

of Indra, could not accept the invitation and Nimi had to return disappointed. At this he got angry, sought the help of Śatānanda, the son of the great hermit Gautama and the sacrifice was begun. Vasiṣṭha did not like this. He cursed Nimi that life might be separated from his body. Nimi retorted with the same curse. Vasiṣṭha's spirit separated itself from his body and began to roam about in the sky. At last he requested Brahmā to provide him with a body. Brahmā granted his wish and said that he would be born again from Mitra and Varuṇa.

When the spirit of Vasiṣṭha returned to the earth it was Mitra and Varuṇa moving about, having only one body for both. Vasiṣṭha's spirit entered into that body. One day Mitra-Varuṇa happened to see the celestial beauty, Urvaśī on the seashore. They embraced Urvaśī and immediately the spirit of Vasiṣṭha entered the body of Urvaśī.

After this Mitra and Varuṇa separated themselves from one another and assumed two different bodies. Varuṇa approached Urvaśī with lustful desire, but rejecting him Urvaśī accepted Mitra. Varuṇa had seminal flow and this semen was taken and kept in a pot. At the sight of this, remorse and passion arose in Urvaśī and the semen of Mitra already received in her womb oozed out and fell on the ground. This also was collected and kept in the same pot along with that of Varuṇa. After a few days the pot broke open by itself and two babies came out. One was Agastya and the other Vasiṣṭha. As these two were born of the semen of Mitra and Varuṇa, they came to be known as Maitravaruṇis later. This story partly occurs in Śānti Parva of Mahābhārata, Verse 343 of Chapter 88.

3) *Education*. Very little is mentioned in the Purāṇas about the education of Agastya. Still there are ample proofs that he was well-versed in the Vedas and sciences and well skilled in the uses of diverse weapons. In Verse 9, Chapter 139 of Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Droṇa says to Arjuna as follows:

"Agniveśa, my teacher was the disciple of Agastya, in the art of using bows and arrows and I am his disciple". When it is said that even Agniveśa the teacher of Droṇa was a disciple of Agastya, his proficiency in the art of using weapons could easily be discerned.

4) *Marriage*. There is an interesting story behind the marriage of such an austere man as Agastya, who had brought all the passions under control. As the hermit Agastya was walking along the forest, he saw his ancestors (Pitṛs) hanging head downwards in a canyon. He wanted to know the reason and they replied: "Child; we would be allowed to enter heaven only if sons are born to you. So get married as soon as possible". The necessity of marriage occurred to him only then. But will there be any woman who could be patient enough to become the wife of this bearded dwarfish hermit? Agastya did not lose heart. At that time the King of Vidarbha was doing penance to obtain a son. Agastya collected the quintessence of all living beings, with which he created an extremely beautiful lady and named her Lopāmudrā. Agastya gave Lopāmudrā as daughter to the King of Vidarbha. The King who was delighted at getting such a daughter, employed hundreds of maids to look after the child, who soon grew up to be a young lady. Agastya once approached the King of Vidarbha

and expressed his wish to have Lopāmudrā as his wife. The King was in a dilemma. On the one hand he did not like his beautiful daughter having the brightness of fire, to be given as wife to the hermit, clad in the bark of trees and wearing tufts of matted hair. On the other hand he was afraid of the curse of the hermit Agastya. As the King was trying hard to find a solution, Lopāmudrā herself came to the King and said "Father, I am happy to say that I shall willingly become the wife of the hermit Agastya." At last her father consented and discarding royal garments and ornaments, Lopāmudrā accompanied Agastya. It is mentioned in Vana Parva, Chapter 130, Verse 5, that they were married at Mahāsindhutīrtha. After their marriage they went to Gaṅgādvāra. (Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 96).

5) *The story of how Agastya ate Vātāpi*. While Agastya was doing severe penance, Lopāmudrā attained puberty and had menstruation. Longing for a child, she went and stood beside Agastya. She expressed her wish to lead a family life. Her demands did not stop there. During conjugation, Agastya should wear flower garlands and ornaments, and she must be provided with divine ornaments. Agastya was surprised at the enormity of her demands. Poor, penniless Agastya! Leaving Lopāmudrā in the hermitage he went in search of money. He at first approached King Śrutarvā, who produced accounts of his income and expenditure and convinced Agastya that he was having no balance at all. Agastya, accompanied by Śrutarvā, then proceeded to King Bradhnāśva. He also produced accounts and refused to help Agastya, who then followed by Śrutarvā and Bradhnāśva went on to the wealthy King Trasadasyu, who also producing his accounts refused to render any help to Agastya. Finally Agastya accompanied by the three Kings, went to the house of Ilvala, a noble asura of immense wealth.

This asura Ilvala lived in Manimatpattana with his younger brother Vātāpi. Once Ilvala approached a hermit Brahmin and requested that his wish for a son, having the power and status of Indra, be granted. The Brahmin refused to grant such a boon. Since then Ilvala and Vātāpi considered Brahmins as their enemies. The elder brother converted the younger one (Vātāpi) into a goat and whenever a Brahmin visited his house, he would kill the goat, prepare mutton dishes and set them before his guest. When he had finished eating, Ilvala would call aloud. "Vātāpi, come out". Breaking the stomach of the guest open, Vātāpi would come out. In this way Ilvala had killed a good number of Brāhmins. It was at this juncture that Agastya and the Kings came to beg money of him.

Ilvala welcomed the guests with hospitality and as usual killed the goat, prepared food with it and served the food before Agastya. When Agastya had finished eating, Ilvala called Vātāpi loudly. But Agastya slowly said, "Vātāpi, jīṃo bhava" (Let Vātāpi be digested) and immediately Vātāpi was digested in the stomach of Agastya. The awe-stricken asura Ilvala gave each Brahmin ten thousand cows and as much gold and to Agastya he doubled the quantity of alms. Over and above this, he presented Agastya with a chariot hitched with two fine horses called Virāvān and