

cobra said, Nala would be taught the secret mantra of Akṣahṛdaya by the King.

One who knows this sacred chant can find out all secrets of a game of dice and can count within no time the number of leaves, fruits and flowers on a tree. Nala went to Ṛtuparṇa and stayed with him. While living there a brahmin named Sudeva came to Ṛtuparṇa and informed him that Damayantī was going to marry again. Ṛtuparṇa immediately started for Vidarbha taking Nala as his charioteer. The chariot driven by Nala flew like a wind and on the way when Ṛtuparṇa's handkerchief fell down and he requested Nala to stop the chariot. Nala informed him that by the time the request was made they had travelled already one yojana. As they proceeded they saw a huge tree full of leaves and fruits. Ṛtuparṇa at a glance told Nala that the tree contained five crores of leaves and two thousand nine hundred and five fruits. Nala was surprised. Then they understood that Nala was able to drive the chariot so quickly because of his knowledge of the sacred chant Aśvahṛdaya and that Ṛtuparṇa was able to count the leaves and fruits because of his knowledge of the chant Akṣahṛdaya. They taught each other the sacred mantras. Because of this Akṣahṛdaya Nala was able to win the game of dice the second time and regain his kingdom. (Chapter 72, Vana Parva).

AKṢAMĀLĀ (ARUNDHATĪ). See under Arundhatī.

AKṢAPRAPATANA. A particular place in the country of Ānarta. At this place Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed two demons named Gopati and Tālaketu. (Śloka 29, Chapter 38, Sabhā Parva, M.B.).

AKṢARAPURUṢA. When all was set for the Kurukṣetra battle Arjuna showed signs of weakness and hesitated to proceed for a fight. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then through the famous Gītā enunciated a philosophy of life during the course of which he speaks about the two puruṣas, Kṣara and Aksara. All that we see in this world and enjoy are Kṣara and the power behind all of them is Akṣara. God is one who transcends the aspects Kṣara and Akṣara and stands as the root cause of all life. (Ślokas 16 to 19, Chapter 39, Bhīṣma Parva, M.B.).

AKṢASŪTRĀ. She was the wife of the sage Āpastamba. She was a very chaste woman. (See under Āpastamba).

AKṢAUHINĪ. A big division of an army. It is described in the Verses 19 to 26 in the 2nd Chapter of Ādi Parva of the Malayalam Mahābhārata. It says thus: One chariot, one elephant, three horses and five soldiers constitute what is termed a Patti. Three such pattis make one Senāmukha and three such senāmukhas make one Gulma. Three gulmas make one Gaṇa and three such gaṇas make one Vāhinī. Three such vāhinīs make one Pṛtanā. An Akṣauhinī contains 21870 chariots, an equal number of elephants, 65160 horses and 109350 soldiers.

AKṢAYAPĀTRA. This is a copper vessel given to Dharmaputra by Sūrya (Sun). To destroy the Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana kept them in a palace made of lac. They escaped from there and passing through dense forests crossed the river Ganges and reached the Kingdom of Pāñcāla where they married the King's daughter, Kṛṣṇā (Pāñcālī). On their way they killed two demons called Hidimba and Baka. When they were living happily at Indraprastha the jealous Duryodhana defeated them in a game of dice by foul play and sent them for a period of twelve years to the forests. The Pāṇḍavas found it impossible to feed the innumerable subjects who

faithfully followed them to the forest. Dharmaputra then prayed to the God, Sūrya and he appeared before him and gave him this Akṣaya Pātra (Akṣaya = never getting empty, Pātra = pot). Everyday this pot never got empty till the meals of Pāñcālī were over. (Chapter 3, Vana Parva, M.B.). See also under Duryodhana; Para 12.

AKṢAYAVATA. A sacred lake. When the Pāṇḍavas during their exile went to Pulastyaśrama sage Pulastya gave a description of all the sacred lakes in India. He says, "After reaching Mārkaṇḍeya lake you should visit the meeting place of the rivers Gaṅgā and Gomatī. Then when you reach Gayā you will find there a lake called Akṣayavata. If you bathe in that lake you will get salvation". In the Navama Skandha of Devī Bhāgavata you find the following about Akṣayavata: "Puṣpa-bhadrā is one of the famous sacred rivers in India. This river starts from the Himālayas with the name Śarāvātī and flowing for 500 yojanas (One yojanam is equal to about 8 miles) on the left side of river Gomatī reaches the western ocean. There is an āśrama called Akṣayavata on the shores of this beautiful river which always carries crystal clear water. The āśrama got that name because of a big banyan tree standing near it. Kapila, the great sage, did penance sitting here for a long time. Lord Śiva, Bhadrakālī and Skanda used to come and sit underneath this banyan tree.

AKṢIṆA. He was the son of Viśvāmitra. (Śloka 50, Chapter 14, Anuśāsana Parva. For more details see under Viśvāmitra).

AKŪPĀRA.

1) *General information.* There is a lake in the Himālayas called Indradyumna. Akūpāra is a tortoise living in it. There is also a statement that this is the Ādikūrma (second of the ten incarnations of God). A description of Akūpāra is found in Chapter 199 of Vana Parva in Mahābhārata.

2) *Cirañjīvī (One who has no death).* When the Pāṇḍavas were in exile in the forests sage Mārkaṇḍeya tells many stories to Dharmaputra to console him in his sad plight. The Pāṇḍavas asked Mārkaṇḍeya whether he knew of anybody living before him. Then the sage said, "In times of old Indradyumna an ascetic King (Rājarsi) fell down from heaven when he fell short of his accumulated 'Puṇya'. Sorrowfully he came to me and asked me whether I knew him. I replied in the negative adding that perhaps Prāvīrakarṇa an owl living on the top of the Himālayas might know him since he was older than me. At once Indradyumna became a horse and taking me on its back approached the owl living in the Himālayas. The owl also could not remember Indradyumna but directed him to a stork named Nāḍījaṅgha who was older than the owl. The Ascetic king took me then to the Indradyumna lake where the stork lived. The stork also could not find the identity of Indradyumna. Perhaps he said that a tortoise of name Akūpāra living in that same lake might know him. We then approached the tortoise and enquired whether he knew Indradyumna. The tortoise sat in meditation for some time and then weeping profusely and shaking like a leaf stood bowing respectfully and said, "How can I remain without knowing him? There are several monuments of the useful work done by him here. This very lake is of his making. This came into existence by the march of the cows he gave away to the people". The moment