

of them. Nala did so but Damayantī was adamant and said she would marry none other than Nala. So all the four gods appeared as Nala in the wedding hall. Damayantī who was confused prayed that she should be shown the real Nala. The gods then changed into their original forms and blessed Nala. Agni said he would come and help him the moment he wanted him. Thus Nala became a good cook and Nala Pācakam (Pācakam = cooking) became famous. Even now it is a synonym for good cooking. (Chapter 57, Vana Parva, M.B.)

15) *Agni and Rāmbhā*. There was once a dānava called Danu. He had two sons named Rāmbha and Karambha. They had no children and tormented by this they went to Pañcanada and started doing penance. Rāmbha sat in the centre of Pañcāgni (five fires) and Karambha in water to do penance. Indra afraid of the severe and powerful tapas of the two took the form of a crocodile and killed Karambha who was doing penance in water by dragging him down to the water. Bereaved Rāmbha started to commit suicide by jumping into the fire. God Agni appeared before him then and asked him what he wanted. Rāmbha then said that he should get a son who would be famous as a warrior in all the three worlds. Agni agreed. Rāmbha on his way back saw a voluptuous she-buffalo and married her at yakṣa kavāṭa. They lived a happy married life and one day a he-buffalo envious of their life attacked Rāmbha and killed him. Grief-stricken Rāmbha's wife jumped into the funeral pyre and committed suicide. Then from the fire arose a demon named Mahiṣāsura (Mahiṣa = Buffalo. Asura = Demon). This buffalo-demon became a terror to all in the three worlds later on. (Chapter 5, Devī Bhāgavata).

16) *Difference of opinion between Agni and Aṅgiras*. Bhagavān Aṅgiras did penance in his own āśrama and became more brilliant than Agni. The whole world was submerged in his brilliance. Agni felt a bit depressed at this. Agni argued that it was not proper on the part of Brahmā to give anybody else more brilliance than himself. So as a protest against this Agni disappeared from the world. Even Aṅgiras was annoyed at Agni's disappearance and so he went and consoled Agni and took him to Brahmā. Brahmā declared that henceforth the world would recognize Agni as the father and Aṅgiras as his son. Thus Agni got the first place in effulgence. This is a story told by sage Mārkaṇḍeya to Dharmaputra. (Chapter 217, Vana Parva, M.B.).

17) *Agni and Mahābali*. On their way to the forest sage Viśvāmitra took Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Siddhāśrama. The sage explained to the princes the importance of that āśrama. He said: "Mahāviṣṇu lived in this āśrama for a number of years. It was at that time that the Emperor of the asuras (demons), Mahābali, son of Virocana, was ruling the world conquering even the devas. After having conquered all the three worlds Mahābali decided to conduct a yāga. A deputation of the Devas headed by Agni then waited upon Mahāviṣṇu and Agni said: "O Lord, Mahābali has commenced a yāga and before it is finished you should go to him and do something for the benefit of the devas". It was at this request of Agni that Mahāviṣṇu took the form of Vāmana and sent Mahābali to the nether-world. (Chapter 29, Bālakāṇḍa, Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa).

18) *Agni and Nahuṣa*. Repenting for his act of killing Vṛtra Indra unknown to anybody went and hid in a lotus in the Mānasa Saras (Lake Mānasa). Perplexed by the disappearance of their leader the devas brought Nahuṣa from the Earth and made him their leader. Nahuṣa became very proud and arrogant of his new position and tried to make Indrāṇī his wife. Indrāṇī went to Brhaspati for help. Brhaspati commanded Agni to go and find out Indra. Agni searched for him in forests, rivers and oceans. At last he went to Mānasa Saras and searched among the lotuses. There he found Indra hiding in a lotus and Brhaspati was duly informed. Then Brhaspati gave Indrāṇī some clever directions to kill Nahuṣa and Nahuṣa was killed. (See Agastya). There is a story in Śānti Parva, Chapter 28, of how Agni took for himself a quarter of the sin which Indra acquired because of his killing Vṛtra, a brahmin by birth. (Chapter 14, Udyoga Parva, M.B.).

19) *Agni Deva and Kārttavīryārjuna*. After the great Kurukṣetra battle the Pāṇḍavas went again to Kurukṣetra along with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On their way Kṛṣṇa showed them the Paraśurāmahradas and narrated to them several stories of Rāma. Reference to Agni comes when Kṛṣṇa explains the reason why Paraśurāma cut off the thousand hands of Kārttavīryārjuna. It was at the time when Kārttavīryārjuna was ruling the three worlds by his might that Agni went and asked for alms from him. Kārttavīrya gave Agni mountains and forests for his food which Agni burnt and ate. In one of the forests was the āśrama of sage Āpava and that also was burnt. Enraged at this the sage cursed Kārttavīrya saying that his thousand hands would be cut off by Paraśurāma. Though the curse was not seriously minded by the King then, it so happened that before long Kārttavīrya had to encounter Paraśurāma in a battle when the children of the King stole a sacrificial cow belonging to Jamadagni, father of Paraśurāma. In the battle all the thousand hands of Kārttavīryārjuna were cut off by Paraśurāma. (Chapter 43, Śānti Parva, M.B.).

20) *How Agni was duped*. Once the wives of the Saptaṛṣis (seven Saints) attended a yāga where Agni was also present. Agni fell in love with them but knowing it to be futile to make any attempt to fulfil his desire he went to the forests dejected. Svāhādevī, daughter of Dakṣa was for a long time craving to marry Agni and she decided to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered. Disguising herself as the wife of Aṅgiras, one of the seven saints, she approached Agni and said: "O Lord, I am Śivā, wife of Aṅgiras. We were all excited when you darted cupids' arrows against us and they have now selected me to come to you for fulfilling your desire". Agni believed her and took her as his consort. (Chapters 223 to 227 of Vana Parva, M.B.).

21) *How Agni became a doctor*. There was once a sage called Dattātreya who had a son called Nimi. Nimi had a son and he died after thousand years. The bereaved sage performed a Śrāddha which was attended by all devas. The feast was so sumptuous that the devas got indigestion after that. Consulting Brahmā Agni prescribed a remedy for their indigestion. He said: "whenever you take any food make me also a participant in that. If you do so you will never get indigestion". That is why a very small portion of any cooked