Excerpts from Potana’s Bhagavatam

By

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FOREWORD

I deem it a great honour and privilege to be asked to write a Foreword to an English rendering of the most sacred, inspiring and devotional piece of Telugu Literature (Potana’s Bhagavatam). Bammera Potana is a poet of acknowledged greatness in Telugu and is also a great Rama Bhakta and he has laid posterity under a deep debt of gratitude by his rendering of the Sanskrit Bhagavatam into lucid Telugu versa. The translation of Bhagavatam into any other language has not even been attempted. The endeavour made by Dr. A.V.S. Sarma to render this great work into English is therefore very laudable and he has certainly done great service to the English knowing public to understand and appreciate the great spirit of Bhakti expounded by Potana. As Potana has put it, it is Lord Sri Ramachandra that has given expression to his writing of the great Bhagavatam and not himself. So it is, I believe, that it is the great devotion and Bhakti of Dr. A.V.S. Sarma that has given expression to the “Excerpts from Potana’s Bhagavatam”.

Dr. A.V.S. Sarma is a practising physician at Madras and has to his credit professional publications of recognition. He has also been a literary writer since his student days. His collection of poems “Flowerets from shrubs” has earned for him recognition as an undergraduate of the College. Subsequently he wrote “Lines of Devotion” and this work won praise from no less a poet and critic than late Dr. James H. Cousins. He said: “I have as you desire, perused it with the interest of a fellow-worker in verse, and congratulate you on your industry and skill.”

I know Dr. Sarma for many years and he has showed great aptitude towards devotional literature and has accomplished something remarkable through this present book “Excerpts from Potana’s Bhagavatam.”

I have gone through some portions of the book and I have nothing but appreciation for the same. I refer particularly to the passages dealing with Dhruva, Prahlada, Gajendra, Vamana, Sri Rama, description of Sri Krishna’s Sport, particularly Rasa Krida, Jala Krida, and description of the autumn season, Rukmini’s Kalyanam, Kuchela; Sruti Gita and Markandeya, which are worth reading by every Bhakta and student of literature and also philosophy.

In conclusion I congratulate the author on this achievement and I have no doubt that the public would welcome this beautiful piece of devotional literature and we can eagerly look forward for many more of such publications to inspire devotion and Bhakti in this materialistic age.

18-12-56, MADRAS. P. SURYANARAYANA.
EXCERPTS FROM POTANA'S BHAGAVATAM

INTRODUCTION

The epic of Bhagavatam illuminates the world eternally. Brahma taught his son Narada the Brahma taught his son Narada the Bhagavatha Purana. Sage Narada spread it to Vyasa who in turn gave it to his son Suka. Suka narrated the same to King Parikshit in the last seven days of the latter’s repentant living.

Bhagavatam sings the glory of God. It is generally respected and particularly worshipped in several houses. The great Purana steers the readers from the material to the spiritual plane. The text runs in the form of discourses. Sri Krishna is almost everywhere in the text. The stories about the Pandavas and the Kauravas and a description of Sri Rama adorn at appropriate places.

To clear the mind of the clouding desires, to follow the righteous path, to realise the necessity and achievements of the avatars of the Lord, to avert the sin accruing in Kaliyuga by singing the praises of Him, and to reach the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord are all discussed in an inimitable way by the great poet Potana.

The existence of God is realised. The Vedic lore explains the universe in terms of Sankhya principles. The Advaita—, Vishistadvaita—, and Dvaita—systems of thought explain each in its own way the relationship between the universe and its Creator. The universe stands emphasised as the means of realising Him, through Vedic rites and devotion.


The avatar as Krishna appeals to every one. As a child, youth, victorious conqueror, householder, and king of kings, Sri Krishna enthranced all that came in contact with Him. The Pandavas, Bhishma, and the Gopas and Gopi women realised Him as the Lord and their love was divine. The adoration of Him by Dharma raja is worth remembering by every reader.

Potana the pious poet, created Bhagavatam in Telugu and like Saint Tyagaraja, dedicated the work to Sri Rama. Thus the poet lives forever like the saint.

The massive magnitude, sustained sweetness, and dignified diction, in the shape of peaceful prose and profuse poetry, and last but not the least the deep devotion permeating the epic of Bhagavatam built by the Godly hands of Potana are things that an advanced student of learning, literary and philosophical, can understand, appreciate and adore with a pure heart.
As a schoolboy, I read the passages from Potana’s Bhagavatam dealing with the salvation of Gajendra, the realisation of God by Dhrusa and Prahlada, the ‘swayamvara’ of Rukmini, the story of Bali, and the sport of Sri Krishna in Brindavana. As a result a silent inspiration arose in me with an inherent force, but was kept under voluntary restraint for over thirty years. The idea of conveying some of the passages of the original into English language pressed and possessed me long; and now I venture to record my work with prayers at the feet of Bammera Potana who carved out the edifice of Bhagavatam in Telugu.

Bhagavatam is set with the highest ideals of devotion knowledge and salvation (vide Sruti Gita; Narada’ advice to Vasudeva; Sri Krishna’s initiation of Uddhava). Narratives are many and enchanting and drive home these ideals.

My aim is that those knowing English and not Telugu may realise to some extent what this great Telugu poet Potana has conveyed through his Bhagavatam to the world. Telugu is sweetest in Bhagavatam. What I have achieved with remain a humble attempt; and the defects and drawbacks will be many in the matter that has evolved due to a force inherent in the theme itself. My rendering is not a translation but is a record from the thoughts that have taken root in me after a reading of the great text which gives me a great solace at all times. I have chosen some portions of the great work for my own rendering and the links of the stories have been to some extent preserved as in the original.

