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શ્રી શ્વેતામ્બર મૂર્તિપૂજક જૈન સંઘ, અંધેરી (પૂર્વ)

પાર્શ્વદર્શન બિલ્ડીંગ, ડૉ. સર્વપલ્લી રાધાકૃષ્ણ રોડ,  
(જુના નાગરદાસ રોડ), અંધેરી (પૂર્વ), મુંબઈ - ૪૦૦ ૦૬૯.



[www.jainsite.com](http://www.jainsite.com)

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Inspired by : MUNI BHAGYACHANDRA VIJAYJI M. S.

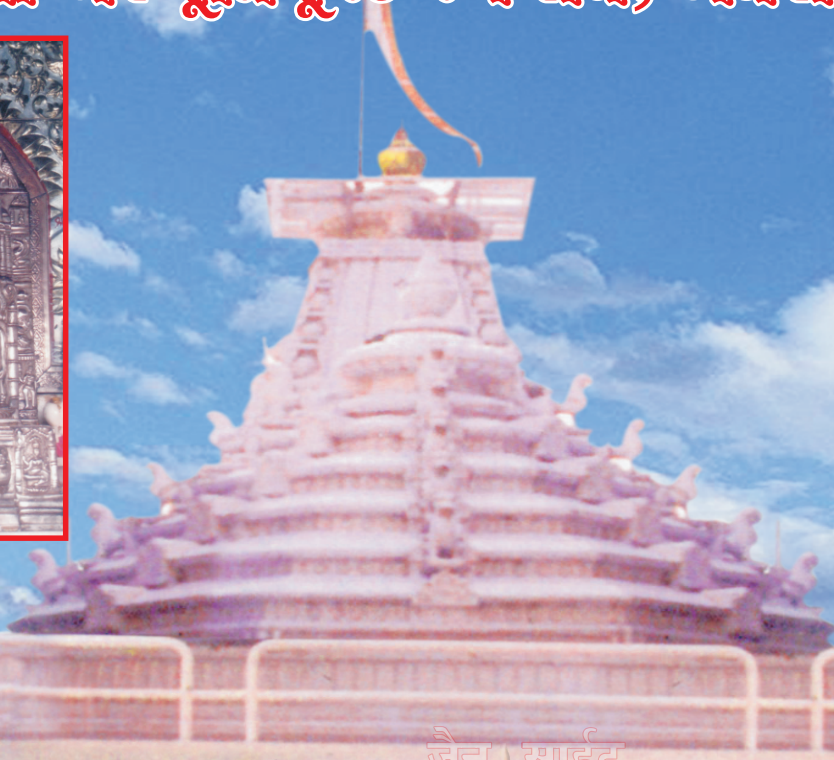
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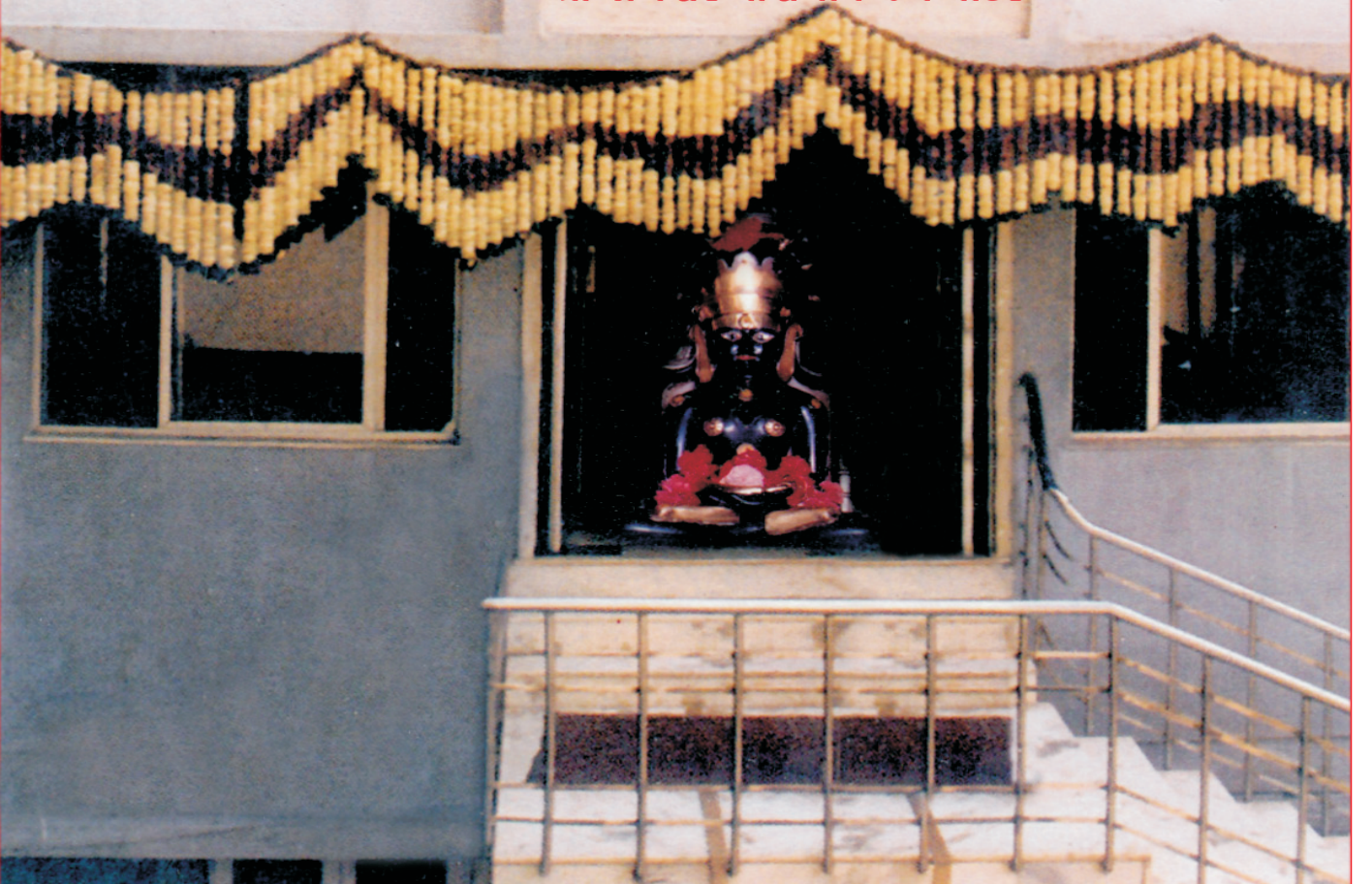
॥ ॐ श्री शंभेश्वर पार्श्वनाथाय नमः ॥

