

4. Nabhaka, Naabhaka, and Ambarisha

Pradoshe Deepakaschandrah

Prabhaate Deepako Ravihi

Trailoke Deepako Dharmah

Suputrah Kula Deepakah

The Moon is the source of light at night.

During the day, the Sun gives light.

Dharma illumines the three world.

A good son is the light of the family.

There are two kinds of night: full moon and new moon. Darkness is not generally desired. But there are some people, like thieves and wicked people, who revel in it. Darkness aides bad thoughts and facilitates sinful behavior. Hence it is called *Raakshasa Kaalam*—demonic period of time. Night is characterized by *thamo guna*. Therefore, peaceful and virtuous people do not desire darkness.

Pradoshe Deepakaschandrah

The full moon is bright and beautiful. Everyone awaits the full moon. Poets are inspired to compose poems looking at it and children play joyously in its cool light. The moon is called *chandamama*—Uncle Moon. He is an uncle to children, to parents, to grandparents...to everyone. He is the same to everyone. Therefore, light has a lot of significance. It aids sacred thoughts.

Prabhaate Deepako Ravihi

The Sun and the Moon sustain the world. Without the Sun there cannot be life. The Sun gives us light, seasons, rain and food. Many diseases are cured by the Sun's benevolent rays. Even electricity can be generated from sunlight.

Trailoke Deepako Dharmah

The third is *dharma*: *Dharma* means “that which binds.” *Dharma* binds us within limits, helping us tread the right path and discharge our duty. *Dharma* establishes norms of behavior between two persons, between a person and society and so on. It helps human values flourish. When *dharma* declines, human values suffer and this, in turn, spells the ruin of life. A country without *dharma* is a country of demons. *Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah*—*Dharma* protects those who protect it. Therefore, adherence to truth and *dharma* are most important for students today. The *Vedas* say, *Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*—speak the truth and follow righteousness. These are the great legacy from our ancient heritage. The true treasures of Bharathiyas are only *sathya* and *dharma*.

Suputrah Kula Deepakah

Now, the fourth. A virtuous child brightens the whole family. Even a single virtuous person brings a good name to the family. One jasmine creeper lends an enchanting smell to the entire forest. If every house had even a single virtuous member, the world will glow with effulgence. Any number of children without virtue are useless. The *Mahabharatha* also teaches this truth. Dhritarashtra had a hundred sons but they did not benefit him or his kingdom. Sage Suka had no children and yet, he was ever blissful! Therefore, it is foolish to rejoice at the birth of a son. The father doesn't feel happy merely at the birth of a son. Parents experience joy only when children demonstrate piety and earn unsullied reputations. Among today's students we need *suputras*—good sons. Who is a “good son”? Is he one with a good nose, good eyes, and a good body? No. Only one

with pure qualities is a good son. No matter how handsome a boy may be, without virtue he is only ugly.

The story of Naabhaka

The *Bhagavatham* contains the narrative of an emperor called Nabhaka. He had many sons, one of whom was Naabhaka.

Naabhaka was a great scholar. He entered a *gurukula*¹ to learn different kinds of knowledge. He was an ideal student. He dedicated his time and his body to the acquisition of education. To this end he even forgot his parents! He considered education to be the jewel of life. He realized the tremendous power of true knowledge and decided to spend his life acquiring it.

Naabhaka came to spend most of his time in the Gurukula. In due course his father, Nabhaka, grew old and resolved to divide his wealth among his sons. He gave wealth to all his sons but forgot Naabhaka because Naabhaka was away in the pursuit of education. After completing his studies, Naabhaka returned home. He saw his brothers ruling the kingdom. He asked them, “Brothers, where is my share of the inheritance?” They replied, “Father did not leave you a share. But we are yet to decide what to do with father himself. Hence, you can have father as your share.”

Naabhaka was highly educated. He recognized the respect due to a father and said, “Father is enough for me.” As per the sacred culture of India—*Maatru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*—mother and father are equal to God. Sri Rama

offered his entire life to uphold his father's word. Similarly, Naabhaka said, "My father is my true wealth" and went to his father. He told Naabhaka, "Dear father, as my brothers have told me, you are my real wealth."