My wife has beeped me by her constant encouragement in all my writings and my indebtedness to her has further increased by the preparation of this book.

The typescripts and proofs have been patiently and carefully read and corrected by my sons A.V. Nagarjuna Sarma, and A. V. Seetharama Sarma, and thus they have kindly helped me.

I am thankful to the Superintendent and other in the T.T.D. Press for their constant courtesy and uniform co-operation. My nephew Sri Dittakavi Sundararama Rao has kindly prepared the errata and to him my thanks are due for the same.

The publication of this book has been accomplished through the co-operation of the members of the Trust Board and the Executive Officer of the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam organisation; and to the of them my thanks are due.

My special thanks are due to Sri P. Suryanarayana, Trustee, T.T.Devasthanam, and Tirupati for having kindly written a 'Foreword'.

I have referred to the following books and utilised knowledge therefrom in some measure or other, and therefore I hereby record my indebtedness to the learned authors of the books.


5. SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM - (Translated into Easy English Prose) - S. Subba Rau Volumes I & II (1928).

4-1-1955 Akkaraju
“VIJAYA DHWAJAM” Venkata
Sarma. Subrahmanya
10, Bhagirathiammal Street, Madras- 17.
(INDIA)

LIFE OF POTANA

Potana was born (1405?) to a pious couple, Kesana and Lakkamamba, of a niyogi brahmin family belonging to Kaundinyasa Gotram. The poet lived in Bammera village, Warangal Hyderabad state, and did not have any rigid schooling or regular education. It is said that while tending cattle in the village, he wended into a nearby forest and had initiation into ‘Ramamantra’ by a sage Jitananda and thereafter acquired devotional knowledge and poetic genius. The writing of the great poet leave us in the conviction that Sri Rama’s grace was with him ever and anon, and Veerabhadra Vijayam was but a pointer in this direction.

Pious poetry and chill penury went together with Potana who lived as an agriculturalist. Srinadha, the brother-in-law of the poet, was however worldly-wise having dedicated his works to the reigning rulers of the day and lived in affluence and luxury, and with royal patronage for a long time.

Potana dedicated his Bhagavata to Sri Rama and refused to offer his writing to any human creature. His idea was plain in the following: -

“Immanujeswaradhamula.........jagaddhitambuagun”.
No dedication shall go to the kings:
Mean mortal folk! No love of gifts and gold
Shall tempt to swell the frame that dies and meets
The brands of Lord of Justice down in hell!
This Potana shall dedicate to Ram
This, Bhagavata, prayerful in piety!
“Chetularanga sivuni………. kadupu chetu”
The hands shall worship Siva full and well!
The mouth shall sing the praise of Hari high!
All truth at heart!
Else, mortals are but sins to parents pure!

It is recorded that the poet early in his life wrote `Bhogini Dandakam’ in respect of a royal demand characterising the concubine of the patron. K. VEERESALINGAM PANTALU accepts this possibility while CHILUKURI VEERABHADRA RAO refutes the same. A poet of such purity, suavity, and sanctity might not have stooped to the degradation attributed thus; and whether at all he did such a profane act, must stand seriously questioned. The patient bearing of life-long poverty is might proof of this great Andhra bard overcome all weaknesses of the body and mind once and for all.

Once Srinadha set out to meet Potana and nearing the latter’s village he asked his palanquin bearers to let go the support of the forearm of the palanquin, which still carried on. Seeing this, Mallanna, the son of Potana exclaimed in wonder to his father at the sight. The father advised his son, who was tilling the ground with a plough and bullocks in the fields nearby to release one bull and the plough ran as usual. Srinadha seeing this ordered the bearers of the rear arm also to let go the hold and demonstrated the palanquin carrying him in safety thereafter too. Now Potana advised his son to release the other bullock also from the plough, which tilled as if nothing had happened. Seeing this Srinadha got down and greeted his brother-in-law and the nephew in a tone of derision: “Are the farmers doing well? To this Potana replied in verse on the spot:

“Balarasala sala navapallava………………..poshanardhamai.”
To dedicate to a man a work
Of poetry, pious, pure, is making ov’r
A paragon of virgin beauty to
The hands impure, immoral and unchaste!
Thereby to feed, is not the path of right!
A poet may till the soil to live in joy
With wife and children and this path is right!

Srinadha advised Potana to dedicate a poetical work to a Karnataka king and live in plenty and happiness, and not to lead the hard life of a tiller of the soil. The entire party then adjourned to the humble residence of Potana. Srinadha and his entourage were requested to get ready for a dinner. There was nothing with the poet and Mallanna went out and returned with empty hands having tried in vain for a loan in the village. The pious poet immediately prayed solemnly to Saraswathi Devi, the Goddess of Learning, and She immediately answered the prayers by supplying an excellent range of sumptuous dinner from behind a curtain in the kitchen. The good wife of Potana served her brother and his retinue to their entire satisfaction. The distinguished visitor in some surprise and more adoration exclaimed to Potana: “O noble soul! Why suffer? Dedicate Bhagavata to a king and you will have all prosperity!” At this Goddess Saraswathi appeared before Potana with tears flowing down her cheeks. Potana exclaimed:
“Katuka kanti neeru…………….nammu Bharathi”
O Goddess! Great of learning and light!
Why art Thine eyes of lustre in tears that run
To Thine bosom heaving with distress and grief?
I Swear to Thee; I shall not sell Thine honour
To carnatic chiefs, heinous with crimes cold!