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જૈન સાઈટ  
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જૈનમ જગતિ શાસનમ  
શ્રી શંભેશ્વર પાર્શ્વનાથ જૈન મંદિર



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ट्रस्टनी नोंधणी नं. F-4210 (BOM)  
सोसायटीनी नोंधणी नं. Bombay 381/1976 G.B.B.S.D.

## श्री श्वैताम्बर मूर्तिपूजक जैन संघ, अंधेरी (पूर्व)

पार्श्वदर्शन भिर्डींग, डॉ. सर्वपल्ली राधाकृष्ण रोड, (जुना नागरदास रोड),  
अंधेरी (पूर्व), मुंबई - ४०० ०६६.

### प्रस्तावना

अनेक परमोपकारक आचार्य देव ज्ञानी, तपस्वी मुनिराज, सेवाभावी साध्वीजु भगवंताना अद्वितीय-अद्भूत-अवर्णनीय आशिर्वाद्यी तथा महापवित्र मंत्रोच्चार अने विधि विधान द्वारा स्थापित आकर्षक अलौकिक अनेक अने मनमोहक रज्ज्मा भगवान श्री शंभेश्वर पार्श्वनाथजु मनोरम्य, नेत्र द्विपक लावण्यमय प्रतिभाजुने मूणनायक तरीके भिराजमान करेल देवविमान तुल्य तीर्थसभ जिनालय अटले मारुं-तमारुं अने आपणा सहजु श्री शंभेश्वर पार्श्वनाथजुं शिपरभंधी जिनालय तथा धीर-वीर-गंभीर-सरण-भक्ति-धार्मिक पापभीरु दानवीर अने उत्तमोत्तम श्रावक-श्राविकाओथी जनेलो रपमा तीर्थकर तरीके ओणपातो श्री श्वे. मू. जैन संघ, अंधेरी (पूर्व) अटले अमारो श्री अने सरस्वतीथी सभर जनेलो विनयी-विवेकी अने गुणभगवंतानो कृपापात्र जनेल चारे तरफु अे दशे दिशाओमां जैनम् जयति शासनम् नी यशोगाथा नी विजयघोष १४ राजलोकमां गुंजतो करनार अटले अमारो श्री श्वे. मू. जैन संघ अंधेरी (पूर्व) अनेक नाना मोटा धार्मिक अनुष्ठानो करनार श्री संघोने मद्दरूप जनेनार, अनेक पांजरापोणोने सहायभूत थनारो अनेक साधु-साध्वीजु भगवंताना वैयावस्यमां सहाय अयेसर, गृह जिनालयमांथी शरु थयेल आजे उत्तुंग गगनचुंभी आकर्षक शिपरभद्ध जिनालय जेमां देव-देवीओनी देवकुलिकाओ शोभी रही छे. श्री संघमां कायमी आयंजिल जातु-जे जे पाठशाणाओ, ज्ञानभंडार अटले श्री संघ शक्तिनुं नमूनेदार नजरालुं कहेवाय.

युगद्विवाकर प. पू. उपकारी गखना नायक आ. भ. श्री विजय धर्मसूरीश्वरजु म. सा. नी शुभ प्रेरणा मार्गदर्शक तथा तेमनी शुभ निश्रामां निर्मित अने स्थापित श्री जिनालय तथा प. पू. शतावधानी आ. भ. श्री जयानंदसूरीजुनी प्रेरणाथी ता. ४-४-१९७६ मां श्री संघनी स्थापनाना सुंदर विचारोनुं भीज आजे घेघुरो घटादार वृक्ष समान जनेयो छे. यमत्कारी अने अलौकिक मूणनायक श्री शंभेश्वर पार्श्वनाथ भगवानना दर्शन करीने जैन-जैनतरोनी घख्याओ इलीभूत थरु छे.

निसहाय-अजोल जनेला टोरोनी अने पांजरापोणोने अमारो श्री संघे उदार हाथे मद्द करी छे तथा हालमां केणवणी क्षेत्रे, मेडीकल क्षेत्रे, साधर्मिक क्षेत्रे, अनुकंपा क्षेत्रे परा श्री संघनी ज अेक शाखा श्री शंभेश्वर पार्श्वनाथ इण्डिशन द्वारा आर्थिक सहाय चालु छे.

श्री श्वे. मू. जैन संघ वती

प्रमुज

# JAIN RAMAYAN

PART 3

जैन साईट  
JAINSITE  
वेबसाइट

*Shri Priyadarshan*



Shri Mulchandbhai who was born on the 4th August 1933 as the fifth son of Manibhai and Hirabahan, in Pudgam, Mehsana, (Gujarat) grew smiling and blooming like a tender and fragrant Jasmine bud. At the age of eighteen, he received the *DEEKSHA* on 21-3-51 at the feet of the famous Jain **Acharya Shrimad Vijay Premsoorishwarji Maharaj**, at Ranpur (Saurashtra) as the disciple of Bhanuvijayi who is at present **Acharya Shri Vijay Bhuvanbhanusoorishwarji Maharaj**.

Muni Shri Bhadruguptavijayi, from the time of his initiation into the *CHARITRA DHARMA*, has been carrying out very deep and continued studies of the scriptures and he has also been carrying out the duties of preaching the scriptures. He mastered the 45 *Jain Agamas*, with their commentaries; and then step by step, he mastered all the philosophical systems of India and of the Western countries. He also studied and mastered the various great literatures of the world, and he has been travelling towards new horizons of knowledge and creation.

