanted by adding *OM, Sree, Namah*. This *mantram* is secretly stored in my heart, which bestows the most blissful liberation. O Parvathi, because of my great love for you, I have initiated you into that *mantram*,” so, said Parameswara to Parvathi Devi.

The holy dip in *Swami Pushkarini*, the *darshan* of Lord Srinivasa, the partaking of the Lord’s *prasadam* — these three are the most auspicious yet toughest to attain unless one has the grace of the Lord and merit accrued in the past.

“The surrounding areas that form the borders of the abode of Lord Srinivasa must be maintained with utmost religious discipline. If anybody harms the devotees who visit the *Tirumala Kshetram* by using harsh language, or by physically abusing, or by stealing their belongings, or by insulting them, or by displaying discrimination — such people will suffer unimaginable punishment in *Naraka* (hell) for thousands of years. Those who protect the sacredness of the peripheries of the temple precincts will attain Liberation”, Lord Shiva told Parvathi.

“There is no other God comparable to Lord Venkateswara in this whole cosmos. My salutations to

that Lord for all times — past, present, and future. This *Rahasyaadhyaayam* is very dear to Sri Venkateswara. Those who read this, contemplate on it, worship it, will please the *pitru devathas*, and also appease all the gods and sages, who in turn will bestow the supreme most position of *Paramapadam*. Lord Shiva told Parvathi that atop the Seven Hills, it is akin to being in the ever-blissful *Paramapadam*.

“When one worships and prays to Lord Venkateswara, He annihilates the heap of sins accrued over many births. Lord Srinivasa was worshipped for thousands of years on this bank of *Pushkarini* by me, Sage Angirasa, and the rulers of the world. Likewise, my son, Kumaraswamy worshipped Lord Srinivasa with the flowers of his penance, meditation, and *samadhi*. He received the powerful weapon, Shakti veil, by the grace of Lord Srinivasa.

“I reside very joyously in Sri Kalahasthi *Kshetram* which is praised even by Brahma and Sage Agasthya, because of its proximity to the river Swarnamukhi, and the very sacred liberating *Swamy Pushkarini*.

“O Parvathi, whose very name is the precious *Kaustubha* gem effulgently shining in the oceans of Upanishads, whose name can destroy the dark hell like ignorance, whose name restored my son back to life, whose name bestows wishes on those seeking them, that Lord Sri Venkateshwara, who is like adornment to *Adishesha*, that Lord by whose grace abundant wealth and affluence is bestowed, that Lord

who bestows boons, I always serve him and worship him,” so said Lord Shiva to Parvathi Devi.

What are we? After all, mere mortals, always erring and committing sins? We have to sincerely surrender our hearts at the lotus feet of Lord Venkateswara.

THE END