His father replied, "Dear son, I have no property. But I will teach you a way to earn wealth. Sage Angirasa is performing a *Yagna*. No one else in the world is competent to perform this Yagna. Two mantras are required for successful completion of this Yagna. Rithwiks² have been conducting this Yagna for a long time because they do not know how to complete it. These two mantras are your real wealth. I will teach them to you. Go there and recite them."

Ever obedient, Naabhaka went to the Yagna. He approached Sage Angirasa and said, "I can recite the mantras that will complete your Yagna." He did so and the Yagna was completed successfully. Angirasa acknowledged Naabhaka's contribution and said, "Dear child, I'm leaving for *Vaikunta*³ now. Enjoy all the wealth collected for this ceremony."

After everyone departed, Naabhaka began gathering the wealth. A dark man approached and claimed authority over it. He said, "I'm Rudra.⁴ It is the Divine command that wealth left over from all yagnas belongs to me." Naabhaka said respectfully, "You have your right and I have mine. Let us find a third person to resolve our dispute."

They went to Nabhaka, who was a master of all scriptures. Nabhaka pondered the matter and judged not in favor of his son, but in Rudra's favor. Naabhaka fell at Rudra's feet and

sought pardon for his mistaken claim. Rudra admired Naabhaka's sense of justice, truthfulness and devotion to his father. Bestowing all the wealth on Naabhaka, Rudra said, "Son, the whole world is illumined by your virtues. I'm pleased with your ideal qualities. I have never met a student like you." Rudra blessed him that he would rule the kingdom for a long time and also gave him the most permanent wealth—*Atma Vidya*. Naabhaka was filled with Bliss. He went on to become the richest among kings of the Ikshvaku⁵ dynasty.

The story of Ambarisha

In due course, Naabhaka had a son called Ambarisha. The story of Ambarisha in the *Bhagavatham* is very sacred. Ambarisha was highly educated. He showered happiness on his subjects, considering them his children. To him, his subjects were parts of his body and the Lord was his heart. A king and his subjects are related to each other as the head is to the body, he believed.

Worldly experiences are dreams. Nothing is permanent. *Anityam Asukham Lokam*—the world is temporary and sorrowful.

Maata Naasti, Pita Naasti, Naasti Bandhu Sahodarah
Artham Naasti, Griham Naasti, Tasmaat Jaagrata Jaagrata
 Mother, father, brother, relatives, wealth, home
 —all are unreal. Therefore, beware, beware!

All relations are to do with the body. They are based on attachment, not on love. Attachment is bondage. Knowing this all too well, we still desire them and descend into bondage.

Ambarisha realized this very early in life. He decided that he wanted only the treasure of God's proximity and not worldly attachment.

Sages Vashishta and Gautama once instructed King Ambarisha to perform the *Aswamedha Yaga*.⁶ Many kings had performed the same yaga successfully but no one in any age had done it like Ambarisha. He conducted it magnificently, giving away cows, land, gold and other articles in charity, articles that people had never seen or heard of before. During the *Yagna*, Ambarisha forgot his kingdom and even his body. He concentrated only on Lord Narayana. At the end of the *Yagna*, Lord Narayana appeared and presented His personal weapon, *Sudarsana Chakra*, to Ambarisha.

What is meant by *Sudarsana*? In a worldly sense, it means a disc endowed with power. Spiritually, *Sudarsana* means "good sight"—the ability to see everything in its true light. Armed with this blessing of *Sudarsana*, Ambarisha was able to enjoy the world and surmount all difficulties in his life. He had no worries, sorrow or desires. He concentrated wholeheartedly on the Lord.

Sometime later, instructed by Sage Vashishta, Ambarisha performed the *Dvaadasi Vrata*, twelve-month vow. After observing certain disciplines for twelve months, Ambarisha was to fast on the day prior to the completion of the one year period. The fast was to be broken at a particular time the next day, just before the end of the year. And after partaking food himself, he was to feed his subjects as well. These were the stipulations of the vow.

Ambarisha was getting ready to break his fast on the last day. Sage Durvasa arrived unexpectedly. Ambarisha honored him. Durvasa said, "O King, no one has performed such a vow in the world. You will achieve great fame. Your kingdom will always experience peace and abundance." Ambarisha pleaded, "Swami, you must accept my hospitality today." Durvasa said, "With pleasure. But give me some time. I will go to the river, bathe and complete my daily prayers." So saying, Durvasa left for the river with his entourage.