His pilgrimage of creative writing which began at the age of twenty with the book "*MAHAPANTHO YATRI*" (in Gujarati) has been continuing even today without a break. He has written more than one hundred books. He has produced various kinds of valuable literature such as critical and scholarly commentaries on such great philosophical works as *JNANSAR* and *PRASHAMARATI* besides works on philosophy, long stories, short stories, poems, songs, epistles and the *JAIN RAMAYAN*. He has been producing literature which provides pure and wholesome spiritual guidance to his readers, especially to the younger generation.

His creative writings are being published in Gujarati, Hindi and English and in the Hindi monthly magazine *ARHANT*, all published by Shri Vishwakalyan Prakashan Trust of Mehsana.

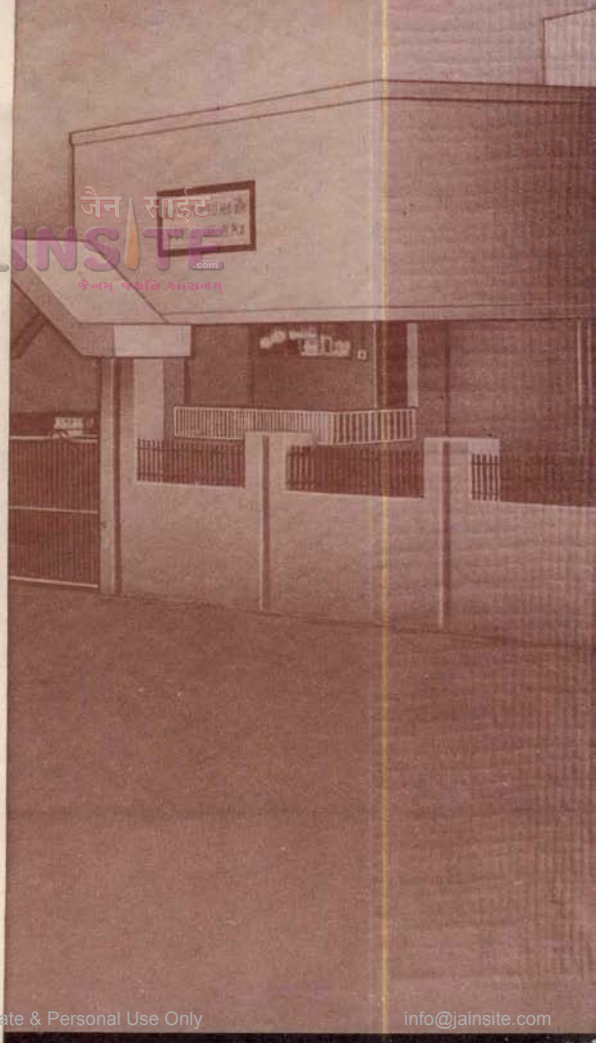
He is of a loving nature, always smiling, serene and sublime in his utterances. His soft and tender nature has endeared himself to countless people whose spiritual welfare is his only aim. The most important aspect of his personality is his never-failing endeavour to bring spiritual welfare and felicity to all. He is deeply interested in providing guidance for the improvement of the society especially the younger generation and children with respect to their way of life.

He has travelled on foot through Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka etc., and wherever he went, he carried out activities to disseminate the *DHARMA* and to inculcate lofty cultural ideals in the minds of his devotees.

His personality has grown lofty and resplendent on account of such sublime activities as delivering discourses, engaging in enlightening conversations, organising cultural programmes, carrying out meditation, recitation and austerities and rendering devotion to the *Paramatma*. He is a person of exemplary and inspiring virtues whose very appearance can bring about spiritual elevation in the beholders.

He was elevated to the status of an **Acharya** on 4th May 1987 at Kolhapur (Maharashtra) by his beneficent Gurudev Acharyashri Vijay Bhuvanbhanusoorishwarji Maharaj and he came to be known as **Acharyashri Vijay Bhadruguptasoorishwarji Maharaj**.

# श्रीयुत संपतराज र श्रीश्वकल्याण महे





**JAIN RAMAYAN**  
**(PART-III)**

(A long novel based on *The Trishashtishalaka Purusha Charitra* written by Kalikalsarvajna Acharyashri Hemachandrasoorishwarji, in the Twelfth century of the Vikram era.)

*Written by :*

**Shri Priyadarshan**  
(Acharyashri Vijay Bhadruguptsoorishwarji Maharaj)

*English Version by :*

**PROF. K. RAMAPPA, M. A., B. Ed.**

\*

*Edited by :*

**BHADRABAHU VJAY**

\*

*First Edition — 2000*

**JANUARY 1989**

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*Price :*

**Rs. 45/-**

\*

*Published by :*

**SHRI VISHVAKALYAN PRAKASHAN TRUST  
NEAR KAMBOINAGAR,  
MEHSANA-384 002. (GUJARAT) INDIA**

\*

*Printed at :*

**HARSHA PRINTERY  
122, DR. MEISHERI ROAD,  
BOMBAY-400 009.**

## A FOREWORD BY THE PUBLISHERS

We are extremely happy to place in your hands, the English version of the *Jain Ramayan* Part-III. The Hindi and the Gujarati versions of the *Jain Ramayan* have been immensely popular and have been received by readers with enthusiasm.

This is the English version of the *Jain Ramayan* Part-III. The three parts of the English Version of the *Jain Ramayan* are being published. We believe that ours is the first excellently and attractively brought out English version of the *Jain Ramayan*.

Our other English publications are becoming very popular among readers. We intend publishing more works in English and placing them in your hands. The original Hindi version of the *Jain Ramayan* by Acharyashri Vijay Bhadragnptsoorishwarji Maharaj is in three parts. The English versions of the three parts are being published.

We are extremely grateful to Shri Ishwar Parmar and Shrimati Manju Parmar of Poona who, out of their devotion for the Revered Acharyadev Shri Vijay Bhadragnptsoorishwarji Maharaj, have extended financial assistance to publish these English versions.

We are extremely thankful to Mr. Rajendra Bothra (Manish Silk Industries, Bangalore) for supplying us a neat and clean-typescript of all the 3 parts of the '*Jain Ramayan*'.