After these events Srinadha returned home, having failed in his mission. The honoured authorship of Telugu Bhagavata goes to Potana who wrote the immortal purana and refused to dedicate to Sarvajnasingabhupala, the ruler of Rachakonda. At this the king punished the poet by burying the classic. Sri Rama appeared to the king’s wife in a dream and persuaded her to prevail upon her husband, and unearth the great epic, and proclaim it as a ruling force for the betterment of mankind and the universe. The ruler responding, the Bhagavata saw the light of the day though mutilated and partially destroyed by white ants. The leaves that were destroyed underwent rewriting by Gangaraju, Veligandala Naraya and Nerchuri Singana.

Potana, Sarvajnasingabhupala, and Srinadha appear to have been contemporaries, but critics do not universally acknowledge this point.

It is said that Potana was poet laureate at Venkatagiri, but it appears sacrilegious even to entertain such an idea.

Potana wrote as per bio of Sri Rama and with His inspiration. It is ennobling to the young or growing or fruitful minds as a perennial flood of ambrosia from a divine, ennobling and enchanting source.

Srinadha commented adversely on the stanza “Sirikincheppadu………..gaja pranavanochahiyai”

Vishnu spoke not to His consort; took none
Of army strong; armed not with disc or conch
Or club: set not hair locks; forgot the hold
Of veil ov’r bosom of Lakshmi whilst in
The rapturous sport of love but tore to save
Gajendra lock’d with crocodile in fight!

And said that no one coming to fight out a situation goes unarmed. Potana remembered the criticism and taught his brother-in-law a lesson. Once as Srinadha was having bath, Potana chose the opportunity and rolled a boulder into a nearby well producing a drowning noise and ran in haste and told his brother-in-law that his child had fallen into a well. Poor Srinadha ran almost naked to the spot. Then Potana said: “Where are the helpers? Where is the rope? Where is the well-diver to bring up the drowned boy?” Thereafter Srinadha realised the aptness of the composition of Potana and conceded all praise.

This great saint of poets is unique in portraying every aspect of poetry and any critic has but unique appreciation for the thought, composition, and effect contained in ever-mellifluous line of his work. Of all aspects, devotion has permeated the epic with such saturation, and any causal reader of even a random passage of the epic in Telugu will experience a peaceful mind evolving towards the Almighty.
Potana’s description of Mohini before Lord Siva, Rukmini emerging out of Durga’s shrine and Sri Krishna enlightening Akrura are achievements that he alone so powerfully presented us. Picturesque, apt and awe-inspiring are the poetic renderings of the scenes thought the text, and a few examples of the many such are seen in the court scene where Dhruba was insulted by his own father; the conversations between Dhruva and his mother; the prayers of Gajendra; the conversation between Yamana and Bali; the rejoicing of the people of Ayodhya at the return of Sri Ramachandra; the conversation between Sri Rama and his sons Lava and Kusa; the avatar of Sri Krishna and His sport at Vraja, Brindavana and Mathura; the seasonal changes at Brindavana; the rasa kreeda - and jala kreeda of Sri Krishna; the lamentations of Gopi women; the humiliation of Indra; the killing of the asuras including Kansa and Sisupala; the wedding the sport of Krishna with His sixteen thousand queens; the love quarrel between Krishna and Rukmini; the warlike qualities of Satya Bhama; the blissful poverty and spotless character of Kuchela; the initiation of Uddhava; the pathetic return of Sri Krishna into His own self; and the witnessing of the deluge by Markandeya. The description of Kaliyuga has a wealth of meaning and the remedy for the many ills is said to lie in chanting wholeheartedly the name of the supreme Lord. The philosophical bearing of the great work is a mine of knowledge. I have left that the excellent commentaries on the original by many learned authors existing today are effectively educative, and I have but touched the mighty material in the simple and humble way of an ordinary worker and thinker and drowned in the depth of mundane existence.

Love in salvation and salvation in love are eminently balanced in abundance in the description of Sri Krishna. While Potana was writing the tenth Skanda, he went out into the paddy fields on a beautiful moonlit night and sat upon a stone on the bund of a canal and imagined himself to be a Gopika and realised Sri Krishna by singing “Nallanivadu…………..ledegadamma cheppare”.

Of hue blue, lotus-eyed, and with the head
Adorned with peacock-feather in the hair,
With smiles on face and raining love all round,
And He has stolen the wealth of lust of maids!
O plants with aroma sweet, tell us if He
Is hiding behind you in Godly sport!

*It is said that while “Alavaikutu puntulo…………..saramhiyai”*

There, in Vaikunta, abode of Vishnu,
Rests He on flowery bed, near banks of lake
Ambrosial in Mandara garden gay,
But heard the cry of elephant king low
In grief, as saviour sure, and char’gd earthward!

Was being written, Potana could not proceed further and there fore went out for relaxation; and in the interval the Lord came down and completed the rest in the guise of the poet. On returning, the poet seeing the beautiful completion of the difficult metre to his great surprise, questioned his daughter nearby about the wonderful authorship. The little girl said that he, it was, that was writing continuously. Thus Potana knew it was Sri Maha Vishnu that wrote up the lines and congratulated his child for having seen the Lord though in the father’s garb.
Again, when Varaha avatar was being described a white boar was reported to have guarded the residence of the poet and chased away the soldiers of the ruler who came to seize the Bhagavata by force. Whether these stories are true or false, the most important moral that crystallizes from them is that God, the creator, protector, and destroyer is omnipresent and deals the right way with one and all in this universe.

Potana passed away in the latter part of the 15th century (1460-1470?), but he is living eternally through his Bhagavatam.