Ambarisha started getting worried when Durvasa did not return even after a long time. Why? On the one hand, the etiquette of a host demanded that he could not eat before offering food to his guest. On the other hand, rules of the *Dvadasi Vrata* dictated that Ambarisha had to eat before the auspicious moment of the completion of one year, which had arrived. Ambarisha was as worried now, as he was peaceful during the vow. Vashishta suggested that he touch a few drops of Tulasi⁷ water to his lips to break his fast, assuring him that no fault would accrue to him by this act. Ambarisha obeyed Vashishta.

Durvasa returned after the auspicious moment. He divined Ambarisha's action. He said, "Ambarisha, you are blind with pride!" Ambarisha asked, "Honorable Sage, what is my fault?" Durvasa said, "How dare you act innocent! You invite me as a guest and then eat before you serve me! Is this not a violation of the principles of hospitality? I am a *Maharshi*,⁸ not an ordinary guest! To insult me is not expected of you!" Ambarisha claimed innocence, humbly but fearlessly. But Durvasa was adamant. He plucked one hair from his head and em-

powered it with a mantra. A terrible demoness appeared and lifted her sword to kill Ambarisha. In a flash, the *Sudarsana Chakra* appeared and put an end to the demoness. The Lord's weapon then turned on Sage Durvasa.

Durvasa fled. Sudarsana Chakra followed him through forests, rivers, deserts, plains, cities... everywhere. Durvasa ran and ran. Finally, he sought refuge in *Brahma Loka*, Lord Brahma's abode. Brahma told him, "I'm helpless. I cannot challenge Lord Narayana's power. I am the Lord's servant. You will gain nothing from me."

Durvasa then fled to *Kailasa*, Lord Shiva's home. Lord Sankara spoke similar words, "I have no right to oppose Narayana's Will. I cannot help you." Durvasa then ran to Lord Narayana Himself. The Lord said, "O Sage! Do you not see My helplessness? I may be all-powerful, but I cannot break one bond: The bond with devotees who have renounced everything for Me. I will always submit to My devotees. Ambarisha is one such devotee. He has renounced everything and he seeks Me alone. I cannot deny such surrender. The power of love (*prema shakthi*) of My devotees is greater than My own will power (*iccha shakthi*)! I cannot help you in the least. But I will suggest a solution. Seek the pardon of Ambarisha."

As advised by Lord Vishnu, Durvasa retraced his steps and fell at Ambarisha's feet. Durvasa's penance and powers were unsurpassed. Imagine, such a great sage falling at a king's feet! Ambarisha was surprised and embarrassed. He said, "O great sage! You are rich in penance and wisdom. Please do not fall at the feet of an ordinary man like me." Durvasa replied,

“In my pride I spoke harsh words to you. I made you suffer without recognizing your sincere devotion. Pardon me.” Ambarisha then prayed on Durvasa’s behalf, “O Lord Vishnu, You are the embodiment of Love and Compassion. You are all-knowing and omnipotent. Please forgive the sage’s faults.” Only then the *Sudarsana Chakra* stopped pursuing the sage.

The Lord is a servant

What is the inner significance of this story? The Lord is a servant of His devotees. He is the final authority everywhere, except in the presence of His devotee! The Lord’s powers are benign to His devotees and devastating to wicked people. Hanuman’s life signified the same idea. Hanuman was humble in front of Rama but bold and terrible to Ravana. Virtue, faultless behavior, renunciation—all these are merely facets of devotion.

Ambarisha was an emperor not just of his kingdom, but in the kingdom of devotion as well. Even Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva had to bow to his devotion! The efficacy of devotion is *Avaang Maanasa Gocharam*—beyond thought and word. In this Kali age, people do not understand devotion. They think devotion is limited to worship, *bhajans*, and vows. God’s Form should be imprinted in your heart like words on paper! There should be no separation, no distinction between you and God. Such intense faith is rare today. Ambarisha’s eyes only saw Narayana, his ears heard only the Lord’s Name, his feet approached only the Lord and his hands were ever engaged in worship. Divine brilliance flowed through all his senses.