We also wish to express our gratitude to Mr. Keshavjibhai Gogri of Harsha Printery for printing these books in an attractive manner.

Our heartfelt desire is that these books should be made available to readers in all educational institutions, libraries and public libraries. For hundreds and thousands of years, the sublime ideals exemplified by the characters of the *Ramayana* have



been the foundation for our Indian Culture. Even in this age of materialism, the impact of the *Ramayan* on the minds and hearts of people is profound and lasting.

The *Ramayan* may not be considered historically true by some but no one can deny its greatness as a magnificent epic poem embodying some eternal, ethical and spiritual truths.

Of course, the *Jain Ramayan* has not been so popular as the *Valmiki Ramayan*, the *Tulsi Ramayan*, etc., but the original *grantha Trishashtishalaka Purush Charitra* on which the *Jain Ramayan* is based is an ancient one.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this book as you have enjoyed reading our other publications.

Our heartfelt desire is that you must read this book; and you must encourage your friends and relatives to read it. This book can also be given as a presentation on auspicious occasions to your friends and relatives.



January, 1989

Shri Vishwakalyan Prakashan Trust.  
Mehsana

## A FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR

This is an English version of my work, the *Jain Ramayan* Part-III. This work is in the form of a long novel based on the story in the famous work, "*Trishashtishalaka Purusha Charitra*" written by Kalikalsarvajna Acharyashri Hemachandrasoori in the twelfth century of the Vikram era. The *Trishashtishalaka Purusha Charitra* contains certain details which are not to be found in such epics as the *Valmiki Ramayan* and the *Ramacharit-manas* of Tulsidas.

The *Jain Ramayan* comprises a detailed account of Ravan's birth, his youth and his attainments; many thrilling and exciting events and stories relating to the Rakshasdwep (the island of the Rakshasas) and the Vanardweep; (the island of the Vanaras) and the profoundly moving story of Anjanadevi, the mother of Hanuman. It also contains the stories of Shri Ram's ancestors, Emperor Dasharath's conquest of Magadha and many stirring events relating to Shri Ram's departure to forests.

The various characters of the *Ramayan*, and the sublime ideals that the great work embodies touch many aspects of the human state of existence. If people read the *Ramayan* with the purpose of attaining spiritual elevation and ethical excellence the great epic provides the necessary spiritual and ethical guidance to them. The *Ramayan* enables its readers to attain such sublime virtues as heroism, fortitude, patience, selflessness, spiritual excellence, chastity, purity, nobility, dutifulness and spiritual equanimity; and bestows upon them genuine elicity and serenity.

Normally, a story narrated in an interesting manner fascinates readers and exercises upon them a deeper impact than philosophical or didactic works. All, whether they are young or old, enjoy stories. Each story produces upon its readers, its own impression. Now-a-days, thousands of stories and works of fiction which provoke sinful propensities and which destroy and

undermine the sublime values of human life are being published. Such books enter every household and people read them with zest and interest. The ignoble impact of such books can be seen in the lives of individuals, in social life and in our national life.

The *Ramayan* is so sublime that it cannot fail to produce a noble and elevating effect on its readers. Such lofty virtues as renunciation, purity, nobility, non-violence, truthfulness, celibacy and disinterestedness appear in the readers of The *Ramayan* at least to some extent. No reader of the *Ramayan* can escape its elevating impact.

I have written this novel with the purpose of communicating to my readers the noble ideals that the *Jain Ramayan* embodies. I have not attempted to preach any precept directly. Whatever is to be said, is said by the characters themselves or is implied in the events. I have only made a humble effort to narrate the story of the *Ramayan* in such a way as to make it interesting to readers and to enable them to appreciate its greatness.

The *Jain Ramayan* written by me has been published in Gujarati and Hindi, are very popular.

Now, this English version of the *Jain Ramayan* has been published for those readers who know English. Prof. K. Ramappa, who has been translating my books has prepared this English version of the *Jain Ramayan*.

This book has been published with the valuable financial assistance of Shri Ishwar Parmar and Shrimati Manju Parmar of Poona. Their precious contribution deserves my heartfelt appreciation.

If this work can awaken in the readers their dormant and latent virtues and if it can provide them some spiritual light, I will consider that my efforts have been fruitful.

—PRIYADARSHAN



Late Shri Chandulaji  
Tarachandji Parmar



Lat Smt. Champaben  
Chandulaji Parmar

Mohabbatnagar (Raj.) Pune



Ishwar Parmar, Manjula Parmar  
Pritee • Darshna • Sanat Parmar  
Ishwar Construction, Pune



## A FOREWORD BY THE TRANSLATOR

This is an English version prepared by me of the *Jain Ramayan* Part-III. It is a translation of the Hindi version written by Acharyashri Vijay Bhadruguptsoorishwarji Maharaj. The Hindi version is in three parts. The English versions of the second part and the third part will be published soon.

Acharyashri Vijay Bhadruguptsoorishwarji Maharaj is a scriptural scholar of outstanding eminence. Besides being a scholar, he is a creative writer of rare gifts; and an excellent exponent of the scriptures. He is also an engaging narrator of stories as it is evident from the various books he has written. He has the remarkable gifts of inventing interesting sequences, and writing realistic dialogues.

I have translated the *Jain Ramayan* into English in accordance with the sacred wish of the great Gurudev and as desired by Shri Vishwakalyan Prakashan Trust. I thank them for choosing me to render the book into English.

If there are any defects in my rendering the work into English, I hope that the readers of the book will treat them in the manner of the legendary swan which receives milk after separating it from water.

Bangalore,  
January 1989.

—K. RAMAPPA.



## LXXIII

### VIBHISHAN

Chandranakha's lamentations filled all the people in the harem in Ravan's palace with great grief and anguish. She had somehow managed to escape with her son, Sund, from Pathal Lanka; and had run away to Lanka. She could not find any place on earth where she and her son could remain safe and secure. Therefore, as soon as she met her brother Ravan, she embraced him and began weeping bitterly :

“Dear brother ! I am absolutely helpless. I have lost everything. I have no shelter except the earth and the sky. My son has been killed; my husband has been killed in the war; my two brothers-in-law have been killed; and our army of fourteen thousand soldiers has been decimated.”