(A.V.S.S.)

**PRAYER**

My heart pants for Thy bliss sacred, and longs
To reach Thee! O! creator of the world,
Protector of devotees, and with the might
Of incarnations to quell sin! Save me!

THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
TO THE SACRED MEMORY OF

BAMMERA POTANA

WHO CREATED THE IMMORTAL
TELUGU BHAGAVATAM.

(A.V.S.S.)

**Excerpts from Potana’s Bhagavatam.**

**SKANDA I**

The rule of Parikshit.

King Dharmaraja placed Parikshit on the throne before he and his brothers freed themselves from earthly existence. Parikshit ruled in an ideal manner and his subjects remained happy.

Sringi curses Parikshit.

Parikshit went out for a hunt into the forest with his followers as wild animals were menacing the peaceful living of the citizens. After the successful hunt of a day the king and his men became thirsty and hungry and were marching in search of rest and comfort. Nearing a hermitage they saw a silent sage, whom the king request for water to drink, but to no response. The sage was in deep meditation. Waiting long to no purpose, the king lost his temper and exclaimed:
This man with eyelids closed as if in depth
On meditation speaks not, gestures not!
No water or fruit sweet for thirst and heat!
This sage is blind with glory great and false;
His penance forgets men in need and want!
The king wound round the neck of sage a snake
With life extinct, and quick returned in spite
Against the host that spoke no word to him!

After a while, the neighbours saw the ghastly sight of the reversed rishi and informed his son Sringi about the matter. Sringi returned back with his companions and roared in anger:

My father speaks no words of heat and meets
No men of spite but eats the tubers hard
Of woods, and sits with sight of God at heart!
No gifts and gold are had by us in woods;
And blessings false are not bestow’d by us!
Away from homes we live in forests lone!
No harm can come from us in search of God!
How then the king has wound a viper dead
Round sacred neck of sage in sacrilege?

The young sage wended to the banks of the Kausiki, and after offering prayers to God cursed the king in burning anger:

The haughty king that laid the viper dead
Around and neck of sage in Godly thought,
Shall die on seventh day of venom hit
Of Takshaka; and Gods shall not save him!

Siringi returned to the hermitage and yelled out in sorrow at the sight of his father, Samika. Later Samika opened his eyes in time and took away the dead serpent and learnt the whole story from his son. He felt extremely grieved at the irrevocable curse promulgated by the son. At last the old sage sent the grave news to King Parikshit through one of his pupils.

The king grieved very little on the receipt of the tidings and immediately determined to pass the remaining days of his life in stern prayer to the Lord. He said:

Why did I go on hunt? Why did I do
The heinous sin of hurting Samika,
The sage in meditation deep? The curse
Of Sringi shall come sure in seven days!
The venom of Takshaka shall kill me!
My life shall go! The splendour royal goes!
Life, lightning-like, shall not temp me at all!
No curse shall go to Sringi from my mouth!
Many noble souls congregated to see the King in repentant penance and in search of the holy path, and of them Suka was pleased to guide the king in his noble march to reach the lotus feet of Sri Maha Vishnu.

Suka meets Parikshit.

Parikshit received Suka and the other holy guests with adequate respect; and this started the famous narrative that goes through the following pages.

SKANDA II

The Conversation between Suka and Parikshit.

Suka spoke: “O king! You have but seven days to live. Fix your mind upon the lotus feet of the Lord. The happiness on the earth is ephemeral. Give up desires. Be contented. You will attain salvation. Now hear the Bhagavata purana.” The story of King Khatwanga who attained salvation by ardent prayer to the Lord within a short space of time was also narrated.

Parikshit said: “I have overcome desires. Please narrate to me the sport of God and more about His incarnations.”

Suka added: “Brahma prayed ardently to Narayana who appeared to him and said that He was the fruit of the penance, and ordained the creation. Once Narada came to Brahma and sought the advice like you. Now I shall give all the narrative in detail as Brahma gave it to Narada.”

SKANDA III

As the Pandavas and the Kurus were fighting between themselves Vidura went out on a pilgrimage, and met Uddhava on the way, learnt from him about the passing away of Sri Krishna and Balarama. The sport of the Avataras was beset with the episodes of salvation of many. Later Maitreya in his turn narrated to Vidura the details of attaining divine bliss. The story of Swayambhumanuva also was narrated and how he desired to perform Yajna but found earth submerged under water and prayed to Brahma ardently. At this juncture Yajna-Varaha appeared and grew into enormous proportions and dived into water and saved the earth. At this the rishis praised the Lord.

Maitreya again spoke to Vidura about the killing of Hiranyaksha by the incarnation of Varaha.

Hiranyaksha.

The Lord of Sri Vaikunta decreed as per curses of Sanaka and Sanandana, that Jaya and Vijaya, the guards at the gates of Vaikunta, would take three births on earth and by fighting with Him would ultimately regain their former positions. The first team of inimical brothers is Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasyappa, born to Diti and Kasyapa.
Hiranyaksha gained boons from Brahma and grew proud and haughty and was running in vain searching to fight with Vishnu. Narada advised the asura to go to Rasathala where Vishnu could be met for a decisive fight.

Vishnu as Boar, dwarf first, but soon grew high
To sky, and tore the seas in rage to fetch
The Earth in Rasathala deep, with claws
Sharp, fearful and put down the waves of seas.
The Lord of Earth went into seas to search
His Queen, as Boar in Yajna shape!
Hiranyaksha met the Boar and swung
His club in spite, but it broke down with ease
Before the Lord, who bled the asura poor!
The Boar looked like clouds blue and large of eve,
And mountain like and resplendent with lustre
In goring Hiranyaksha bleeding dead;
And elevated the Earth with praises from Gods!

