

country began to witness the evil effects of this cruel deed. People stopped passing urine or faeces. Even animals were affected. The King and his ministers were worried. People came on deputation to the King to describe the disaster that had gripped the state. The King began to doubt that somebody must have done some great injury to the sage, Cyavana. He started enquiries asking his subjects one by one about this. But everybody replied in the negative. He bribed, he threatened. The result was the same. Then one day while the King and his courtiers were sitting despondent Sukanyā approached her father and confessed what she had done. She said : "While I was playing with my friends in the tapovana I saw this huge shrub-heap and two points gleaming from inside. I took a pin-stick and pricked them both and on drawing it out I found it wet also. But I left the matter there and never made any enquiries thereafter". Śaryāti now knew the cause of this national disaster and so immediately rushed to the sage for forgiveness. Prostrating before the ṛṣi the King pleaded "Oh, best of ṛṣis, forgive us for this injury done unknowingly. My daughter who is only an innocent child did this playfully while she was playing in this garden with her friends. She never knew what she pricked for a fun were your eyes. Oh, the best of sage, thou art rich in forgiveness and so please do condone this mischief and bless us." Cyavana replied that he would forgive if he gave Sukanyā in marriage to him. Śaryāti was depressed. How could he give his only and beautiful daughter to this aged senile ugly and blind ṛṣi ? While the King was thus pondering over this, Sukanyā herself came to him and said, "Oh, dear father, please do not worry on my account. I shall go as his wife. If he is satisfied the nation would be saved from a calamity and I am prepared to sacrifice my happiness for the sake of the country. I will be only too glad to do so." With suppressed unwillingness the King gave his daughter in marriage to Cyavana.

Sukanyā after her marriage engaged herself fully in the service of looking after the welfare of her husband. She gave her husband healthy and tasty fruits and vegetables, bathed him daily in hot water, placed before him all the materials for his pūjā and when the time came for his meals gave him his food sitting by his side. After the meals she gave him tāmbūla and only after putting him on a bed would she go to attend to her own affairs. After finishing her meals she would come again to her husband and sit by his side massaging him. In the evening she would make ready all the things required for the pūjā and after the pūjā feed him with nourishing food. Whatever remained after his feed would be taken by her. At night she would be at the foot of her husband and take a nap. In the morning she would attend to all the details of the ablutions of her husband. Thus Sukanyā lived true to her husband always anxious to please him. Then one day the Aśvinīkumāras saw her going to the āśrama after her bath. They were very much attracted by the stunning beauty of the maiden that they approached her and asked : "Oh, beautiful maiden, who are you ? We are Aśvinīkumāras. You seem to be alone. How did you happen to come to this place ? You are one who should always move about with friends and courtiers and what is the reason for your living like this ?" Sukanyā replied, "Revered Devas, I am the daughter of Śaryāti and wife of Cyavana. Forced by certain circum-

stances my father gave me in marriage to this sage who is very old and blind. He is living in the āśrama nearby. I am living with him looking after his comfort. If you think it convenient you can come and accept our hospitality." Hearing this the Aśvinīkumāras told her thus : "Sweet girl, you are fit to be the wife of one who is better than this blind old ascetic. So please do accept one of us as your husband". Sukanyā did not relish this talk and threatening them that if they did not withdraw stopping such blabbering she would curse them to ashes. The Aśvinīdevas were a bit surprised and also frightened at the attitude of Sukanyā. "Oh, Princess, we are immensely pleased at your sense of righteousness and chastity and you can ask of us a boon. We are physicians of the devas and can give your husband his sight and can also make him young and virile. But there is a condition for this. As soon as your husband becomes young and handsome we will also become like him and then you can select one among us. Are you willing ? If so we will make your husband charming and handsome at this instant.

Sukanyā was well pleased with this offer but the condition placed did not satisfy her. So she ran to the āśrama and told her husband thus : "Lord, I met the Aśvinīdevas on my way from the river after my bath and enamoured of my beauty they have made this offer. We will make your husband young and beautiful giving him back his eyesight and then we will change ourselves to resemble him. You have then to select one of us as your husband. I am not able to understand their cunning and so I have come to you to get from you the answer for their question. I am anxious to see you young and handsome with your eyesight regained. I shall do as you direct."

Cyavana said : "There is nothing in this for great thinking. You go and tell them that you would do as they wish and bring them down here. On hearing this Sukanyā went to the Aśvinīkumāras and took them to the āśrama. They asked Cyavana to take a dip in the lake nearby and as he entered the lake the Aśvinīdevas also entered it and took a dip in its waters along with Cyavana. Lo ! As they rose from the waters all the three became young and handsome looking alike. The Aśvinīdevas then requested Sukanyā to select one among them. Sukanyā was in a fix and she prayed to her goddess to give her power to identify her husband. She was blessed with that power and she selected Cyavana from the lot at which the Aśvinīdevas were also pleased. (Seventh Skandha, Devī Bhāgavata).

4) *Cyavana's gratitude.* Cyavana who got back his eyesight and youth asked the Aśvinīkumāras what boon they wanted. They then told him thus : "We are the physicians of the devas. Devendra has unnecessarily put a ban on our drinking Soma (juice extracted from the creeper Soma). When Brahmā performed a yāga at Mahāmeru this leader of the devas did not allow us to take a soma drink. If you are capable of doing it you should get us the right to take this celestial drink." Cyavana promised to do that.

Before long, King Śaryāti and his wife came to the āśrama to enquire about the welfare of their daughter. To their great amazement they found a young and handsome ascetic at the āśrama and were a bit suspicious of the character of their daughter. But soon all doubts were cleared and they were immensely pleased. Cyavana then