

CHAPTER TWENTYSIX

*The Greatness of Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Gayā:
Jānaśruti Attains Perfect Knowledge*

Śrī Sūta said:

1-5. After taking the holy ablution in Śaṅkhatīrtha, O excellent Brāhmaṇas, the man should proceed to Yumunā, Gaṅgā and Gayā in the due order.¹

The great Tīrtha named Yamunā, the excellent Gaṅgātīrtha and Gayātīrtha are destructive of great sins. These three Tīrthas are meritorious and well-known in all the worlds. They suppress all obstacles and destroy all ailments. These three Tīrthas are indeed annihilators of all ignorance. When Avidyā (Māyā, ignorance) is (thus) destroyed, they bestow perfect knowledge on men.

Jānaśruti², a great king, took his holy bath in all these Tīrthas formerly and obtained excellent and perfect knowledge from Raikva, an excellent Brāhmaṇa.

The sages asked:

6-7. O Sūta conversant with all topics, O disciple of Vyāsa, O highly intelligent one, how (and why) did the three Tīrthas famous as Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Gayā come to Mount Gandhamādana? How did Jānaśruti, the saintly king, attain perfect knowledge by taking the holy bath in all the three Tīrthas? How did he get the knowledge from Raikva? O Sūta, narrate this to us.

1. These three Tīrthas are three wells in the second north Prākāram in the temple premises.

2. Jānaśruti Pautrāyṇa is an ancient king mentioned in *Chāndogya Up* 4.1.1, 5; 4.2.1, 3. The king offered to Sayugvā Raikva 600 and 1000 cows for imparting spiritual knowledge (*Ibid* 4.2.2 and 4). It is doubtful whether the Upaniṣadic Raikva was a Brāhmaṇa at all. This Purāna states that he was a lame Brāhmaṇa sage who had to use a cart for movement from place to place. He is called *Savugvan* due to his dependence on a cart for movement (vv 8-14). The Upaniṣadic reference to Raikva's being afflicted with scabs and scratching them also is used here to confirm his identity with the Raikva of this Purāna.

The only difference is the non-mention of his stay at Gandhamadana and the appearance of these three Tīrthas for him in the Upaniṣad.

Śrī Sūta said:

8-14. Formerly there lived on Gandhamādana a great sage named Raikva. He was a storehouse of penance. He lived there engaged in very severe penance. That great sage Raikva continued the penance for a long time. By the great power of penance, he obtained a long life.

The great sage named Raikva was lame ever since his birth. Since he was lame, he was incapable of going to Tīrthas. This sage used to move about by means of a cart to all those Tīrthas which were on Gandhamādana, because of their proximity.

Since Raikva, the excellent sage, had a *Yugvā* (a cart) always, that ascetic came to be called *Sayugvā* by Vedic scholars in the world. A cart is spoken of by the word *Yugvā*. He was always (seen) with a cart. It was thus that the excellent sage came to be named *Sayugvā*. Endowed with full knowledge, the sage performed penance of the Gandhamādana mountain.

15. During summer he remained in the midst of five fires and performed the great penance. During rainy season he stayed under neck-deep water.

16. As his body was dried up due to the penance, he had (developed) scabies on the skin which the eminent sage used to scratch day and night.

17-21. Even as he continued to scratch the scab, the sage did not cease to perform his penance. It once occurred to the mind of the sage *Sayugvā*: 'Now itself I must have my holy bath in the three Tīrthas of great merit, namely Yamunā, Gaṅgā and Gayā.'

After thinking thus the sage had another worry: 'I am lame from the very birth. Hence the holy bath (in them) will be impossible to have. It is impossible for me to go very far in my cart. What shall I do then?'

Having pondered thus, that highly intelligent sage decided what he should do in order to take the holy bath in all the three Tīrthas: 'I have unbearable and unassailable power of penance. Thereby I shall invoke those three Tīrthas to this spot.'