Ravan heard the heart-rending story of Chandranakha with stupefaction and horripilation.

“Dear brother ! Though I have a heroic brother like you I am now compelled to lead a life of destitution. Oh ! I have lost my prosperous kingdom of Pathal Lanka and I, with my son, Sund, had to run away from there to save our lives; and we have come here seeking your refuge and protection. Kindly protect me and my son. Now, in this world, I have no other support except you. You are my only prop in this distress of mine. Now, the boat of my life is staggering in the mid-stream of life. Oh dear brother ! Only you can help it to reach the shore.”

“Dear Chandranakha ! You are indeed in great distress. Your story is really heart-rending but you need not at all worry. Your tragic story has broken my heart into pieces but be



patient. You are absolutely safe here. You are absolutely free from danger here. Live in Lanka happily. Nobody can harm you here and remember ! I will destroy the fellow who killed your husband and your son in such a heartless and heinous manner."

Ravan moved forward a few paces; wiped off Chandranakha's tears and tried to comfort her, with soothing words. He lifted her faded face; looked at her with unwinking eyes; and then embraced her. Later, he arranged a proper residence for Chandranakha; and went into the palace.

Ravan was greatly agitated by Chandranakha's story. There arose in his mind countless conflicting thoughts and feelings. He was greatly agitated by his desire for a union with Sita, madened by her fascinating beauty and the tremendous attraction her beauty had exercised upon him. He had become blinded by his infatuation for Sita. He was beside his wits. Her beauty made him yearn for her, day and night. He had lost his wits on account of his blinding infatuation for her.

A little later, Mandodari came into the chamber. She saw the King of Lanka. She saw the King of Lanka lying on his bed in a state of intense mental agitation. She had not seen before that at any time her husband in such a state of deep worry and agitation. She went near him and stood by his side. She stroked him affectionately and said in a tender voice :

"My dear Lord ! What is the cause for your worry ?" There was perfect stillness in the chamber. Perfect silence pervaded the whole chamber. Ravan did not break his silence. He lay motionless upon his cot. He had closed his eyes. Holding his head with his hands, he lay deeply thinking. Agitated by his condition, she shook him gently; and said in a perturbed tone;

"What serious problem has been causing such worry to the Lord of Lanka that he has lost his wits and is thus lying in deep agitation?"

A few moments passed thus. Only then did Ravan open his eyes but even then he could not look straight into Mandodari's eyes. He said in a tone of distress:

"Dear goddess! How can I tell you what I am experiencing? I am really ashamed of myself. My Queen! I am unable to bear with this separation from Sita. I cannot live without attaining her favour. As soon as I begin thinking of her, flames of passion flash to the brims of my being. I feel that my body is decaying and that every limb of mine has been falling to pieces. The thoughts relating to Sita keep agitating me every moment, wherever I may be; whatever I may be doing. As a result of all this I may . . . . ." As he said this, his eyes closed naturally and he collapsed on his bed. Of course, Mandodari was fully aware of Ravana's agitation and grief. But she had never even dreamt that such a mighty hero as Lankesh, a lion in might and ferocity would thus get entangled in the snares of sensual cravings. Hence, she stood there in utter silence and stupefaction.

Ravan took Mandodari's hands into his; and began to speak like a mad man;

"Mandodari! I am sure that you desire that I should be alive; don't you? If so, you at once go to Sita without caring for any scruples or sentiments; and prevail upon her to accept my love and to become my dearest partner in life; to become united with me for ever. Dear goddess! Cannot you do this for my sake? Cannot you make this sacrifice for my sake? . . . . for your, dearest lord's sake? Cannot you make this sacrifice to keep me alive?"

Mandodari fell into a deep conflict. A tremendous conflict of thoughts and feelings arose in her mind.

"Dearest one! You know very well that I have taken a vow before a spiritual head that I would not compel a woman to marry me against her will and that I would not even touch another man's wife. You know I have taken this vow; "I will not even touch a woman against her will." Now, it is this vow

that stands as an insurmountable impediment on the path of my love. But of course, I will never break my vow. Even by a mistake I will not use force to compel Sita to become united with me."

Mandodari was a woman of great nobility and purity; an ideal Indian woman born of an illustrious family; so, naturally she was greatly agitated by her lord's distress and grief. She believed that no other duty was nobler than her wifely duty towards her Lord. She adored her husband as a god. His welfare was her highest wish. Her greatest felicity was to see him in felicity. Therefore, she decided to meet Sita; and to prevail upon her to accept Ravan's love. Having made this determination, she proceeded straight to the *Devaraman* garden.

When Mandodari went to meet Sita, a new ray of hope shot through his mind which had been filled with the gloom of disappointment and bitterness. Even then, he did not feel certain that his desire would be fulfilled. Repeatedly, his conscience said to him, "Even if the sky and the nether world become one; even if the sun rises in the west, Sita will not accept your love." In spite of this, Ravan who was maddened by infatuation became impatient and kept looking for Mandodari.

Ravan had decorated the *Devaraman* garden in such a way that it looked like the *Nandanvan* (the heavenly garden.) He had engaged a large number of attendants to wait upon Sita and to render the necessary service to her. The attendants stood ready in their appointed places to render service to Sita. Armed guards had been appointed to guard every gate of the garden. Every alley and part of the garden was radiant with colourful and fragrant flowers and creepers. Birds and animals moved about joyfully and freely in the garden. When Mandodari's chariot stopped at the gates of the garden, the guards came forward with bowed heads and saluted her with great respect. The attendants received her with great honour saying; "May queen Mandodari be victorious." Mandodari, having alighted from her chariot proceeded with slow steps towards the Ashoka tree beneath which Sita was sitting. As soon as she came near the Ashoka tree, the attendants introduced Mandodari to Sita.

Sita sat still and silent in her place. Moving a few steps towards Sita, Mandodari sat on the ground facing her. There was silence for a while. And then breaking the silence, Mandodari said.

“Dear Sita! I have an entreaty to make to you; will you grant it?”

