

gold. (Manusmṛti, Chapter 8).

NIŠKṚTI. An agni (fire). A son of Bṛhaspati, he came to be known as Niškṛti as he redeemed (Niškrama) people from unhappiness. (Vana Parva, Chapter 229, Verse 14).

NIŠKUMBHA. A great asura. A dependant of the asura called Vṛṣaparvan, Niškumbha, took part in many Devāsura wars. (Bhaviṣya Parva, Chapter 59).

NIŠKUṬA. An ancient region in India. The people of the region were defeated once by Arjuna. (Sabhā Parva Chapter 27, Verse 29).

NIŠKUṬIKĀ. A female attendant of Subrahmaṇya. (Śalya Parva, Chapter 46, Verse 12).

NIŠṬĀNAKA. A prominent nāga (serpent) begot by Kaśyapaprajāpati of his wife Kadrū. (Ādi Parva, Chapter 35, Verse 9).

NIŠṬHURAKA. A very prominent King, who lived in ancient times in South India. Once he had to depend on Śṛidatta, a King of North India. (See under Śṛidatta).

NIŠṬHŪRIKA. A nāga born in the Kaśyapa dynasty. (Udyoga Parva, Chapter 106, Verse 12).

NIŠUMBHA I. An asura. Two of the sons of Kaśyapa Prajāpati by his wife Diti became notorious fellows called Śumbha and Niśumbha. They were born and brought up in Pātāla. But as young men they came to the earth and began rigorous tapas taking neither food nor drink. After ten thousand years Brahmā appeared and asked them to choose their boons. They requested for eternity, deathlessness. But, Brahmā refused to grant that boon. Then they thought of another boon, which would in effect be as good as the first one; they wanted death to come, but to come in a manner impossible to happen. So, they requested Brahmā as follows: "We shall not meet with death at the hands of males among Devas, human beings as also by birds, animals etc. In short we should be killed only by women; we fear them not."

Brahmā granted them such a boon and they returned to Pātāla. They lost their head over the boon and appointed Śukra as their preceptor. Śukra was so pleased at this that he made Śumbha sit on a golden throne and crowned him King of Daityas. Following this, lesser Kings began coming to salute the great King and pay tributes. Great daityas like the Caṇḍamuṇḍas, Dhūmrālocana, Raktabīja etc., became attendants of Śumbha and Niśumbha.

After having established the power of the daityas thus Śumbha—Niśumbhas gradually turned their attention towards extending the boundaries of their kingdom. The whole earth they subjugated. Then Niśumbha with a large army marched to Devaloka to conquer Indra. A Devāsura war started. In the fight all the Dikpālakas were on one side and Niśumbha alone on the other side; the latter side was slightly defeated. Smitten by Indra's Vajrāyudha Niśumbha fainted; his army also was broken.

As soon as news about the defeat of his brother was reported to him, Śumbha, with the remaining Dānavas hurried to Devaloka. In the battle that ensued the Devas were routed. Śumbha assumed Indra-hood by force and the standard (flag) of the daityas was hoisted on the flag-staff of Sudharmā, the palace of Indra. Śumbha captured Kāmadhenu, Airāvata, Uccaiśravas etc. The Nandana garden and the shades of the

Kalpaka tree were turned into resting places of the daityas. Fragrant flowers of the Kalpa tree adorned the hairs of daitya women. Śumbha drove away Kubera and took over Alakāpurī also from him. As Yama ran away from the kingdom, Kālāpurī also came under Śumbha. All the Dikpālakas took refuge in forests and caves. Thousand years rolled by thus. By then the Devas worshipped Mahādevī, who appeared before them. Kauśikī devī, born from the body of Mahādevī stood before the Devas. As Kauśikī was dark in colour she came to be known as Kālikā also. Mahādevī, along with Kālikā started for the capital of Śumbha—Niśumbhas. At the capital they ascended a mountain and sat on two rocks. Mahādevī sang such a melodious song that birds and animals lost themselves in its sweetness and stood motionless.

The Caṇḍamuṇḍas, who were at the time passing that way were also attracted by the music. Having understood what it all meant they hurried upto Śumbhāsura and gave him a description of the supreme beauty of Mahādevī and Kālikā. The description kindled great interest in Śumbha and Niśumbha about the devīs and they deputed their minister Sugrīva to bring the devīs over to them. Having heard Sugrīva's mission Mahādevī told him as follows:—"We do not have any objection to becoming the wives of your masters. But, in the matter of my marriage there is a special problem. While playing with my friends as a child I had accidentally taken a vow. I was at that age a bit proud about my capabilities and strength, and the vow I took was that I would marry only someone who was stronger than I am. My friends called me a 'fool' and ridiculed me about the vow. That only hardened my stubbornness and I stand by my vow even now. Therefore, please tell Śumbha first to defeat me in fighting."

When Sugrīva carried this information to Śumbha, and Niśumbha, they felt amused that a woman challenged them to fight. But, they had no alternative but to fight. So they deputed the mighty daitya Dhūmrākṣa with an army to fight Devī, and there ensued a fierce fighting between Devī and Kālikā on one side and the big daitya army on the other side. The whole army and finally Dhūmrākṣa too was killed.

Devī then retired from the battlefield to a place nearby and blew the conch. Śumbha—Niśumbhas heard the sound from it, and the next moment a messenger came and told them about the fate of the army and of Dhūmrākṣa. They then sent a much greater army under Caṇḍamuṇḍas against Devī. But Kālikā devoured them all. Raktabīja, who next encountered Devī with a great force, also became food for Kālikā. Then Śumbha—Niśumbhas entered the battlefield and they too were killed. Devas thus victorious regained Svarga. (Devī Bhāgavata, 5th Skandha).

NIŠUMBHA II. The Mahābhārata mentions another Niśumbha, a dependant of Narakāsura. Śrī Kṛṣṇa killed this asura who towered upto the path of the devas (devayāna) from the earth. (Sabhā Parva, Chapter 38).

NISUNDA. An asura killed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. (Vana Parva, Chapter 12).

NITAMBHŪ. A great maharṣi. He too was present in the company of the munis, who visited Bhīṣma on his bed of arrows. (Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 26, Verse 8).