22-25. After resolving thus mentally, he sat facing the East. With all the organs under control, he performed the *Ācamana* rite thrice. Then *Sayugvā* earnestly meditated for a short while. By the power of his Mantras, Yamunā, the great river, Gaṅgā, the daughter of Jahnu, and Gayā, the destroyer of sins—all the three broke the ground and rose up suddenly from the nether worlds. Assuming

human forms, they joyously approached Sayugvā and spoke to the sage giving delight to him:

26-28. “O Sayugvā Raikva, welfare unto you. Desist from this meditation. Drawn by your Mantra, we have come here. What should be done by us for you? O eminent sage, speak it out to us.”

On hearing their words, Sayugvā, the great sage, refrained from his meditation. He saw them standing in front of him. After honouring them duly, Raikva spoke these words:

29-36a. “O Goddess Yamunā, O Goddess Gangā, O Gayā, the destroyer of sins, always be present near me on the Gandhamādana mountain. The places from where you emerged should be meritorious Tīrthas known after your names.”

They said “So be it” and vanished suddenly. The places where they vanished thus, have become three holy Tīrthas. They are always praised by the people and addressed by their respective names.

The place where Yamunā pierced the ground and came out then is called *Yamunā Tīrtha* by the people. The chasm in the earth through which Gaṅgā gushed out suddenly, is well-known in the world as *Gaṅgā Tīrtha*. It is destructive of sins. The cavity in the ground through which Gayā came out in human guise, is called *Gayā Tīrtha*. Thus these three excellent Tīrthas are excessively meritorious.

They suddenly rose out of the earth, due to the power of the Mantra of Raikva.

36b-42. The excellent men who take holy bath in all these three Tīrthas shall get their *Ajñāna* (Ignorance) destroyed. Their perfect knowledge will increase.

The sage spent his time regularly taking his holy bath in the three Tīrthas invoked through his own Mantra.

At the time, there was a great king named Jānaśruti. He was the grandson of a saintly king named Putra. He was very much devoted to holy rites and pious activities. He gave foodstuffs and other things to suppliants with great faith and sincerity. Hence people in the world called him *Śraddhādeya*.

Since the king had ample *Vākya* (instructions?) in the abode for the propitiation of hungry people who sought food, he was called by all those suppliants *Bahuvākya*.

That king was *Pautrāyana* (belonging to the family of Putra).

He was powerful. He was the son of Janaśruta. He was *Priyātithi* ('fond of guests'). He was also *Bahudāyī* ('one who gives liberally').

43-45. In all the cities, countries, villages, parks, all the quadrangles and in the highways, he made arrangements for various articles of hospitality along with much foodstuff and many kinds of beverages, pulses, vegetables, etc. for propitiating the people who sought the same. In the different places where the people gathered together, he announced thus: "O suppliants, make use of the foodstuffs and beverages."

46. The king's good qualities became well-known everywhere as he was fond of guests, as he gave much to the suppliants and was fond of making gifts.

47. When the king belonging to the family of Putra stayed thus with his good qualities, Devas and sages of great fortune desired for his blessings.

48-49. During the night in summer season they assumed the forms of swans, formed beautiful rows and flew swiftly along the ethereal path above the king who was seated at a window of his mansion.

50-54. As those swans flew swiftly a certain swan that had been flying in the rear of them all, addressed the swan that was at the head. Even as the king heard everything, he (the swan) spoke these words sarcastically: "O Bhallākṣa, O Bhallākṣa, O swan that goes at the head of all, the king, the son of Janaśruta, is seated in front of you in his mansion. He is worthy of being worshipped. Don't you see like a blind one? His refulgence is inviolable (and hence dreadful). It resembles infinite number of Suns. It blazes in front everywhere right from the abode of Brahmā. Do not fly so swiftly away from and above that saintly king bypassing him thus. If you do so, his refulgence will burn you up."

55-58a. As the swan spoke thus, the swan at the head replied: "Oh! You have great understanding and are worthy of being praised by poets.