In response to this, Sita looked towards Mandodari with weary and grief-stricken eyes.

“Oh goddess! I am willing to be your attendant if you grant this request of mine.”

But Sita gave no reply. She remained silent as before. The attendants stood speechless; and moment by moment Mandodari's agitation changed into intense impatience.

“Sita! You know very well that I am Mandodari, the Queen – consort of Dashmukh, the Emperor of Lanka. I am the greatest among Ravan's queens and I occupy the highest position of power among his queens. Yet, discarding all sense of shame, I have come here to make a humble entreaty to you. Oh! Sita! Ravan, the Emperor of Lanka has enshrined you in the temple of his heart as his dearest and most honoured goddess. He has given you an honoured seat in the mansion of his magnificent heart. He is yearning to attain your company and favour. Since, he has failed to attain your favour, he has fallen into a state of deep distress. He is prepared to surrender at your feet all his power, pelf and prosperity. I entreat you not to reject his love but to accept it. Indeed, you are supremely fortunate because my lord whom the whole universe adores is impatient to wear on his forehead, the dust of your feet. Ah! . . . . . another point. Now you give up expecting the arrival of your husband, Ram who is like a mendicant. My lord Dashmukh Ravan is capable of bestowing upon you greater happiness than your mendicant-husband can. I wonder why you keep waiting for that mendicant, Ram who is now wandering about helplessly in the midst of wild forests.”

“Stop your improper talk! Stop this nonsense!” saying this, Sita at once closed her ears with her hands and screamed in utter agony. Her tender face reddened with anger. Her heart began to beat faster and she began breathing audibly.

“Oh! Can there be any comparison between your husband who is a cowardly jackal and my lord, Shri Ram who is a lion among men.”

“Stop prattling. Your husband Ravan is a crow compared to my lord who is a royal swan. Your words are absolutely absurd. I think you are birds of the same feather. You have come here as a messenger and a mediator carrying the mean message of your husband who, maddened by sensuality, ignobly craves for the company of another man’s wife. Are you not at all ashamed of this terrible sin you are committing? You are destroying sublime family-traditions by supporting ingobility and immorality. Your conduct is disgraceful. Fie upon you! At once, get away from here. It is a sin even to look at your face. Never show me your black and monstrous face again.”

And Sita at once turned her face away from her.

Meanwhile, Ravan who had grown impatient since Mandodari had not returned, came straight to the *Devaraman* garden. When he overheard that conversation between Sita and Mandodari, he felt bitterly disappointed. He moved forward and said in a tone of deep agitation.

“Dear Sita! Do not get angry with Mandodari. She is your humble servant and you are the empress of the empire of Lanka and the heart of the mighty hero, Lankesh Ravan who has conquered the three worlds. I myself am a humble servant at your feet. Oh goddess, Sita! Kindly bestow at least a ray of your grace upon me, a mean and humble fellow. Kindly at least glance towards me with love and affection. Do you know how much I am distressed by my inability to secure your favour? Oh! you light my life! I yearn for your grace. I am yearning for at least one single blissful union with you.”

And then Ravan moved a few steps forward; sat on the ground before Sita; and then he began to make entreaties to her. But Sita indignantly reprimanded him; turned her face away from him; and said with burning anger;

“O you meanest of mortals! Certainly the cruel eyes of the god of death have fallen upon you. Since the time you abducted, the wife of Shri Ram dreadful death has been stalking behind you. By abducting me, you have courted a disaster and invited Death. O you wicked fellow! How long can you remain secure escaping from the dreadful fury of my husband Shri Ram and my brother-in-law, Lakshman?”

“Sita! Dear one! Do not break my heart by uttering such harsh words. Indeed, I love you. I do not desire anything except you; nor do I worry about anything else. I fear no one in the entire universe. Let alone mortals, even demons and gods shudder before me . . . . . Become the queen of my harem. Establish your undisputed and absolute sway seated on the throne of my heart. That will be the veritable heaven for me . . . . That will make my life a magnificent *Nandanvan* (the heavenly garden)”

Ravan’s repeated entreaties had no effect on Sita. She remained firm and unyielding. She reprimanded him and denounced him. Yet, Ravan who was caught in the whirlwind of passion and sensual desires kept repeating his entreaties with increased fervour. The great sages have rightly said.

“*Indeed Passion is powerful.*”

The sun had already set.

Yet, Ravan blinded by indignation and infatuation kept wandering through the dense forest of sensual passion; and overpowering indignation. When Sita did not accept Ravan’s entreaties and humble offers of love, he grew wild with rage. In consequence, he made a determination to win her over by means of threats and terror-tactics. Ravan was not an ordinary mortal but a Vidyadhar emperor who had acquired mastery over many supernatural powers.

Dense darkness covered everything, enveloping the whole world. In that darkness nothing was visible. An impenetrable silence pervaded the atmosphere.

The goddess of the night began her sway over the world. Dense dark clouds covered the sky. The whole universe was filled with a dreadful kind of darkness.

The *Devaraman* garden which a few moments before had been resplendent like the *Nandanvan*, the heavenly garden suddenly became transformed into a darkling plain for the dreadful sports of demons. The whole garden was filled with sky-cracking cries of monsters, ghosts and spectres. Monsters and demons began moving about freely indulging in their diabolical games and frolicsome sports. The garden began to echo with the cries and roars of tigers and lions and the dreadful hissing of venomous snakes.

In spite of all this, the great woman Sita did not experience any fear or helplessness.

She began reciting, with devotion, the *Navkar Mahamantra*.

She experienced neither fear nor worry. She did not feel helpless or terrified. She remained still and stolid like the *Meru* which remains unshaken by clashing clouds or raging winds. Throughout the night, Ravan brought about countless terrifying events by means of his magical and supernatural powers but Sita who was absolutely devoted to her Lord, Shri Ram kept reciting the *Namaskar Mahamantra*. Ravan's terror-tactics totally failed. The mighty hero Ravan had to accept defeat before a woman, weak compared to his might; yet his infatuation for her did not decrease even a little.

In this manner the night passed. The golden rays of the rising sun shot from the eastern horizon and rendered the whole world resplendent by his heavenly alchemy. The birds skipping playfully on the branches of trees gave an indication of the rising sun.

