

not extricate himself from the hold of the snake, who eventually informed Bhīma of its previous history. When Bhīma understood that the serpent was none other than Nahuṣa, a King of the Sūrya dynasty (Solar), he felt sorry for him. Dharmaputra, who came there in search of Bhīma, talked with Nahuṣa, who immediately regained his original form and went to heaven. (Mahābhārata, Chapter 17 of Udyoga Parva; Chapter 179 of Vana Parva; Chapter 342 of Śānti Parva).

9) *How Agastya drank up the ocean.* Indra ruthlessly killed Vṛttrāsura, who had been harassing the Gods, with the help of the Kālakeyas. The frightened Kālakeyas got into the ocean and hid themselves at the bottom. From that hideout they decided to destroy the three worlds. At night they came out on the earth and ate a good deal of Brahmins, and caused much damage to the hermitages of Vasiṣṭha and Cyavana. All the Brahmins on the earth were terribly afraid of the Kālakeyas. The gods went to Viṣṇu and prayed for protection. Viṣṇu informed them that the Kālakeyas could not be caught unless the ocean was dried up, and this task could be performed only by Agastya. So the Gods approached Agastya and told him what Viṣṇu had informed them. With pleasure Agastya accepted the job. Accompanied by the Gods and hermits he neared the swaying and surging ocean. While all were watching unwinkingly Agastya brought the great ocean into his palm and drank it up very easily and subsequently the Kālakeyas were killed. Now the Gods again approached Viṣṇu and made representation about the loss of the ocean. Viṣṇu told them that by the penance of Bhagiratha the divine Gaṅgā would fall into the earth and then the ocean will be filled. In this way the earth regained its lost ocean. (Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapters 101 to 105).

10) *Agastya cursing Kubera and his companion.* In the course of their sojourn in forest, the Pāṇḍavas visited several holy places and reached the proximity of the Himālayas. Leaving his brothers behind, Arjuna went up the Mahāmeru to worship Śiva. Years passed by. At last his brothers also started for the Mahāmeru in search of Arjuna and with the help of the hermits Vṛṣaparvā and Ārṣṭiṣeṇa, they reached Kuberapuri (the capital of Kubera). There Bhīma destroyed the army of Kubera and killed Maṇimān, his friend and favourite. Dharmaputra, repenting of his younger brother's iniquity bowed before Kubera and asked him with politeness, why the power of Gods gave way to the power of man. Kubera replied that it was due to the curse of Agastya and began to depict the event thus : Once my friend Maṇimān and myself were going, in a chariot, to be present at the singing and chanting just begun at Kuśavatī. At that time Agastya was standing in his hermitage on the bank of Kālindī, performing Sun worship. When Maṇimān saw this from the sky, he spat on the head of Agastya, who instantly getting wild cursed me. "Lo, Kubera, your friend Maṇimān spat on my head in your sight. So this Maṇimān and your army will meet with death at a man's hand. When they die you should not feel sorry for them. If it becomes possible for you to meet the man who killed Maṇimān you will be liberated from the curse."

It is this curse that brought about the death of Maṇimān and the army. When Kubera saw Bhīma face to face his curse was revoked. (Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 160).

11) *Agastya cursing Mārīca and Tāḍakā.* The boys Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went to the forest with Viśvāmitra for protecting sacrifice. When they entered the Tāḍakā forest Viśvāmitra told them the story of Tāḍakā thus:—

Tāḍakā is the daughter of Suketu, a semi god of the tribe Yakṣa. Being childless for a long time Suketu was miserable and began to do penance before Brahmā, who blessed him and granted his wish and a daughter was born to him. This daughter was named Tāḍakā. Brahmā blessed her, giving her the strength of one thousand elephants. Tāḍakā grew up and became a young woman. Suketu gave her in marriage to Sunda, son of Iharjha. Tāḍakā gave birth to a son called Mārīca. When Sunda was killed, Tāḍakā got wild and ran into the hermitage of Agastya causing much havoc there. At this Agastya got angry and cursed her to become a Rākṣasī (giantess) and instantly the bodies of Tāḍakā and Mārīca were deformed. Tāḍakā could not control her anger and she demolished the hermitage of Agastya. (Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa).

12) *The story of the theft of lotus.* Once Bhṛṅgu, Vasiṣṭha and other hermits went on a pilgrimage, with Indra as their leader. On the way they reached Brahmasaras, in the holy place of Kauṣikī. Agastya had grown some lotus flowers there. The pilgrims plucked stealthily all the lotus flowers nurtured by Agastya and ate them. The furious Agastya got into the midst of the hermits in search of the culprit. None admitted the theft. Finally he caught hold of Indra, as the thief. Indra said "O, Lord, had it not been for my eagerness to hear discourses on duty from your face, I would not have stolen your lotus flowers." Saying thus Indra returned the lotus flowers. Agastya was pleased and let Indra and the hermits depart in peace. (Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 94).

13) *How Agastya burned the Asuras (demons).* (This story occurs in the Mahābhārata as, having been told by the God Vāyu to Bhīṣma as a discourse on the greatness of Agastya, and Bhīṣma reiterating it to Arjuna).

Once the Gods had to accept defeat at the hands of the Asuras (Demons) and they approached Agastya and said thus : Oh, hermit, since we have been defeated by the Asuras, our prosperity is at an end. There is none to help us but you." Hearing this Agastya became angry and began to burn the Asuras to death, by the merits of his penance. Many of them fell down on the earth and some fell into Pātāla (the nether world). The asuras who thus fell were not killed by Agastya. Thus the menace of the Asuras in heaven was warded off, and the Gods lived in peace and prosperity. (Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 155, Verses 1 to 13).

14) *Indra's conflict with Agastya.* Once Agastya commenced a sacrifice of twelve years' duration. Many hermits participated in this sacrifice. No sooner had the hermit begun the sacrifice, than Indra, (the God of Thunder and Rain) stopped rain in the world. Crops