

of his father. With a view to destroying the whole Pāṇḍava dynasty he sent against the Pāṇḍavas the all-powerful Brahmaśirāstra (a missile charged with great power by a holy incantation). But Droṇa had given the same type of missile to Arjuna also and so he sent forth his to meet the other. It created such a great explosion that all the elders on both the sides joined together and requested them to withdraw the missiles. Arjuna demanded the jewel on Aśvatthāmā's head to withdraw his missile. But Aśvatthāmā refused to part with it. He said, "This jewel of mine is more valuable than all the wealth of both Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas put together. If you wear this you need not be afraid of your enemies, disease, hunger and thirst. No harm will come to you from Yakṣas, Nāgas or thieves. I will never part with such a jewel". (Ślokas 28-30, M.B., Chapter 15, Sautika Parva). After great persuasion Aśvatthāmā surrendered his jewel but without withdrawing the missile directed it towards the womb of Uttarā who was bearing a child then. We are reminded of an incident which happened when the Pāṇḍavas were residing in Upaplāvya; a poor brahmin looking at Uttarā said, "When the Kauravas will be weakening in power a child will be born to you. The boy will have to bear a test even while in the womb and so you must name the child Parikṣit (One who has been tested)".

When the powerful missile was flying straight towards Uttarā's womb Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, "Even though the child in the womb will die of this arrow it will be reborn. Oh, Aśvatthāmā, you will be denounced by all as a sinner for killing this unborn babe. To suffer for this evil deed you will roam about in the earth for three thousand years. Nobody will associate with you; you will be shunned by society. You will be tormented by all diseases on earth. But the babe which you have now killed will be a famous scholar and brave King. He will rule this country for sixty years. He will be known as the next Kururāja. Look, I am giving life to the babe you have killed". Vyāsa supported Kṛṣṇa, and Aśvatthāmā repenting on his hasty action gave the jewel to the Pāṇḍavas and left for the forest with Vyāsa. (Sautika Parva, M.B.).

8) *Synonyms of Aśvatthāmā*. The Mahābhārata has used the following names also for Aśvatthāmā. Ācāryanandana, Ācāryaputra, Ācāryasuta, Ācāryatanaya, Ācāryasattama, Drauṇi, Drauṇyāni, Droṇaputra, Droṇasūnu, Guruputra, Gurusuta and Bhāratācāryaputra.

AŚVATTHĀMĀ II. Indravarmā, King of Mālava, had an elephant of this name and it was killed in the battle by Bhīmasena. (Śloka 15, Chapter 190, Droṇa Parva, M.B.).

AŚVAVATĪ. A river. It is believed that if one just thinks about it at daybreak, midday and sunset one will get salvation. (M.B., Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 165, Śloka 25).

AŚVAVĀN. The first child of King Kuru. (See under genealogy of Kuru). His mother was Vāhinī. He is known as Avikṣit also. He got eight sons : Parikṣit, Śabalāśva, Ādirāja, Virāja, Sālmali, Uccaiḥśravas, Bhayaṅkara and Jitāri. (Ślokas 50 to 53, Chapter 94, Ādi Parva, M.B.).

AŚVINĪKUMĀRA(S) (AŚVINĪDEVAS). Satya and Dasra, the two sons of Sūrya (The Sun) are called Aśvinīkumāras. (Ślokas 17 and 18, Chapter 150, Anuśāsana Parva, M.B.). They are also known as Aśvins,

and Aśvinīdevas. These two are the physicians of the devas. (Śloka 12, Chapter 123, Aranya Parva, M.B.).

1) *Genealogy*. Descending from Viṣṇu in order are : Brahmā, Marīci, Kaśyapa, Vivasvān (the Sun), Aśvinīkumāras.

2) *Birth*. The Viṣṇu Purāna describes the birth thus : "Samjñā, daughter of Viśvakarmā, was the wife of Sūrya. She got three children : Manu, Yama and Yamī. Once finding the effulgence of Sūrya unbearable she engaged Chāyā to look after Sūrya and left for the forests to do penance there. Sūrya took Chāyā to be Samjñā and got three children of her : Śanaīścara, (another) Manu and Tapatī. Once Chāyā got angry and cursed Yama. It was then that Sūrya and Yama came to know that she was not Samjñā, getting more details from Chāyā, Sūrya found out by his Jñānadrṣṭi (a power of sight developed by Yoga by which one could see things far beyond the limits of his vision) that Samjñā was practising austerities taking the form of a mare. Then Sūrya went to her disguised as a horse and with her co-operation produced three children of which the first two became known as Aśvinīkumāras. The third son was called Revanta. Then Sūrya took Samjñā to his place (Chapter 2, Amśa 3, Viṣṇu Purāna). Śloka 35 of Chapter 66 of Ādi Parva states that Aśvinīkumāras were born from the nose of Samjñā.

3) *How Aśvinīkumāras tested Sukanyā*. The Devī Bhāgavata contains a story of how the Aśvinīkumāras tested the fidelity of Sukanyā, daughter of Śaryāti and made her old and senile husband into a young and virile one. Śaryāti, son of Vaivasvata manu, had four thousand beautiful princesses as wives. But none had any children. When they were lamenting over this misfortune one of the wives gave birth to a girl and she was called Sukanyā. The father and all his wives together brought up this daughter with great affection.

In the neighbourhood of the palace of Śaryāti there was a tapovana as good and grand as Nandanavana and it contained a lake similar to the Mānasa lake. In one corner of this tapovana a sage named Cyavana was doing penance. He had been sitting there for so long a period without food meditating on a goddess that he was covered with plants and shrubs had grown over him. He was unaware of the growth around him. Once at this time Śaryāti with his wives and child and followed by a large retinue entered the tapovana for recreation. The King and his wives entered the lake and Sukanyā with her friends moved about in the garden plucking flowers and playing. Moving about thus aimlessly Sukanyā and party reached the place where Cyavana was doing penance. She saw the huge shrubby growth and while looking at it saw two gleaming points inside the shrubby heap. She was about to break open the thing when from inside she heard somebody addressing her thus : "Oh, innocent girl, why do you think of doing this mischief. Please do go your way. I am an ascetic. What wrong have I done to you for you to disturb me like this ?" But Sukanyā brought up as she was, as a very pet girl did not like anybody advising her like this and so taking a pointed stick gave two pricks at the site of the gleam-points and left the place arrogantly.

The gleam-points were the eyes of Cyavana and so he lost his eyes and suffered much from the pain. Though he felt angry he did not curse anybody. But slowly the