At last, Ravan feeling utterly defeated put an end to his deceitful and magical trickery and returned to his palace.

But the attendants in the garden were terrified by those magical tricks of Ravan. Some of them sympathised with Sita and developed great veneration for her. Some of the attendants ran away from there when Ravan began to display his magical and supernatural powers to win over Sita by means of intimidation and terror-tactics. One attendant thought, "Ravan, has been using force and terror-tractics heartlessly to compel Sita to accept his offers of love. His harem abounds in queens, maidens and attendants of outstanding beauty. Yet why does he want to make this noble woman a victim to his passion? Probably the noble Vibhishan does not know what is happening here. Why should I not inform him of all this? Only he is noble among these heartless Rakshasas. Therefore, I must at once inform him of this tragic situation."

She at once hurried to the palace of Vibhishan. Vibhishan at that time sat on the balcony of his palace watching with delight the beauty of Lanka. Noticing the attendant running towards the palace in great grief and agitation he descended from his palace. The attendant approached him, saluted him respectfully and then said in a humble voice.

"May Lord Vibhishan be victorious!" and then she glanced around carefully to see if anyone was watching her. She was in great fright. Fear filled her heart.

It did not take much time for Vibhishan to understand the situation. He gave her an assurance of safety and said: "Be fearless. Tell me what you want to say, without any fear."

"My Lord, I think you are aware of what is happening in the *Devaraman* garden."

"No; but what is happening there."

"Emperor, Dashmukh Ravan has abducted and brought a noble woman. In order to prevail upon her to accept the Emperor's love, even queen Mandodari came to the garden in the evening but that great woman, Sita is still and dauntless like a rock. She remains unshaken and unmoved by the



emperor's entreaties and appeals. She reprimanded the emperor severely."

"What are you prattling? Are you in your senses? Vibhishan flared up with anger. He knew nothing about Sita's abduction by Ravan. He had never interfered with his elder brother's personal affairs. Pausing a little, he said in an apprehensive tone; "What is her name? Who is she?"

"My Lord, her name is Sita."

"And who is her husband? Whose wife is she?"

"Dear sir, I do not know all those things but she always keeps uttering the name, Shri Ram. Probably, Shri Ram is her husband's name. And my Lord! This night the Devaraman garden has become a playfield for ghosts, spirits, demons and monsters. Emperor Ravan has been using his magical powers to intimidate Sita and to compel her to accept his love."

"All right. Now you may go."

The attendant returned at once. Vibhishan stood in utter stupefaction and silence for sometime. His mind was greatly agitated. No one had committed such an enormity so far in the Rakshasa dynasty. There was no precedent of this kind in the Rakshasa dynasty. Therefore, Vibhishan was greatly grieved and agitated by Ravan's ignoble action. He felt ashamed of it. His agitation knew no bounds. He decided to meet Sita personally and to understand the situation. He could not get a wink of sleep that night. He spent the whole night in great agitation and worry.

The day dawned. The tender rays of the rising sun spread playfully and joyfully over the world. A fresh commotion, a new stir arose in the world which had been silent and still.

Vibhishan set off to the *Devaraman* garden in his chariot. Ravan was sitting there. Vibhishan went straight to Sita. He saluted her respectfully and said :

"Revered lady ! I am Vibhishan. I always treat other women as my sisters. Would you kindly tell me who you are ? From

where have you been brought here? Who is your husband? And to which noble family do you belong?"

Sita heard the words uttered by Vibhishan in an intensely emotional manner. She was greatly overwhelmed with Vibhishan's words. She could at once realise that he was an impartial and noble person. Therefore, she said in a serious but soft tone :

"Dear sir! I am Sita, the daughter of Janak, the king of Mithila. Prince Bhamandal is my brother. Shri Ram, the mighty hero is my husband. I am the daughter-in-law of Dasharath, the renowned Emperor of Ayodhya. I came into the Dandakaranya accompanying my husband, Shri Ram and brother-in-law, Lakshman. Once while my brother-in-law, Lakshman happened to approach a grove of bamboo trees, there he noticed unexpectedly a resplendent sword hanging in the air. Out of curiosity, he clutched it and then to test its sharpness, he waved it across the bamboo trees and unknowingly, he happened to cut off the head of someone who was there lost in meditation. Then, he realised what he had done. He was filled with great grief and repentance. Looking at the sword steaming with blood, he thought, "Oh! What an enormity have I committed! I have killed some innocent person." Greatly grieved and agitated by this unhappy occurrence, he at once returned to his elder brother, Shri Ram and informed him of the occurrence. Even while he was speaking to Shri Ram, some woman came following him raging with anger obviously intending to ask him why he had killed the man in the bamboo grove.

But as soon as she saw my husband she became infatuated with him. At once, there appeared a great change in her. Her indignation disappeared. She assumed the form of a heavenly damsel of unexampled beauty; fell at the feet of my husband and begged for a union with him. She was deeply agitated with passion. My husband rejected her advances and reprimanded her. Incensed by this, she went away but soon the entire Dandakaranya began teeming with demons. My brother-in-law set off to fight against the demons. Just then, this ignoble man (pointing towards Ravan) separated me from my lord by

deceptive methods; forcibly dragged me into his *Pushpak*; and brought me here. Actually, by committing this enormity, he has only courted disaster and death.”

The atmosphere of deception disappeared in the presence of Vibhishan and the truth came to light. He at once realised that Ravan was responsible for the unpleasant events that had taken place that night. Ravan had abducted a woman. He looked towards Ravan in great grief and distress. He stood silent and calm for a while. Then he went towards Ravan a few steps; saluted him and said :

“My Lord ! I cannot even believe that you have committed this enormity which will bring disgrace upon the Rakshasa dynasty. The truth can never be concealed. I humbly entreat you to take back Sita to Dandakaranya and to surrender her to Shri Ram. Otherwise, the destruction of Rakshasa dynasty and of the empire of Lanka is certain. You must carry out this duty even before Shri Ram arrives here with his brother Lakshman. This is the only way left to save the resplendent Rakshasa dynasty from ignominy and destruction.” But Ravan was not prepared to listen to the sensible advice of Vibhishan. He grew red with anger.