SKANDA IV

Maitreya gave the story of Dhruva to Vidura.

Dhruva.

Swayambhuva arose from Brahma and married Satarupa. The couple bore two sons Priyavrata and Uttanapada. Uttanapada became famous and had two queens Suniti and Surichi, the latter monopolising royal love. Suniti had a son by name Dhruva and Surichi, Uttama.

In court the king sat on the throne in joy;
Uttama came and sat on lap of his father high;
The father and son smiling, kissing soft;
And now Dhruva came up to sit on lap
Of father, but was disowned and hurled low!
Surichi spoke with pride: “Thou should have been
Son mine to reach thy father’s lap and not
Of her! Pray Vishnu and become my son!”
Dhruva in sorrow, shame and rage went home
And met his mother Suniti, in tears,
Who seated her son on lap and soft embraced
The crying lad, and wiped the tears and set
Aright the hair on head and heard the woe
And tale of partiality of kind in grief!
Suniti comforted Dhruva and told him that devotion to the Lord would end all sorrow. Further she said:

My son! The king views me not ev’n as
Attendant base, and I bore thee son!
Misfortune is with us, and Vishnu shall
Redeem thee son! Go, pray! The Lord shall help!

Dhruva took leave of his dear mother and started for doing penance in a forest. Narada met him on the way and learnt the sore story of the prince whom he advised first to return home. Dhruva refused sternly and said that he was in search of the balm from God for the sore wounds inflicted by his stepmother. Then the sage advised him to do penance in Madhura forest on the banks of the Yamuna, and initiated him also into ‘Vasudevanamtra.’ The little boy continued in stern penance. The Lord appeared before the young devotee who then sang praises of Narayana and had divine response thus:

O prince! the pain at heart of thine is known
To me, and I will grant thee a state
Of honour high and rare! It is in stars!
It is supreme and permanent, the range
Of thy name which shall sway ov’r deluge even!
Thou shalt rule ov’r for twenty six thousand years
On earth in fame and reach thy starry home!
Thy brother shalt die in hunt in woods;
His mother searching for her son, dies too!
As king thou worship ME and live in truth!

So saying, Narayana disappeared and reached his heavenly abode.

Dhruva slowly wended his way homeward. Narada informed Uttanapada earlier about the return of Dhruva. The old father extended an affectionate and royal welcome to the son returning with angelic glory and soon placed him on the throne.

Uttanapada adjoined to the forest for penance. As informed by Narayana earlier, Uttama and Surichi met with death in the forest.

Dhruva completed his tenure of terrestrial reign and reached his sublime starry status.

Thus the story of Dhruva was narrated by Maitreya to Vidura. He was very pleased and thanked him and subsequently returned to Hastinapur.

Prithu.

Prithu and Arcis arose from Nisada who derived from the corpse of Vena the great grandson of Chaksusa-Manu. Prithu and Arcis lived as man and wife.

The Earth said to Prithu:
O Lord! Save me a thou me from seas!
The life of plants is in myself and now
As cow, my milk secretes all wants of thine!
Later,
Swayambhuva Manu became the chief!
Prithu milked vegetables in His hands!

Prithu levelled the earth and made her his daughter. Thus the first shaping of life took place on earth under benign rule of Prithu. Prithu made many Yajna and at last aspired for the position of Indra, but later learnt the real path for salvation and dived into quest of SELF and gave up his kingdom, and went into the woods; and body ceasing reached Vaikunta.

Barhi.

Barhi the grandson of Antardhana and great grandson of Prithu is described as the champion of action and famed for having performed many Yajna. He married Satadrutui and brought forth ten sons, Prachelas. The ten sons entered into long penance for one thousand years with the object of enhancing creation.

Narada advised the king that the path of salvation lay in the quest of SELF and not in repeating Yajna, which drowned one in karma, and informed him, further about Puranjana. Immediately abdicating the throne, Barhi went to Kapila’s hermitage for meditation and attained bliss.

Puranjana.

King Puranjana gave up company of his constant friend of thousand years and chose an earthly town (Bharasha) south of the Himalayas. In he new place the king found a beautiful damsel and lived with her happily in a garden. The entire town had nine gateways and a five-headed serpent protected the population. The king was lost in his queen with carnal love and blind lust.

One day Puranjana went out hunting in his five-horse chariot and returned late forgetting home and housewife and apologised for the delay in returning to his queen. The couple bore one thousand and one hundred sons and one hundred and ten daughters. Sacrifices made were many by the king.

Candavega and his army repeatedly attacked Bharatavarsha and gradually debilitated the serpent guard.

Sage refused the daughter of Kala Narada and King Fear, when she made overtures. The army of King Fear attacked the stronghold of Puranjana and killed the serpent guard. Puranjana lived with Puranjani for one hundred years and was lost in his attachment to her till the end. He died and was reborn as the daughter of king Vidarbha, and married the King of Pandya and bore him one daughter and seven sons. After years, at the death of her husband, the daughter of Vidarbha mourned bitterly and was preparing to observe ‘sati’. At this juncture the good old friend of Puranjana appeared in time and revealed how ‘Maya’ overcame him and took him round many vicissitudes. He and his friend were swans on the lake Manasa (the mind) having lived in peace for one thousand years.
The explanation by sage Narada of the foregoing allegory briefly and poetically is thus:

The town is body mortal! Puranjana
Is Purusha with gates, the portals nine?
Of body; and his friend is Eswara!
The Queen is Buddhi and the ten
Attendants are the limbs to act
And perceive; and serpent is Prana!
The hunt is joy in state of dreams!
Meditation on Him takes one to Him!