Nabhaka, Naabhaka, and Ambarisha—grandfather, father and son—all three were highly educated. What education

did they have? Not worldly education, but *Atma Vidya!*⁹ Krishna said: *Aadhyatmika Vidya Vidyaanaam*—true knowledge is knowledge of the Self. The different kinds of worldly knowledge are small trickles which merge into the ocean of *Atma Vidya. Nadeenaam Saagaro Gatih*—all rivers are destined for the ocean. It is only because he pursued spiritual knowledge hand-in-hand with worldly knowledge that Ambarisha became worthy of the Lord’s protection. He was able to subdue the curse of a sage. A curse given by a sage is normally irrevocable. But Ambarisha was able to humble even a sage of Durvasa’s stature!

Nothing in the world comes close to the power of devotion. But fools are blind to it. Truly, one who recognizes the potency of devotion cannot stay aloof from the path even for a moment. Even nectar may have traces of bitterness but the principle of devotion is sweetness, sweetness, sweetness. *Premaamritam*—the nectar of devotion—is the limit of sweetness. Such *premaamritam* is present only between God and devotees. All other relations are based on attachment. Love and attachment are poles apart. People tell Swami, “I love you, I love you, I love you.” What is love? They don’t know.

Service

Chatterji just spoke about “help.” Students have no idea even what “help” means. They just repeat phrases like “Help Ever, Hurt Never.” Help means to render assistance. But what kind of help, where, to whom and how? We must understand this well. That is why the *Bhagavatham* says: Charity must be based on eligibility. Do not help anyone, anytime,

anywhere. Before acting you must assess, “To whom am I rendering help and how? What would be the result of my action?” You can’t give a knife to a wicked man, or a gold cup to a child. There must be deservedness in help. Otherwise, help can turn into harm. When should you help? When you watch someone suffering, feel it in your heart. Feel their pain and serve when your heart melts. Meaning, offer help to that cause which melts your heart. When many people can be benefited, you may definitely help. Help is not just to individuals. It should be related to society and even to the world.

This morning, Ashok Singhal talked about the importance of service. What is service? People say it means doing “good work.” Do not think of *seva* as “good work”. Even the attitude “I am doing good to others” is not positive. The right attitude is to see it as “God’s work”! True *seva* is to consider all your actions as God’s work.

Na Tapaamsi Na Teerthaanaam.

Na Saastra Na Japaanahi.

Samsaara Saagaroddhaare.

Sajjanam Sevanam Vina.

Not by penance or pilgrimage,

Nor by study of scriptures or repetition of God’s
name,

But the ocean of birth and death can be crossed only by
Serving the pious and the needy.

Help pious and needy people alone. If a man is beating another man, will you help him in that act? Always discriminate before jumping to help. Someone asks you for money.

You must ask him why he wants money. If he says he is hungry, give him food, not money. His real need is food. If he insists on money, such a person should not be helped. If he is cold, give warm clothes. If he is ill, give medicine. But don't give money. Why? He will spend it on liquor, go home and drown himself and his family in misery. By giving money you have not helped him, but hurt him! So, always inquire whom you should help, when, where and how. This is true seva.

People think, "I am the giver, he is the recipient." This is not seva. Once upon a time a man resolved to perform seva. He told himself, "I am a servant. That is why I serve." The Divinity present in servitude is not present in authority. He prayed:

*Daasaanudaasudanu Kaavalenu Ra,
Daasulaku Sevane Cheyavale Ra.*

O Lord! Let me be the servant of Your servant.
Let me be busy serving Your servants.

What is the meaning? The goal of service is to subdue egoism. The egoist can never serve and the real servant is egoless. Proceed into service with such an outlook. There is nothing greater than service. We should develop humility. Authority and power do not stay forever. Wealth can vanish any moment. But virtues are permanent.

When Hanuman entered Lanka, all the demons were intrigued by his appearance. They had never seen a monkey before. Why? Recall that Lanka was surrounded by the sea on all sides, and what monkey can cross the ocean? While they gaped

at Hanuman with surprise, he laughed and played impish pranks. Then a demon questioned, “Hey, who are you?” The answer came: “*Daasoham Kosa-lendrasya*”—“You ask who I am? I am the servant of Rama.” Hanuman did not say, “I am the virtuous, strong and devoted son of the Wind God” and so on. It is because of his humility that Hanuman always succeeded in the tasks allotted to him by Rama. To fulfill God’s commands, first we must render our ego powerless. We should express humility. Not merely express it, but practice it.

