

AŚMANAGARA. A city of the nether world. The Uttara Rāmāyaṇa states that Rāvaṇa entered this city when he was going home in the Puṣpaka Vimāna (the aeroplane of ancient times) stolen from Kubera.

AŚMAPRṢṬA (M). The sacred pond near Gayā known as Pretaśilā. It is believed that if you perform obsequies here even the sin of killing a brahmin would fade away.

AŚMĀ. An ancient sage.

AŚMOPĀKHYĀNAM. This is called Aśmagītā also. After the great Kurukṣetra battle Vyāsa spoke to Dharmaputra to console him and the philosophy he then expounded is called Aśmopākhyānam. Once King Janaka asked the great scholar Aśman on the changes that occur in Man as wealth comes and goes. Aśman then gave the King the same philosophy which Vyāsa gave to Dharmaputra and Aśman's oration to King Janaka came to be known as Aśmagītā. (Chapter 28, Śānti Parva, M.B.).

AŚOKA I. The charioteer of Bhīmasena. When Bhīmasena was fighting a battle with Śrutāyu the King of Kalinga, this charioteer brought the chariot to him. (M.B., Bhīṣma Parva, Chapter 54, Stanzas 70 and 71).

AŚOKA II. A minister of King Daśaratha. Daśaratha had eight ministers. They were Jayanta, Dhṛṣṭi, Vijaya, Asiddhārtha, Arthasādhaka, Aśoka, Mantrapāla and Sumantra. (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa, Sarga 7).

AŚOKA III. A King of the family of the famous Asura Aśva. This king had been ruling over Kalinga. (Ādi Parva, Chapter 67, Stanza 14).

AŚOKADATTA. Once the Vidyādhara (a class of semi gods) named Aśokavega was going through the sky, when the hermit maids of Gālavāśrama (the hermitage of Gālava) were bathing in the Ganges. He hankered after them. So the hermits cursed him and changed him to a man. The name of Aśokavega in his human birth was Aśokadatta. The story of Aśokadatta in the "Kathāsaritsāgara" is as follows :

Long ago there lived a Brahmin named Govindasvāmī, near the river Kālindi. He had two sons, Aśokadatta and Vijayadatta. They were good men like their father. Once there occurred a great famine in the country. Scarcity prevailed everywhere. Govindasvāmī told his wife, "I cannot bear to see the difficulties of our people. So let us give everything we have for famine relief and then go to Kāśī and live there." His good-natured wife agreed to it and giving everything for the relief work, Govindasvāmī with his wife and children started for Kāśī. On the way he met a hermit sage who had renounced the world. He had his whole body besmeared with ashes. With his tuft of hair and garment made of the barks of trees, he seemed to be Śiva. Govindasvāmī bowed before him, and asked about the future of his children. The Yogī (hermit) said, "the future of your two sons is good. But this Vijayadatta will go away from you. Reunion will become possible by the goodness of Aśokadatta." Govindasvāmī felt glad and sad at the same time. Leaving the hermit they proceeded to Kāśī. They neared Kāśī. There was a temple on the way. They stayed there and conducted worship in the temple and took shelter for the night under a tree outside the temple. Other travellers also were there. Being tired of walking all went to sleep. Vijayadatta the second son of Govindasvāmī caught cold. So he woke up in the night. When he began to shiver, because of cold, he called his father and said, "Father, it appears

that I have caught cold and I am shivering. I would grow better if I could get some fire. So please get some twigs and make a fire. I don't think, I may complete this night otherwise". They saw a fire close by. It was in a burial-ground. Govindasvāmī took Vijayadatta to that place where a dead body was burning.

Vijayadatta sat near the fire and warmed himself. In the meanwhile he was talking to his father. He said, "Father, what is that round thing seen in the middle of the fire?" "That is the head of a dead body burning" said his father who was standing close by. He took a burning faggot and hit at the head. The head broke into pieces and some viscous stuff from the head fell into his mouth. There occurred a sudden change in Vijayadatta. He became a fearful giant with huge tusks and hair standing erect on the head. Somehow or other he got a sword also. That giant took the burning head from fire and drank up all the viscous liquid in it. With his tongue which looked like blazing fire he licked the bones. Then he threw away the skull. Then he approached his father with open mouth to swallow him. "You ! giant, Don't kill your father, come here !" a voice shouted to him from the burial-ground. Thus Vijaya became a giant and disappeared. "Oh dear ! my child ! my son ! Vijayadatta !", cried his father and came away from the burial-place, and went to the shelter of the tree and told his wife, son and others everything that had happened. Stricken with grief they all fell on the ground. All those who came to worship in the temple gathered round them and tried to console them. Among them was a merchant named Samudradatta, a native of Kāśī. He consoled Govindasvāmī and his family and took them to his house in Kāśī. He showed hospitality and gave them a separate place to live in. Noble men are kind to those who are in distress. The great hermit had said that their son would come back in due course. Hoping that such a time would come soon Govindasvāmī and his family dragged on their time. At the request of that wealthy merchant they stayed there on. Aśokadatta got his education there. When he grew up to a youth, he got physical training. He became such an expert in wrestling and other modes of fighting that nobody on earth could overcome him. During a festival there was a contest in wrestling. A renowned wrestler had come from the south to take part in the contest. In the contest which took place in the presence of Pratāpamukta, the King of Kāśī, the wrestler challenged every wrestler in the country and had overthrown each one of them. Having heard from the merchant Samudradatta, the King sent for Aśokadatta and put him against the wrestler from the south. A very serious fight began between the two. They grappled each other with firm and resolute grips. The audience was struck with wonder at the variety of the modes of grappling and twisting and turning they exhibited. Applause came from everywhere. The fight lasted for a very long time. Finally Aśokadatta threw the other to the ground, and got much presents from the King. Gradually he became a favourite of the King, and consequently became wealthy. One day the King went to a temple of Śiva, a little away from the capital to observe fast on the fourteenth night of the Moon and while returning he passed by a burial-ground and heard a voice saying, "Oh Lord ! The judge had ordered me to be