

lotus in her hand and seated in an open lotus flower. Gandharvas sang celestial songs in her presence; Apsarā women danced. For her bath, the Gaṅgā river arrived there with her tributaries. The Milk Sea itself took on physical form and offered her a garland of ever-fresh lotus flowers. Brahmā bedecked her with ornaments. After that Lakṣmīdevī, fully adorned in all her magnificent jewels, in the presence of all Devas, joined the bosom of Mahāviṣṇu. The Asuras were displeased at it. They snatched the pot of Amṛtam from Dhanvantari and fled away.

3) *How Amṛtam was recovered.* With the loss of Amṛtam, the Devas were in a fix. They began to consider how the pot of Amṛtam could be recovered. Accordingly Mahāviṣṇu transformed himself into a celestial virgin, Mohinī, of extraordinary beauty. She approached the Asuras as a shy girl. The Asuras were enchanted by her surpassing beauty. They asked her, "Who are you?" Looking down on the ground, Mohinī replied: "I am the little sister of Dhanvantari. By the time I came out of the Milk Sea, the Devas and Asuras had already gone. Being lonely I am going about in search of a suitable mate."

On hearing her words, the Asuras began to make friends with her one by one, determined not to waste this opportunity. They told her that she should distribute Amṛtam to all of them and in the end she should marry one of them. Mohinī agreed, but added: "All of you should close your eyes. I shall serve Amṛtam to all. He who opens his eyes last, must serve Amṛtam to me and he will marry me".

All of them accepted this condition. They sat in front of Mohinī with closed eyes. In a moment Mohinī left the place with the pot of Amṛtam and went to devaloka.

4) *Rāhu's neck is cut.* When the Asuras opened their eyes, Mohinī was not to be seen. Finding that they were betrayed, they were in great perplexity. All of them pursued Mohinī to devaloka. Devas had put the Sun and Moon gods on guard duty at the gates of devaloka. At the instance of the Asuras, Rāhu in disguise entered the divine assembly chamber. The Sun and Moon gods detected him and Viṣṇu with his weapon, Sudarśana Cakra cut open his neck. Swearing that he would wreak vengeance on the Sun and Moon Rāhu returned. In the 8th Skandha of Bhāgavata it is said that even now from time to time Rāhu swallows the Sun and Moon, but they escape through the open gash in his neck and this is known as solar eclipse and lunar eclipse.

5) *Defeat of the Asuras.* Indra and all other gods took Amṛtam. The enraged Asuras attacked the gods, who had gained strength and vigour by taking Amṛtam. The Asuras were driven away in all directions. All the three worlds began to enjoy glory and prosperity again.

6) *Kālakūṭa.* The story of how the deadly poison, Kālakūṭa arose at the churning of the ocean of Milk, is given in M.B., Ādi Parva, Chapter 18, Verses 42-45, as follows: After many precious things had come up from the surface of the ocean. Its strong smell caused a stupor in all the three worlds. Fearing that the world will perish, Brahmā requested Śiva to swallow that poison. Śiva gulped it down, but stopped it in his throat. From that day he became "Nilakaṅṭha".

7) *The story of Airāvata.* Indra's tusker Airāvata was responsible for the churning of the ocean of Milk. But in the Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Chapter 18, Verse 42 it is said that a white elephant with four tusks arose during the churning of the ocean of Milk and that Devendra caught and tamed it. This is an obvious contradiction. Besides, in Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇya-kāṇḍa, 14th Sarga, the wounded Jaṭāyu describing his family history to Śrī Rāma, gives the following account about the origin of Airāvata:

Kaśyapa, one of the Prajāpatis, married the eight daughters of Dakṣa. One of them named Krodhavaśā had ten daughters by Kaśyapa. They were: Mrgī, Mrgamadā, Hari, Bhadramadā, Mātāṅgī, Śārdūli, Śvetā, Surabhi, Surasā and Kadru. Of them Bhadramadā gave birth to a daughter, Irāvati. The tusker Airāvata is Irāvati's son.

An explanation for this discrepancy may be seen in Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 3rd Section, Chapter 1. Now six Manvantaras have passed (See 'MANVANTARA'). This is the seventh Manvantara. Each Manvantara has a new Indra. According to this, different Indras have their own Airāvatas. This is the only explanation for this apparent contradiction.

8) *Amṛtam and Garuḍa.* There is another story about Amṛtam which says that Garuḍa once went to devaloka and brought Amṛtam from there to be given to the Nāgas, but Devendra came down and took it back. This story is given in Mahābhārata from Chapter 27 onwards. Vinatā, a wife of Kaśyapa gave birth to Garuḍa and Kadru and her sister gave birth to the Nāgas. Once there was a dispute between Vinatā and Kadru. Vinatā said that the hairs on the tail of Uccaiśravas, Devendra's horse, were white but Kadru asserted that they were black. To settle the dispute they made a bet. The condition was that the loser must become the servant maid of the winner. As instructed by Kadru, some of the Nāgas went in advance and hung down from the tail of Uccaiśravas, thus giving the false appearance of a tail with black hairs. By this trick Vinatā lost the bet and had to become Kadru's servant maid. As a result of it, the task of looking after Kadru's children became Garuḍa's duty. Kadru told him that if he fetched Amṛtam from devaloka and gave it to the Nāgas, she was prepared to release him from the bondage. So Garuḍa flew up to devaloka, fought with the gods and defeated them. He returned with the pot of Amṛtam and gave it to the Nāgas. The Nāgas went to take their bath after placing the pot on darbha grass spread on the floor. Just then Devendra swooped down and carried away the pot of Amṛtam to devaloka. When the Nāgas returned after their purifying bath, the pot was not to be seen. In their greed they began to lick the darbha grass on which the pot was placed. The sharp edge of the grass cut their tongues into two. This is why the Nāgas (snakes) came to have forked tongues.

Amṛtam which has been thus recovered after many such adventures, is still preserved carefully in devaloka. [ (1) M.B., Ādi Parva, Chapter 17. (2) M.B., Ādi Parva, Chapter 27, verse 16. (3) M.B. Ādi Parva, Chapter 30, Verse 2. (4) Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇya Kāṇḍa, 35th Sarga. (5) Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Section 1, Chapter 9. (6) Agni Purāṇa, Chapter 152. (7) Bhāgavata, 8th Skandha. (8) Ūttara Rāmāyaṇa.]