People think, “I am so educated, so intelligent, so influential.” How long do authority and power last? With retirement, your influence vanishes like snow on a summer day! The world has seen kings and rulers, each greater than the other. Many emperors ruled over India. Where are they today? Wealth and authority are transient, but virtues are lasting. It has been eons since Ambarisha died. But the glories of his character are sung the world over till this day. Therefore, we become worthy of immortal fame when we shine in virtue. Worldly joys are “passing clouds”. Ambarisha recognized this truth. Nothing in this world grants happiness or peace. Happiness and peace are unique to God’s proximity alone. The King of Tanjavur wanted to present wealth to Thyagaraja. Thyagaraja sang:

Nidhi chaala sukhamaa, Isvara sannidhi chaala sukhamama? Nijamuga Telupumu Manasa!

O mind, what grants happiness—wealth (*nidhi*) or proximity to God (*Isvara sannidhi*)?

As long as worldly joys are around, you may experience them. It is not possible to renounce them entirely. But for God we should be ready to give up everything! “Less luggage, more comfort.” Reduce responsibilities and desires gradually. Desires are the greatest thieves and cheats. Desires are the root cause of restlessness. Sacrifice is the basis for peace. Every man must encourage pure feelings and sacrifice in his heart if he desires Divinity. Even if you have no devotion, that is okay. Your pure feelings are your devotion.

There are many meanings given to the word “help”. We should not use this word carelessly. True help should include the society and permeate your thoughts, words, sight, hearing and hands. Help rendered with unity of thought, word and deed (*trikarana suddhi*) is true service. Help means love and compassion guiding your hands.

There was an old woman full of sacrifice and kindness. During the rainy season, the cool breeze made nights very cold. In the evenings she would go along the streets with a bundle of blankets. Many homeless people slept on the footpath. She would cover each of them with a blanket. Gradually the townsfolk came to know of this daily ritual. “What humility and sacrifice she has! Is there anyone in the world doing more service than her?” they thought. When everybody praised her in this manner, she used to veil her head and walk away.

One boy asked her, “Grandma! Why don’t you hold your head high for this wonderful *seva*?” She said, “Son, I’m not helping anyone.” The boy said, “But aren’t you donating blankets to the shivering street people every day?” She said,

“Son, God has given us two hands. Compared to what He does, all our work is trivial. And I’m using only one hand to distribute the blankets. I feel ashamed for not using the other hand. I can hold my head high only when God blesses me with opportunities to serve with both my hands.”

There are many fools in the world who do not sacrifice despite being rich. They go to the market with loose change in their pockets, not currency notes. They give a few coins to each beggar they encounter. Another example. I went to Bombay a few days ago. From Bombay, we had to drive to a nearby town. On the way we stopped at a red light. Many beggars surrounded the car. I noticed one woman carrying a baby and felt very pained. But I do not even have a pocket, what to talk of money! I told Indulal Shah, “You give her something.” He gave one rupee from his pocket. Do you know what that lady did? She tossed it back into the car saying, “You cannot get anything with one rupee today, Sir. You can keep it!”

Even five rupees are not much to beggars today. In such a situation, will a few coins do any good? Some people are so stingy that even the coins they donate are counterfeit! No, no. Where did you get all your money? We see big industrialists, rich beyond the common man’s imagination. How did they get rich? The money was earned with the assistance of the middle class, the laborers, the officers. When you know that everyone is responsible for your prosperity, you must sacrifice for their sake. In the Kali Yuga, riches only increase pride instead of evoking sacrifice in people. *Na Karmana Na Prajaya Dhanena Tyaagenaike Amritatvamaanashu*—not by rituals, children, or

wealth, but only by sacrifice is immortality attained. Keep what you need and share the rest.

Hastasya Bhooshanam Daanam.

Sathyam Kanttasya Bhooshanam.

Charity is the ornament for the hand.

Truth is the ornament for the throat.

What ornaments do you desire? Gold? Diamonds? No, no. What other decorations do we need besides charity, truth and the Lord's Name? This is true sacrifice.

Desire God alone

Therefore, all of you should promote unity based on the *Atma*, contemplate on Divinity and do actions beneficial to the common good. How can you call yourself a human without following human values? Today's dire need are human values, human values.

