

turn cursed that Sarasvatī be born as a river on earth. Sarasvatī did not take the curse lying down, but cursed that Gaṅgā also be born as a river on earth and take upon herself the sins of the whole world. When all the three wives of Viṣṇu got themselves thus into trouble he told them as follows : “Everything has happened as it should have happened. Lakṣmī may go to the earth and be born in the home of Dharmadhvaja and grow up as his daughter, but not from the womb of his women. There you will purify the three worlds after which you will be born as the plant called tulasī, and be married by an asura called Śaṅkha-cūḍa, who will be born as a part of me. And, after that you will be turned into a sacred river called Padmāvati, and leaving the river on earth your divine form will return to Vaiṅkṣa.” And, to Gaṅgā Viṣṇu said as follows : “You will go to earth as a holy river to wash off the sins of people there. A king called Bhagīratha will be leading you to earth, and you will, therefore, be known as Bhāgīrathī also. And, you remain there on earth as the wife of the ocean of King Śantanu. Your divine form will return to mount Kailāsa as the consort of Śiva.” As for Sarasvatī, Viṣṇu asked her to be born as a river on earth, her divine form ultimately returning to Satyaloka and then becoming the consort of Brahmā.

And, thus it was that Lakṣmī became the consort of Mahāviṣṇu, Gaṅgā of Śiva and Sarasvatī of Brahmā. (Devī Bhāgavata, Navama Skandha).

3) *Gaṅgā born on earth due to the curse of Brahmā.* Mahābhīṣak, an emperor of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, went to Satyaloka after he had attained heaven, to worship Brahmā. Gaṅgā too happened to be there. In the devotional atmosphere at Satyaloka a casual breeze removed Gaṅgā's clothes slightly from position, and Mahābhīṣak then cast a lustful glance at her which she also returned. Brahmā, who was observing this exchange of love got angry and cursed that Mahābhīṣak be born as a King on earth and Gaṅgā as his wife. Gaṅgā prayed for redemption from the curse, and Brahmā told her that she would regain her old status after she had delivered the Aṣṭavasus. As the consequence of Brahmā's cure Mahābhīṣak was born as King Śantanu in the solar dynasty on earth and he married Gaṅgā. (Ādi Parva, Chapters 96 and 97).

4) *Bhagīratha brought down Gaṅgā on earth.* King Sagara of the solar dynasty had two wives called Sumati (Vaidarbhī) and Keśinī (Śaibya). A son called Asamañjasa was born to Keśinī, and 60,000 princes were born to Sumati. Sagara drove out of the country Asamañjasa, who turned out to be an enemy of the people. The 60,000 sons of Sagara also proved to be a menace to the world, and the Devas approached Brahmā for protection from the menace. He assured the Devas that a sage called Kapila will destroy the 60,000 evil fellows.

During the above period of time Sagara performed an Aśvamedha Yajña, and his sons went round the earth with the sacrificial horse. But, when they reached the sea-shore the horse disappeared. When the sons complained about it to their father, Sagara, he asked them to look out for the horse in every part of the world and bring it back. Not finding it anywhere on earth they dug a hole and entered Pātāla, where they saw Sage Kapila absorbed in meditation and the missing horse tied to a pole near the sage. (It was Indra who had carried away the horse and tied it there). The sons of

Sagara, believing that it was Kapila who had stolen the horse were about to attack the sage when he opened his eyes, and they were reduced to ashes in the fire of Kapila's eyes.

His sons having not returned even after a long time Sagara asked his grandson Anīśumān to seek them out, and after an extensive search he saw Kapila at Pātāla. Anīśumān pleased Kapila with laudatory phrases and the latter returned to him the sacrificial horse. Kapila also pronounced the blessing that the grandson of Anīśumān would perform the purificatory rites of Sagara's sons by bringing down Gaṅgā to earth from heaven. Anīśumān returned to the palace with the horse and the aśvamedha was duly concluded.

From Anīśumān was born Dilīpa and from him Bhagīratha. On becoming King, Bhagīratha handed over the reins of government to his ministers and began efforts to bring down Gaṅgā to earth. He did tapas for thousand years on the slopes of the Himālayas when Gaṅgā asked him to please Śiva first as he alone could face her (Gaṅgā) fall on the earth. Accordingly he pleased Śiva by his penance and Śiva agreed to receive Gaṅgā on his head. With a terrific noise Gaṅgā came down on Śiva's head. The haughty Gaṅgā wanted to carry down Śiva also to Pātāla. Realising this ambition of her Śiva blocked her passage with the result that she wandered about in Śiva's matted hair for many years without finding an outlet. Bhagīratha again did tapas and pleased Śiva who shook his matted head and made fall some water therefrom on earth. The water fell into Bindusaras, and flowed in seven tributaries, the first three, Hlādinī, Pāvanī and Nalinī towards the east, the next three, Sucakṣus, Sitā and Sindhu towards the west and the seventh tributary followed Bhagīratha. In this manner they progressed a great distance till they reached the āśrama of the sage Jāhnu, and the haughty Gaṅgā flooded the āśrama. The sage got enraged at this and drank up Gaṅgā. But Bhagīratha pleased the sage who then let out Gaṅgā through his ears. Thenceforth Gaṅgā came to be called Jāhnavī also. Gaṅgā again followed Bhagīratha to Pātāla and made the sons of Sagara attain salvation by purifying them with her waters. (Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Bāla Kāṇḍa, Cantos 43 and 44 ; Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, Chapter 97 ; Devī Purāṇa, Dvītiya Skandha ; Droṇa Parva, Chapter 60 ; Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 4 and Vana Parva, Chapter 109).

5) *Gaṅgā flowed into the sea.* After the purificatory rites of the sons of Sagara were over, Bhagīratha conducted Gaṅgā to the sea and with its waters the sea became full. (Vana Parva, Chapter 109, Verses 18-21).

6) *Gaṅgā set on the thighs of Pratīpa.* Gaṅgā once fell in love with Pratīpa, father of Śantanu, and set on his right thigh when he (Pratīpa) was doing penance on the banks of the Gaṅgā for a son. Pratīpa did not agree to Gaṅgā's proposal that he should marry her and told her thus: “the right thigh is for the children and daughters-in-law to sit on and the left thigh for the wife; therefore, you be my son's wife.”

Then Pratīpa called his son Śantanu and told him : “Sometime back a divine woman came to me and I promised to wed her to you. Therefore, if any divine woman approaches you for a son you must accept her, and whatever she may do you must not object to that...”. Not long after this Pratīpa crowned Śantanu