

4) *His death.* War between Devas and Asuras broke out and in the fight between Devī and Raktabīja blood from his body flowed. When Devī found it impossible to kill the lakhs of Raktāsuras who arose from the blood, she resorted to a trick. She asked Cāmuṇḍī to lick off the blood flowing from Raktabīja before it fell on the ground. Accordingly Devī began killing the asuras and Cāmuṇḍī consuming their blood and flesh. When the artificial Raktabījas were all killed thus, the original Raktabīja alone remained and in the fight between them, Devī cut off his head with her sword. Cāmuṇḍī did not permit even a drop of blood to fall on the ground. (Devī Bhāgavata, 5th Skandha).

RAKTAJA. A form assumed by Arjuna in his previous birth. The following story is told in Padma Purāṇa (Chapter 14) about Arjuna being reborn as such at the meeting of Kali and Dvāpara yugas and Svedaja being born as Karṇa during the same period.

Once during a quarrel between Śiva and Brahmā the former nipped off Brahmā's head. (For details see under Brahmā). Some drops of sweat appeared on the forehead of the angry Brahmā, and from the sweat which Brahmā wiped with his hand arose a person wearing a thousand shields, bow and quiver. That person was Svedaja. He asked Brahmā what he should do and the former granted him permission to destroy Śiva. He then approached Śiva with bow drawn and the frightened Śiva ran to Viṣṇu and sought refuge. Svedaja followed Śiva and when Viṣṇu, seeing him, raised a loud noise 'Hum'. Śiva prostrated at Viṣṇu's feet. Śiva extended the skull in his hand towards Viṣṇu requesting something to be given to him. Mahāviṣṇu, who had nothing else to give Śiva, put his right hand into the skull as alms, Śiva wounded the hand with his Śūla (three-pronged weapon) and pure red blood began flowing from the hand into the skull. The blood continued flowing for a thousand years in a length of fifty yojanas and thickness of ten yojanas. At the end of the period Viṣṇu asked whether the skull was not filled yet, and looking into the skull with his three eyes Śiva answered that it was full. Then Viṣṇu stopped the flow of blood, and Śiva, in the presence of Viṣṇu, looked into the blood for a thousand years and stirred it with his hand. The blood gradually turned into a bubble, and a person possessing thousand hands and as glowing as fire appeared in the skull. He had a crown on his head and he held in his hands a bow and quiver. He wore gloves on his hands. And, that was Raktaja, an incarnation of Nararṣi.

Looking at Raktaja, Śiva told Viṣṇu thus : "This master in archery is Nara. You spoke Nara, and let his name, therefore be Nara. Oh Nārāyaṇa, you both will be called Naranārāyaṇas. This Nara will be of help to you on behalf of the Devas and also in the sustenance and protection of the world. He will further help you to kill the asuras. Nara, the great intellectual that he is, will become a mūṇi, of surpassing wisdom. Brahmā's divine fifth head possesses so much of effulgence. Nara is created from that effulgence and also from the blood from your hands and my look at it. He will annihilate all enemies in war. He will be a terror to those persons who cannot be conquered by you, Indra and the other Devas.

While Viṣṇu stood there amazed Raktaja praised him and Śiva with folded hands and asked from the skull

what he should do. Then Śiva ordered him thus : You kill this asura (Svedaja) created by Brahmā with his own effulgence." And Śiva led Raktaja out of the skull by his hands and told him again :—"Look, here lies the terrible person I spoke about made unconscious by the cry of 'Hum' by Viṣṇu. Awake him immediately." After having said this Śiva disappeared. Nara, in the presence of Nārāyaṇa, kicked the unconscious Svedaja with his left foot, and he came out of his unconscious state.

The fierce fight that ensued between Raktaja and Svedaja continued for two years. By then Svedaja had lost everything but one of his shields and Raktaja had only his two arms to fight with. At this stage Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu) in great alarm went and asked Brahmā whether Raktaja might not kill Svedaja. Brahmā answered, 'In the next birth Nara may defeat Svedaja'. Saying 'Right, let that be so', Viṣṇu returned to the battlefield and withdrew them from fighting with the assurance that they would be given an opportunity to fight again during the period of the Kali and the Dvāpara yugas.

Afterwards Viṣṇu directed Āditya (Sun) and Ākhaṇḍala (Indra) to look after Raktaja and Svedaja. He told Āditya further :—"At the end of the Dvāpara yuga you should see that Svedaja is reborn, in the interests of the Devas, as your son. In the Yadu dynasty will be born a very powerful fellow called Śūra and he will have a very beautiful daughter named Pṛthā. Durvāsas will advise her some mantras as a boon and she will have some sons from the Devas whom she will invoke with the mantras. With that object in view, while in her periods, she would, at the time of dawn gaze at you with love. Then he (Svedaja) will be born as the son called Vasuṣeṇa of Kuntī, the virgin."

The Sun-God agreed to obey the above instructions of Viṣṇu and told him further :—"I shall procreate in the virgin a very powerful and valiant son, who will become well-known in the world as Karṇa. He will gift away all wealth to brahmins." After saying this Śūrya disappeared.

After this Viṣṇu told Indra as follows :—"You should, at the end of the Dvāpara yuga see that this Nara, born from blood, is reborn as an aspect of yours on earth. King Pāṇḍu will one day go into the forest with his wives, Kuntī and Mādrī, and he will then become the object of an animal's curse. He will therefore, in a spirit of renunciation, go to mount Śataśṛṅga where he would ask Kuntī to become a mother by another man. Unwilling to do so Kuntī will desire to have sons by Devas, and when she prays to you, you should favour her with this Nara as son. Devendra raised a legal objection to the above injunction of Viṣṇu as follows :—"You, who incarnated yourself as Rāma in the twenty-seventh yuga of the last Manvantara for the purpose of killing Rāvaṇa, killed my son Bāli. Therefore I do not wish to procreate Nara as my son." To this objection of Indra Viṣṇu assured him that as a penalty for the mistake of killing Bāli, he would be a companion of Nara (Arjuna) who would be born as Indra's son.

According to the above terms and conditions fighting between Raktaja and Svedaja ended. In the next birth Raktaja was born as Arjuna and Svedaja as