**The penance of Prachetasu brothers.**

The brothers went westward and there Siva greeted them and blessed them and taught them prayer to Vishnu-Rudra Gita. They prayed in waters for one thousand years when Vishnu appeared and blessed the dutiful brothers a son like Brahma.

The brothers married Marisa; the daughter of Kandu Rishi and Marisa brought forth the famous Daksha who was controlled by Lord Siva at one stage.

**SKANDA V**

**Rishabha.**

Rishabha’s father knew that his son was an avatar of Vishnu. Rishabha married Jayanti and had hundred sons of whom Bharatha stands unique.

One day Rishabha summoned his sons and says:

My sons! I know the world in full!
The kingdom and joys no more tempt me!
You are my sons with blood of purest ray
And thus you are the ones good for work great!
Do follow Bharatha and reign! I go!

Rishabha went in silence calm for years,

And last took ‘Ajagara’ shape in woods,
And with end nearing ate stones hard and went
To bamboo forest which burnt him to death!

**Bharatha.**

Suka narrated to Parikshit the story of Bharatha of ‘Bharatha Khanda’ fame and a great devotee of the Lord.

Bharatha ruled the country justly and finding no respite for meditation gave over the reigns of government to his sons and adjourned to a forest.
One day the king bathed in the holy Gandaki and was offering prayers. At that time a
deer full term and in thirst came to the banks of the river, when she heard the roar of a lion.
Frightened and in agony, the deer delivered her young-one into the water and subsequently
died on the riverbank in shock.

The king opened his eyes and saw the drifting fawn and saved it in pity and began to
rear it very affectionately in this hermitage. The love bestowed on it increased day by day and
ultimately the meditation on God turned into filial duty to a young deer.

Once the growing deer went far and was missing from the royal hermit’s hut and this
made the guardian anxious and unhappy until its return. Thus the aim of Godly thought
disappeared and instead mortal affinity developed in stronger bonds between Bharatha and
his pet.

Days moved fast and the end of the royal Rishi came and he died with his attention
and affection concentrated on the deer. The last thoughts made the man reborn as a deer and
the life of this deer was spent in prayerful quiescence, at the hermitage of Pulaha and
Pulasthavya. Life as deer ended but existence started again as the son of a Brahman Angirasa,
through his second wife. As the boy grew up the parents trained him as ‘Brahmacharya’ after
Upanayana. The parents died leaving the boy into the hands of the half brothers that meted
out very partial treatment but it did not hurt him. The boy growing into manhood was known
as ‘Jada Bharaha’ because of his superficial stupidity and dirtiness, but his vision was indeed
inward towards SELF.

Time rolled on. Bharatha become a guard on the fields on account of the
machinations and ill treatment at home. One night he was picked up by some soldiers of a
certain childless king Vrishala, for human sacrifice before Kali. Things were got ready for
the appointed hour and as the murderer’s sword was about to fall on the neck of the innocent
victim standing peacefully resigned to the Lord, Goddess Kali darted out alive from the
image and killed everybody else except the poor brahmana. Later Bharatha walked out of the
temple of Kali and continued the guard at the paddy fields.

Some years passed.

Once the ruler of Sind, Rahugana, aspired to have spiritual initiation from the sage
Kapila and was proceeding in a palanquin. The palanquin reached the spot where Bharatha
was present. The captain of the bearers caught hold of Bharatha who looked well built and
placed one arm on his back and thus evaded the burden.

The new bearer being cautious to the rhythmic steps of the carriers was moving
silently and patiently and peacefully, avoiding the crushing of little lives, but the effect was
discomfort to the inmate who angrily chided the bearers in common, but the culprits informed
the king that the fault lay with the fourth man. At this the haughty rider said:

O man, mean, dead though living with the breath!
Thou movest not in the order! Know the way!”
The Brahmana spoke not and bore the weight
On back but knew the truth of lives and paths!
Later the brahmana replied soft:

O king! Thy words are true! The weight is born
By body and not soul! The births and deaths
Are common to all flesh! Love, hate, disease,
And pains of mind are born with body frail!
My self is with the Lord, and punishment
Meted out to me is waste, as it hurts not!
I bear this palanquin to count my days!

The king heard all that the Brahmin bearer said in a learned and noble way, and immediately alighted from the palanquin and fell down at the feet of the wise adviser and begged the saintly person to forgive him. “O great soul! Are you Kapila the great sage in disguise? I am going to him for being helped in the path of the Lord. I have spoken blindly and in royal pride and hurt a Godly being whose praises now I shall sing with all my heart.”

The king lost his love of the body and proceeded in the light of the teaching.

Bharatha on completion of his ‘karma’ reached the lotus feet of the Lord.

**SKANDA VI**

King Parikshit asked sage Suka the way and means of avoiding ’Narakas.’ The reply was the narration of the story of Ajamila who attained the lotus feet of the Lord by devotion even at the last moment.

Ajamila.

Ajamila, Brahmana, gave up the rites

Of Vedas high and took to women low
And had sons many and lived life in lust!
Games evil and talk foul was his day’s round.
Hair dark turn’d white; limbs learner grew;
Desires increased; the head shook loose; teeth fell!
The man four score and eight in age, kept son
The last, all day and night in thoughts and called
His name Narayana in fright when death came near!
The agents of Yama came claiming him!
And messengers of Vishnu claimed too
The ‘jiva’ as their own! Ajamila old
Said “NARAYANA!” and set thought on Lord;
Thus won the grace of saviour great Vishnu!
This argument won ov’r men from Yama.