Why then do you praise this cheat who is not at all worthy of being praised? Why do you praise this worthless person?

He merely breathes like an animal or like a bellows. This king does not know the secret of Dharma as the excellent Brāhmaṇa Sayugvā Raikva, the knower of truth, knows.

58b-63. The secret of the great splendour of Raikva (cannot be comprehended) even by Devas. No other living being has such

a brilliance as his. No limit can be set to the mass of the merits of Raikva.

The dust particles on the ground can be counted. The stars in the firmament can also be counted. But the mass of the merits of Raikva as huge as Meru, cannot be estimated. Further let these transient Dharmas of that sage be (kept aside). The knowledge of Brahman that the sage possesses makes him praiseworthy. Jānaśruti has no such Dharma. How great is the glory of that knowledge which is difficult to be obtained by even leading Yogins! Why do you leave him off (i.e. ignore him) and praise this wretched man of evil soul? Let that sage, Sayugvā Raikva, alone be praised by you.

64-68a. That eminent sage is congenitally lame. He was desirous of taking his holy bath. Hence with his Mantra he invoked Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Gayā and brought them to the vicinity of his hermitage. In the mass of Dharmas of that great sage Raikva (which is so great) all the Dharmas of the beings present within the three worlds get included. But the extensive Dharmas of Raikva cannot come within the fold of the Dharmas of the living beings present in all the three worlds."

When the swan going in front stopped after speaking thus the prominent sages in the form of swans proceeded towards the world of Brahmā.

68b-75a. On hearing Raikva (praised) to the highest level and to the greatest extent, King Jānaśruti, the grandson of Putra, the suppressor of enemies, became excessively distressed like a pitiable wretch defeated at a game of dice. Heaving deep sighs repeatedly the king began to think thus: 'That swan who lauded (the superiority of) Raikva said that I am mean and lowly. Wonderful indeed is the greatness of Raikva whom even the birds praise. So I shall renounce the worldly affairs and the entire kingdom now and seek refuge in that noble-souled Sayugvā. Raikva is a storehouse of mercy. He will accept me when I seek refuge in him and will instruct me in the spiritual knowledge of the Ātman.'

Thinking thus, O Brāhmaṇas, and remaining awake, he spent (the remaining part of) that terrible night with great difficulty. When the night came to a close, he heard the auspicious sounds of the songs sung by the bards and the musical instruments played by them.

75b-80. On hearing it, the great king summoned his charioteer

before leaving his bed. To him he spoke these words in all earnestness: "O my charioteer, take the chariot and hasten to search for the eminent Yogin named Raikva. He is lame and is (always) seated in a cart. He is the sole refuge of all holy Dharmas. Search for him in the hermitages of great sages, in holy forests, in desolate regions, in the residential areas of good noble men, on the shores and banks of the Tīrthas and rivers and in all other places where great sages are (usually) present. Search for Sayugvā, the abode of the perfect knowledge of Brahman. After searching for him, O charioteer, come back to me as quickly as possible (after knowing his whereabouts) to delight me."

81-86. He said, "So it shall be", and set out seated in a very fast chariot. He searched for Sage Raikva, the knower of Brahman, everywhere.

He searched for him in the caves of mountains and the hermitages of sages. In the course of his search, he wandered over the entire earth. After searching in different countries with great haste, he, in due course, came to Gandhamādāna where many great sages had gathered together. He searched for him there too and saw the great sage scratching his scabies seated in his cart. He was in continuous meditation of the non-dual Brahman without divisions and parts. On seeing the great sage Sayugvā, he thought, 'This must be Raikva', and approached him. He humbly bowed down to the sage, sat near him and asked him:

87-91. "O holy lord, are you (the Sage) Sayugvā named Raikva?"¹ On hearing his words the sage replied: "I surely am Sayugvā named Raikva." He heard the words of the sage. Through various gestures, he understood that the sage wished for some money to meet the expenses of maintaining the family. After returning from Gandhamādāna, he intimated everything to the king.

