

SKANDA PURĀṆA

Book VII: Prabhāsakhaṇḍa Section III: Arbuda Khaṇḍa

CHAPTER ONE

A Hollow Near the Hermitage of Vasiṣṭha

Obeisance to gracious Gaṇeśa. Now the *third section of Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa entitled Arbuda Khaṇḍa starts.*

Vyāsa said:

1. Obeisance to that endless, subtle, pure, God of gods, the creator knowable through the means of knowledge, and the cosmic-formed Śaṁkara.

The Sages said:

2-3. O Sūta! You have already described the Lunar and Solar races in a detailed manner. You have also described all the Ages of Manu and the different types of creations. Now, we want to hear about the greatness of the principal places of pilgrimage. O Sūta of great intelligence! which are the auspicious places of pilgrimage on this earth?

Sūta said:

4. There are many centers of pilgrimage in this world which cannot be counted. Their number has been stated to be three and a half crore in olden times.

5-7. Different regions, rivers, mountains and large rivers have attained distinguished and exalted position through the austerities and heroic acts of sages. Among these is a place of pilgrimage named Arbuda which is free from sins, destroyer of all sins and exempted from the touch of vices of the Age of Kali through the influence of Sage Vasiṣṭha. All places of pilgrimage purify by means of offering of free gifts and bathing. But all the sins of humans get destroyed by a mere sight of Arbuda from a distance.

The sages said:

8-9. What are the dimensions of this Arbuda mountain? Where is it situated? How could it get the fame by the greatness of Vasiṣṭha? Which are the main places of pilgrimage on this Arbuda? Please explain in details. We have a great curiosity to know.

Sūta said:

10. O great Brāhmanas! I describe the sin-destroying story of Arbuda mountain, the way I have heard.

11-13. Vasiṣṭha, the son of Brahmā, was a divine sage. Descending on earth, he performed severe austerities. He used to live in open during rains and in water during winter. He used to take fixed food and kept himself engaged in the welfare of all living beings. Undergoing the pain of self-torment under five fires during summer, he used to keep himself continuously engaged in muttering names of deities and in making offerings to fire. He had a wish-fulfilling milch cow named Nandinī with him.

14. Once while wandering about on earth, she fell into a deep and dark cleft affected by extreme thirst.

15. Coinciding this, the Sun god set down but the cow did not return to the hermitage.

16. Everyday in the morning and in the evening Vasiṣṭha, the observer of religious vow used to perform the ritual of offering oblation to fire with the milk of that cow.

17. Now worried with the fear of atonement, Vasiṣṭha went in search of the cow in the higher and lower regions of that mountain.

18. Going near that ditch, he heard the painful voice of the cow. He asked the auspicious cow, "How could you fall down here?"

19-20. Becoming nervous as to how offering oblation to the sacrificial fire could be continued, I have come out to see you." The cow said, "I have fallen down here due to my desire to have grass. Please save me from this difficult, intolerable pain." Having heard those words of hers, Sage Vasiṣṭha, resorted to meditation.

21-23. He meditated on the (divine) river Sarasvatī, the purifier of all the three worlds. She on being meditated on by that sage filled the ditch completely at once with pure water. The ditch having thus been completely filled, Nandinī then came out of it. Becoming happy, the cow came back to the hermitage with the sage.

24-27. That great sage saw depth in the middle of the ditch and he, the wise one, thought of filling it up. O Brāhmaṇas! a thought that this ditch be filled up with stones brought from the mountain dawned on Vasiṣṭha and he thought, "Let me proceed towards Himālaya soon. Himālaya will send stones here. This ditch will get filled up by this great soul." Sage Vasiṣṭha then went to Himālaya. Having seen Vasiṣṭha coming, the Himālaya mountain became happy. Then having received him by washing of feet and making deserving offering he said:

28-29. "Welcome to you, O great sage! My life has become fruitful today that you, the one adorable to all gods, have arrived at my house today. O great sage! Tell me the job to be done, any job, which I, of course, will do, even by sacrificing my life for your sake."

30-32. Vasiṣṭha said: "There is a dangerous hollow near my hermitage. Nandinī, my best cow, had fallen into it. I took her out with great effort. I have come to you with the fear that she may fall into it again. O Lord of the Earth! No one else is able to accomplish this task (of filling the hollow). Hence, O great one, please send any mountain there, by which the hollow gets filled up. Send something like this."

33. Himālaya said: “O great Sage! how does that hollow measure? I will send a mountain after considering the size equal to the same measurement.”

34. Vasiṣṭha said: “Its breadth and length measure respectively 2000 and 3000. I cannot tell its depth.”

35. Himālaya said: “What could be the cause for the formation of a hollow of such measurement. I have a great curiosity. Describe this in greater details.”