The messengers of Yama went back and explained to their lord the controversy over the ‘jiva’ of Ajamila. Yama, the lord of justice, replied, “Vishnu, the supreme controller of the universe, knows best. We all abide.” Ajamila heard the dispute between the rival parties
claiming his `jiva' and came to his senses. He repented sorely for his past life and went to Haridwar and meditated upon Sri Maha Vishnu and reached His abode with all honours due to a realised soul.

**The fight between Danavas and Devatas.**

Suka continued thus to Parikshit.

Once Indra was in the height of joy and pride in his court sitting in full complement and in royal splendour. Brahaspati, the Guru then entered the court, but was ignored by Indra and therefore immediately left the place with a heavy heart. Indra realising his mistake later went in search of the Guru who disappeared by his prowess and taught the haughtily Indra a lesson.

At this juncture the asuras having had the patronage of their preceptor, Bhargava, attacked the suras and gained an easy victory. The suras and their lord wended their way to Vishnu and informed him about their sorry plight and prayed for mercy. Vishnu informed them that all the suffering was the fruit of their insult to Brahaspati and advised them to seek the aid of Visvarupa.

Visvarupa pitied Indra and initiated him into `Narayanakavacha' and Indra observed the same in austerity and gained the upper hand over the enemies and continued his sway in peace.

Indra detected the treachery of Visvarupa in time and severed his three heads and distributed the consequential sin equally between earth, trees, water and women.

**Chitraketu**

King Chitraketu had many wives and only one son by the blessing of Angirasa after a Yajna and this only son brought both joy and sorrow to the parents by his premature death.

Narada gave the son that died temporary life for a short while, and he expressed before the parents:

O sage! Tell me! Fate brought me here as son
Of Chitraketu, but I am from Him!
Every birth has parents, relations, friends,
And foes, but who is permanent on earth?
The `jiva' plays in body by `karma'!
Who are wives, husbands, sons, friends, and foes?
To one that knows identity of `self'!

Narada and Angirasa prescribed to Chitraketu the worship of `Samkarshana' by which the Lord was soon realised after stern `tapas'.

Once while travelling in his chariot on the skies, Chitraketu saw Lord Siva in court openly drawing near his consort Bhavani, and laughed at them and spoke inn derision:
Siva, Thou, idol of truth, justice firm,
With locks of hair as proof of penance deep,
Adored by lesser gods and saints hast now
In open court embraced Thy Bhavani!
One loves his wife private ad not this way!

At this Siva and his followers smiled but Bhavani cursed the king to take the birth of an asura.

The king descended from his chariot and fell flat at the feet of Bhavani and prayed for pardon, and expressed his willing consent to undergo the curse ordained and said: “The ephemeral existence shall not differentiate between sorrow and joy.” Lord Siva then said to his consort: “Chitraketu follows Vishnu as we do too. True devotees are not afraid of what happens to the body. Hence I am unperturbed at the remarks of the insolent king who offended you at once.”

SKANDA VII

The curse upon the guards at the gateways of Vaikunta.

King Parikshit addressed sage Suka thus: “O great rishi, why does the Lord save Indra and punish the asuras?” Suka replied: “Dear king, hear me. God has neither a friend nor a foe. All are equal to him. Devatas owning ‘sattva’ are spared, and the rakshasas having ‘rajas and tamas’ are checked and set in order by Vishnu. Now the story of the curse falling on the sentry at Vaikunta proves the above points.”

Once Sanandana and Sanat Kumara, enjoying through His bliss eternal boyhood and going naked anywhere and everywhere, came to Vaikunta for darshana of the Lord. They were promptly stopped by the guards at the gate Jaya and Vijaya, and thus provoked the sages anxiously waiting to see Vishnu. The sages cursed the keepers to take asura births. Immediately the guards prostrated at the feet of the sages in repentance and exclaimed: “We have kept to our instructions. We do not know you so great and privileged to the presence of Maha Vishnu immaterial of time and circumstance! Save us.” The noble sages pitied and modified the curse by saying that after three turns on earth as asura enemies to the Lord, they would be elevated back to their original positions at the threshold of the abode of the Lord. At this Jaya and Vijaya felt relieved and departed. The first stage is fulfilled by Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu; the second by Ravana and Kumbhakarna; and the third by Sisupala and Dantavakra.

The sage went into the entrancing presence of Sir Maha Vishnu and had their fill of the longed darshan and departed in immense joy.

Hiranyakasipu.

On the death of his brother, Hiranyakasipu grew sore and held meetings with the asuras and determined to wreak his revenge upon Sri Hari. He ordered his asura army to go to earth and spoil the penance of the sages, the Yajna, and in short all that is sanctioned by the suras.
Hiranyakasipu performed the last rites to his departed brother, drew near his nephews and consoled the wives of his brother, and particularly his mother, with ennobling and wise advice and anecdotes.

The asura with ambitious plans went to Mandara Mountain and prayed in all austerity and extraordinary determination for one hundred years. He became covered by anthill, grass and bamboos, and became emaciated and victimised by forest flies. Brahma appeared to hi appreciating the penance and desired to satisfy the asura who said with folded hands and in salutation:

Pray, let not death come to me from one in Thy creation! So, let not death come to me from The agency beside thy realm, on earth or air: By day or night, in or out, and no man Or beast, live or dead, and no asura Or sura or naga quench me to death! My might shall be supreme like Thine ov’r all!