How can we make human values grow? A seed grows into a plant when embedded in fertile soil. Will it germinate in a tin? No. Similarly, the seed of human values can grow only in the soil of spirituality. Without this fertile and enduring soil of spirituality, humanness cannot be strengthened. The heart filled with Love for God is like nutritious soil. Sow your seed in such a heart.

Look at Ambarisha. Despite his vast knowledge, wealth and powers, he renounced worldly joys: "I want only God, nothing else. He alone is my goal." Keep God as your goal. Today's students change their ambitions a hundred times a day!

No, no. Till your last breath your goal should not change. Even if you encounter a hundred troubles, face and overcome them. Do not let them deter you. That is the quality of a true human. Look how Ambarisha suffered. Durvasa's curse caused him much hardship. But his one-pointed mind and steady vision bore him through everything.

A one-pointed mind and steady vision—these two are the touchstones of devotion that every devotee must acquire. Our vision must focus only on the Lord. Our mind must meditate only on God. The sole motivation for all our actions must be to earn God's Love (*Bhagavat preetyartham*).

Seek knowledge in student years

Students! Fill your hearts with such pure feelings. Yes, you are filling yourselves. But with what? With absurd novels, TV, radio and videos. It is not even enough to fill your hearts. Translate into action! That is the mark of a true student. Seekers of knowledge (*vidyarthi*) should not turn into seekers of worldly joy (*vishayarthi*).

Desire only knowledge as long as you are a student. After completing education, you may desire money. Ambarisha did not care for anything as long as he pursued knowledge. He entered the kingdom only after completing his education. That is how he was able to serve his subjects. He initiated projects of public welfare, won his people's love and even attained the Vision of God.

All work is God work

Ambarisha achieved Divinity, the Grace of God. Students! You may not win or be eligible for anything, but earn Divine Grace. That is enough. Earn God's Grace first and you can achieve whatever you wish. Thyagaraja sang, "Rama, all I need is your grace (*anugraha*). Then the nine celestial powers (*nava grahas*) will submit to me." You may study great subjects, get coveted jobs and earn wealth, but nothing is of value unless you earn God's Grace.

A student in Varanasi had no job. He approached the municipality. They told him, "Son! Jobs are scarce today. But there is nobody to light the oil lamps on the streets. You can do that if you wish." The poor boy said, "I am ready for any job, Sir." So he would clean each lamp at dusk, fill it with oil and light it. He did everything as an act of service. As he cleaned each glass frame he thought, "Rama, this is my service to You." He visualized that He was cleaning Rama's Feet with each rub. As a result, his lamps were immaculate and glowed brighter than all others. The municipal officers recognized this and summoned him, "Son! Your lights are burning as brightly as your pure, sacred heart." The boy did not care for recognition. He did it out of his enthusiasm, for his own satisfaction.

Today's service is pomp. They take a broom in their hands and call the photographer, "Hey, take a photo of me doing service!" This is for others, not for yourself, not for the *Atma*. That which gives you unalloyed happiness and increases your enthusiasm is true service. Service makes you forget yourself.

Students! The *Bhagavatham* has many examples of devotees with full hearts. Recognize their characters, hold them as ideals in your mind and emulate them. This is the *Kali Yuga*. A more suitable name is *Kalaha Yuga*, Era of quarrels! There are fights even for small matters. In the midst of conflict, develop hearts of purity and serve your country. Recognize that you are serving only yourself, not anyone else. The same God is in everyone. Your ego will recede as your attitude of service strengthens. When you engage in service with such divine feelings, our country will shine brightly with purity and prosperity.

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1. Ancient Indian hermitage-school, where students of all back-grounds lived as equals with a guru and acquired secular and spiritual education.
 2. Chanters of *Vedic* mantras.
 3. Abode of Lord Vishnu.
 4. A form of Lord Shiva.
 5. A dynasty of great kings of ancient India.
 6. "Horse Sacrifice." *Vedic* ceremony performed by kings seeking to establish supremacy over other kings. In a spiritual sense, Swami says, the body of a horse constantly twitches—symbolic of restlessness of the mind. This rite is to attain steadiness of mind.
 7. Basil plant, sacred to Hindus.