After hearing the words of the charioteer with great respect, the king took with him six hundred cows, a *Bhāra* of gold coins and a chariot fitted with a mule. Taking all these with him, King Jānaśruti, the saintly king belonging to the family of Putra, proceeded towards (the abode of) Raikva. After going there, that king spoke these words to Raikva:

¹ The episode and the conversation recorded in the *Chāndogya Up* 4.1.8, etc. is echoed here. the only difference is that the spiritual knowledge imparted in the *Upaniṣad* is not reproduced here.

92-95. "O holy lord Raikva, O Sayugvā, let what is offered by me be accepted. Accept from me six hundred cows, a *Bhāra* of gold coins and a chariot fitted with a mule. After accepting these, O holy Brāhmaṇa, train and instruct me. Let the perfect knowledge of the non-dual Brahman be imparted to me."

On hearing these enthusiastic and excited words of his, Sayugvā Raikva replied to Jānaśruti, the suppressor of foes:

Raikva said:

96-98. Let these cows be with you alone. So also the *Bhāra* of gold coins and the chariot. Of what avail to me is this small quantity (of wealth, etc.), for I am one who remains alive for many Kalpas? This is not adequate for me to maintain the family. Even if you were to give me hundred times this present, O eminent king, that will not be enough for the maintenance of my family.

On hearing, these words of Raikva, Jānaśruti replied:

Jānaśruti said:

99-100. These cows, ready cash and the chariot are not intended to be the price of the perfect knowledge of Brahman, O sage, to be imparted by you. You may or may not accept these cows, etc. from me. But, O Brāhmaṇa, do impart to me the perfect knowledge of the undivided (indivisible) non-dual Brahman.

On hearing these words of his Sayugvā spoke these words:

Raikva said:

101-105a. Only that person is fit to have the instruction (in spiritual knowledge) who is completely detached from worldly affairs and whose merits and demerits that began to yield results have exhausted. Although you are completely indifferent to worldly affairs, the merits and sins have not completely ceased. The mass of merits and sins is the cause of rebirth. Usually they are not destroyed, O king, unless their results are experienced. Still, I shall tell you the means of destroying them, since you have sought refuge in me. Listen with concentration and mental purity.

105b-109. There are three Tīrthas here that bestow what is desired. They are destructive of all *Prārabdhas* (i.e. merits and sins

that have begun to yield results) of all those who are desirous of salvation. This is Yamunā-tīrtha; this is Gaṅgā-tīrtha, and this is Gayā-tīrtha. So take your holy bath in these. Do not delay. All the *Prārabdhas* will perish. There is no doubt about it. Thereby, you shall become pure in mind and I shall impart knowledge unto you.

When this was spoken by sage Raikva, the king was delighted very much. His eyes beamed with pleasure like lotuses in full bloom. He entered the three Tīrthas with great excitement and took his holy bath in them. Merely by taking his holy bath in those Tīrthas, the king obtained the purity of mind.

110-113. That king served Sayugvā as his preceptor. Raikva, the sage Sayugvā, mercifully imparted perfect knowledge to Jānaśruti, the perfect knowledge that is difficult to have even by eminent sages.

The moment the perfect knowledge in the form of Brahman was imparted by him, the excellent king had uncontradicted experience (of Brahman). With the favour of Raikva, the Yogin, he attained the form of Brahman. The whole world in (the form of various objects) such as pot, wall, granary, etc. did not appear before him. He pierced through (the veil of) Māyā and became the Sole Brahman.

114-116. It is wonderful that King Jānaśruti attained the form of Brahman difficult of access even unto great Yogins by taking his holy bath in the three Tīrthas.

Thus, O Brāhmaṇas, the glory of those three Tīrthas has been recounted to you all.

He who reads this chapter on the glory of the three Tīrthas, shall pierce through the darkness of ignorance and attain Brahman.