Brahma smiled and said:

O son of Kasyapa! My grant is there To thee! No one shall have such boons as thine! All boons of thy choice vast are yielded by ME; But be thou good at heart and rule with love!

Thus Brahma left Hiranyakasipu stronger than before.

Hiranyakasipu returned home in high spirits and ruled in place of Indra and in a cruel manner. The asuras worked havoc with the good and innocent citizens. Diti and her son and the rest lived in a palace built by Viswakarma and guided by Sukracharya.

The rule was a hardship to the sages and saints, the suras and in particular to those devoted to Lord Vishnu.

Hiranyakasipu decided to meet Vishnu, fight and avenge the death of his brother, and burning with this desire proceeded in this intoxicated thought relentlessly towards the innocent and the helpless who remained devoted to Lord Vishnu.

Prahlada was one of the four sons of Hiranyakasipu.

The prince was son true in family! To serve the poor and elders, he took a pride! He looked at women all as mothers’ dear! All friend were brethren to the prince all time! He spoke the truth and lived regarding all!

The young prince was mingling with the boys of his age but was different from them in his behaviour and response to things around. He believed in Vishnu and spoke it out to
his fellow students, and while in meditation appeared extraordinary and even insane. He was put to study under the care of Chanda and Amaraka, the sons of Sukracharya.

After some time the father desired to see his son’s progress. The son was brought to the father who drew him near and placed him on his lap and said: “My son, tell me something from your lessons.” The boy said with folded hands “Mortals shall I always think of Vishnu, the supreme Lord.” At this the king grew angry but saw his tender child and quenching his disgust exclaimed:

Displeasure, wonder, disappointment sore  
My mind do cloud! my son, is this thy work?  
Or have some suras secretly taught thy mouth?  
Or others misled thy mind immature?  
The resident of Vaikunta is our  
Sworn enemy! Know thou, my son, that now!  
Our duty lies in ending suras and  
In paining lesser gods, their retinue!  
Think not of Hari or Giri, in faith  
Of fools, but join my hands in my vow sure!

To these words of the father, Prahlada replied in a sober manner while casting respectful looks towards the teachers:

Salutations to those souls that have known SELF  
And lost all lust, and realised the Lord!  
As iron draws to magnet, thus my mind  
Is moving fast to lotus feet of God!  
Do bees that suck the flowers sweet wind to  
Datura plants? Does royal swan that swims  
In holy Ganga go to rivulets?  
Does kokil chirping in mango grooves green  
Fly back to trees with wilderness of buds?  
Does chakora in rays of shining moon  
Desire to live in white of frozen snow?  
Ambrosia flowing from meditation on Him  
Intoxicates me and I forget the rest!

At this the teachers addressed the king and said to their pupil with displeasure:

Thou, boy of five! Thou goest deep into thoughts  
Philosophical, logic tense, but thou  
Hast not learnt daily lessons taught by us!  
We hang our heads in shame in midst of Court!  
Thou art not son but foe to father great!  
In sandal garden of asuras thick,  
Thou art the horny tree of shame and sin!
Thou praisest Vishnu, enemy of ours!
Regime of rigid work we shall put on
Thy son, O King, give us some time to shape!

The teachers taught the prince once again the lessons of their asura lore and requested him not to betray them before the king a second time, and then took leave of the ruler.

The father fond drew near the son it love,
Embraced, set right the fore-locks on head,
Geared up the chin and kissed in joy and said:
“Do tell me now a lesson bright, taught thee?
I wait to hear thy fame as scholar bright!”

Prahlada replied in all humility:

The teachers taught me; I have learnt the truth
Of lessons and the lore and that is strength!
Devotional ways nine have I learnt well!
To trust Hari is greatest thing for all!
The mind is meant to think of Lord Vishnu!
The thought is meant to go to Lord Vishnu!
The soul is tied to stay with Lord Vishnu!
The head bows down to feet of Lord Vishnu!
The eyes are meant to see one, Lord Vishnu!
The ears are meant to hear of Lord Vishnu!
The hands are meant to worship Lord Vishnu!
The feet are meant to go round Lord Vishnu!
A day is one when spent in thought of Lord!
A learning is true when it speaks of Lord!
A teacher is one who pours praises of Lord!
The body shall be dedicat’d to Him!
If not, it is just one bag big, of skin!
A man shall think life-long the praise of Him!
If not, it is a life of quadruped!

These words pained Hiranyakasipu who roared in thundering anger: “Who has taught you these evil lessons? Have the teachers cheated me?” The son said in peace:

The faith in God evolves, but is not forced!

O father! Men with interest in things
Material, have births and deaths, and thus
The cycle dark perpetuates for ev’r!
The thought of Lord is boat that takes through seas
Of children, wife, desires, pride, spit and lust!
Hearing these words the father threw down his son from upon his lap and howled out with bitterness and blood-shot eyes: “Prahlada! You are praising me enemy that killed your uncle and my brother as a boar! You are ungrateful and disloyal.” Further Hiranyakasipu ordered his ministers to do away with his son.

The asuras tried every means to kill the innocent prince. They pierced him relentlessly with spears, rolled him down the mountains, put him into wild seas, crushed him under the feet of elephants, put him into blazing fire, and even poisoned him, but the young devotee always stood calm and peaceful with prayers of Sri Hari. At this the father had peculiar reactions and felt that his son was gifted and would even bring about an end to the present order. At this juncture, Chanda and Amaraka met the king and praised and encouraged him.

Hiranyakasipu once again requested the sons of Sukracharya to teach Prahlada, who by this gained the confidence of his mates too and began to teach the path of devotion to Sri Hari; and further proclaimed that that was real education which he