

curves all over". When Sujātā delivered the child it had eight bends and light curves and so the boy was named Aṣṭāvakra, meaning one with eight bends. (Chapter 132, Vana Parva, M.B.).

2) *Father died before he was born.* When Sujātā was pregnant they suffered much from poverty and at the insistence of Sujātā, Khagodara went to the King Janaka, to beg for some money. Janaka was performing a yāga then and so Khagodara had to wait. When at last he went to the royal assembly he was asked to enter into a polemical contest with Vāndīna, the court scholar and having been defeated by him was asked to drown himself.

Uddālaka got a son named Śvetaketu and Sujātā delivered Aṣṭāvakra. Both the boys grew in the āśrama on great intimacy and Sujātā withheld the news of the death of her husband from the boys. (Chapter 132, Vana Parva, M.B.).

3) *How Khagodara was got back.* One day the two boys went to bathe in the river and during a controversial talk Śvetaketu said that Aṣṭāvakra had no father. This teased him much and Aṣṭāvakra went to his mother and gathered all the facts about his father. He went, then, straight to the royal assembly of King Janaka. He was not allowed inside. The gate keeper said that he was only a boy and only learned men could go inside the sacrificial hall. Aṣṭāvakra contended that neither size nor age was any indication of one's knowledge or worth and got himself admitted into the hall. There he entered into a polemical contest with the same court scholar, Vāndīna, who had killed his father. Vāndīna was defeated and was thrown into the same river in which his father had drowned himself. The moment Vāndīna fell into the river Khagodara rose up from there and the father and son along with Śvetaketu returned to the āśrama. Khagodara then took his son for a bath and when it was over Aṣṭāvakra became a bright boy without crooks. (Chapter 133, Vana Parva, M.B.).

4) *Marriage.* Aṣṭāvakra wanted to marry Suprabhā, the daughter of a sage named Vadānya. When Vadānya was approached for this the Sage decided to test the love which Aṣṭāvakra had towards his daughter and said: "I am going to test you. You go to the north to the Himālayas. Pay homage to Śiva and Pārvatī and go further north. There you will find a very beautiful damsel. You talk to her and return and when you come back I shall give you my daughter."

Accepting this challenge Aṣṭāvakra went north. When he went to the Himālayas Kubera entertained him. He remained there for a year enjoying the dances of celestial maidens and then, after worshipping Śiva and Pārvatī went further north. There he came across seven very attractive women. At the command of Aṣṭāvakra the eldest of the lot, Uttarā, remained with him; all the rest left the place immediately she started making love with him and requested him to marry her. But Aṣṭāvakra did not yield and told her about his promise to Vadānya. Pleased at this reply Uttarā revealed that she was the queen of the north in disguise and was testing him. She then blessed Aṣṭāvakra who fulfilling his mission successfully, returned and married the girl he wanted. (Chapter 19, Anuśāsana Parva, M.B.).

5) *Another version of how the body became crooked.* There is another story also about Aṣṭāvakra. Once there lived

a sage named Asita. He did great penance to please Śiva to bless him with a child. Śiva blessed him and he got a son named Devala. Rambhā, the queen of devaloka, fell in love with him but Devala did not yield to her wishes. Then Rambhā cursed him and made him into one with eight crooks. Thus Devala came to be called Aṣṭāvakra. He then did penance for six thousand years and Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa accompanied by Rādhā appeared before him. Rādhā was shocked by the ugliness of the sage and did not relish his sight. But Kṛṣṇa asking her to remain quiet went and embraced him. At once Aṣṭāvakra lost all his crooks and became a beautiful man. At that time a chariot descended from heaven and all of them went to heaven in it. (Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa).

6) *Other information.* (1) Aṣṭāvakra was also present among the ṛṣis who partook in the coronation ceremony conducted after Rāma's return to Ayodhyā from Laṅkā. (Uttarāmāyaṇa).

(2) Aṣṭāvakra cursed those celestial maidens who rebuked him for his ugliness and they were born on earth as the wives of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. When after the death of Kṛṣṇa they were being taken by Arjuna to the north they were forcibly taken by some of the shepherds. (Chapter 15, Agni Purāṇa).

AṢṬĀVAKRATĪRTHA. If one observes complete fasting for twelve days doing tarpaṇa in this sacred pond it is said that he gets the benefit of doing of Naramedhayājña. (Śloka 41, Chapter 25, Anuśāsana Parva, M.B.).

AṢṬĀVAKTRA. See under Aṣṭāvakra.

AṢṬAVARGA(S). Meda, Mahāmeda, Kākoli, Kṣīrakākoli, Jīvaka, Itavaka, Rddhi, Viddhi (These are used in infusions for treating rheumatism).

AṢṬAVASU(S).

1) *Origin.* Ganadevatās are called Aṣṭavasus. They were born to Dharmadeva of his wife Vasu, daughter of Dakṣa. They are : Dhara, Dhruva, Soma, Ahar, Anila, Anala, Pratyūṣa and Prabhāsa. (Ślokas 17 and 18, Chapter 66, Ādi Parva, M.B.). There is a version in certain purāṇas that the Aṣṭavasus are the sons of Kaśyapa.

Different purāṇas give different names to these Aṣṭavasus. According to Viṣṇu Purāṇa they are : Āpa, Dhruva, Soma, Dharma, Anila, Anala, Pratyūṣa and Prabhāsa. (Chapter 15 of Amśam 1). In Bhāgavata they are Droṇa, Prāṇa, Dhruva, Arka, Agni, Doṣa, Vasu and Vibhāvasu. In Harivaṃśa they are : Akha, Dhara, Dhruva, Soma, Anila, Anala, Pratyūṣa and Prabhāsa. This only indicates that some of these have two or more names for them.

2) *Curse of Vasiṣṭha.* Once the Aṣṭavasus were enjoying a picnic with their wives and they happened to go to the āśrama of Vasiṣṭha. One of the wives got enamoured over Nandinī, Vasiṣṭha's beautiful cow and wanted it. The Vasu to please his wife took the cow by force and left the place. When the sage found his cow missing after some time he understood by his divine powers who stole the cow and so he cursed the Aṣṭavasus saying that all of them would be born on earth as men. The Aṣṭavasus were greatly worried and approached the sage apologising and craving for pardon. The sage relaxed the curse and declared that their life on earth would be only for a very short time maintaining that the particular Vasu who committed the theft would live for a long time as man. It was this Vasu, Āpa (Dyau) who was born as Bhīṣma.