“Coward ! Do you realise what you have been saying ? Sita will surely become my wife and if at all Ram and Lakshman come here, they will be destroyed. Their death is certain if they come here. I do not need the advice of a coward and contemptible fellow like you. If I listen to the advice of a coward like you it will be impossible to carry out the administration of our Empire.”

“Yet, oh lord of Lanka ! Do you remember what that enlightened man predicted once ? Piercing the darkness of oblivion, remember that event a little. Do not act unwisely. That enlightened man predicted that the Rakshasa dynasty would be destroyed on account of Sita, the wife of Ram. Have you forgotten that, dear brother ? I have nothing but affection for you. Even now my esteem for you has not abated. You are the supreme lord and protector of the Rakshasa dynasty, the

care-taker of the empire of Lanka and my dear lord and elder brother. You are the protector of our race. Do not slight my entreaty. Do not reject my humble appeal. I thought I had killed Dasarath and I am amazed to hear that he is alive. With the purpose of falsifying the prediction of that enlightened man. I attacked Ayodhya and I thought I had killed Dasarath. Actually, a great commotion arose in Ayodhya and thinking that I had killed Dasarath, I returned to Lanka. I was absolutely certain that I had killed Dasarath and that Ram would not be born. But my belief has been falsified. I think on account of my carelessness. I killed someone else and thus Dasarath escaped alive. I tried to defeat the decree of Destiny but destiny has mocked at me. What is decreed to happen surely happens. No power in this universe can alter the decrees of Destiny. Therefore, I entreat you humbly to restore Sita to her husband and to save the Rakshasa dynasty. Only this measure will bring welfare to us and to the empire of Lanka."

Ravan just ignored the advice of Vibhishan. He, at once, stood up. He dragged Sita into his Pushpak and began flying over the vast empire of Lanka. Vibhishan, utterly stupefied, stood still and silent like a painted picture.

Gradually, the *Pushpak Viman* reached great heights. Sometimes he brought his airship to lower levels. Ravan thus tried to show the magnificent city of Lanka; and to fascinate her with his prosperity and unearthly splendour and magnificence.

"Dearest one! The mountain you see there is called the mountain of sports. Gods and goddesses always come there to play games and sports on its peaks. They are always attracted by that mountain. You will experience supreme bliss by engaging with me in sports of love on this mountain. Look at those magnificent cataracts whose waters are sweeter than nectar. This is a world of resplendent gardens, sinuous rills and fascinating water-falls. Not only the people of Lanka but all creatures and all human beings in this world deem it a supreme bliss to play here. That magnificent bower you see there, resplendent with flowers, festoons and garlands of precious stones is the Bower of Bliss, where lovers forget themselves in amorous

sports and sensual ecstasies. Oh you tenderest one! Be so gracious as to accept my humble advances of love and enjoy supreme bliss with me in this Bower of Bliss which even angels cannot enter."

But Ravan's infatuated and passionate entreaties had no effect on Sita. He only began to boil with maddening indignation and bitter contempt. He, maddened with infatuation began displaying his magical and supernatural powers and potentialities in order to win Sita's favour but Sita kept meditating on the holy feet of Shri Ram and remained patient, firm and unshaken.

After having shown the various fascinating sights of Lanka, Ravan brought his *Pushpak* to the Devaraman garden and landed in it. Noticing that Sita had not changed her attitude, he felt bitterly disappointed and returned to his palace. Ravan was in great agony and anguish. His heart was filled with the darkness of frustration. Yet, now and then a flickering ray of hope appeared in it; "How long can Sita's persistence continue? If not today, tomorrow or a few days later or sometime later, she will certainly yield to me. Somehow or the other, I will win her favour. I am prepared to surrender all my prosperity, all my unexampled splendour and all my superhuman might for her sake. Ah! I will give up the entire empire of Lanka for her sake."

At that time, no other problem worried Ravan except his over-mastering desire to secure Sita's favour. If there was any problem, it was secondary and negligible in his view. He was unable to think of any means by which he could win her favour. He had lost all his sense and wisdom in his infatuation. How could he remain sensible and wise? It is a law of nature that a person who is caught in the meshes of infatuation should lose all his sense and wisdom and Ravan was not an exception to this rule.

Vibhishan was greatly irritated and agitated by Ravan's enormities. Even while he was standing there, Ravan had taken Sita in his *Pushpak* to show her the splendid sights of Lanka. Ravan had disgraced him and had even used strong language.

Vibhishan was greatly shocked and pained by all this. In consequence he returned to his palace in great agony and agitation. He made this determination, "Whatever might be the consequences of it, I will do all that I can, to safeguard and to protect the noble lady, Sita. I must set about carrying out this duty at once. It is absolutely useless to give any advice to my elder brother. He is so deeply caught in the meshes of sensual cravings that he has lost all sense of right and wrong. Blinded by infatuation, he is unable to distinguish good from evil; right from wrong. Therefore, I must meet the ministers and appraise them of the situation; and after consulting them I should decide upon the future course of action.

Accordingly, the ministers of the empire of Lanka gathered in the palace of Vibhishan. Vibhishan had not sought a meeting with the ministers at any time before. He made arrangements to keep the meeting and the discussions a secret. The ministers were greatly pained to see the agitation and grief which had enveloped the face of Vibhishan.

Breaking the silence, Vibhishan said in a serious voice.

"Honoured ministers! I know that you are well-wishers of our empire. I have invited you today to inform you of an extraordinary and distressing situation. You are all aware of the golden history of the resplendent and noble traditions of the Rakshasa dynasty. Before informing you what has happened I would like to ask you if there can be a stronger enemy than infatuation, anger, avarice, jealousy and such other inner enemies. Even if one of these inner enemies enslaves a man what will happen to him?"

"Ruin... Nothing but utter ruin!"

"You are not unaware of the truth that of these inner enemies sensual craving itself can bring about total ruin, in man's life. That too an infatuation for the wife of another man! No other sin is greater than this. Probably, you know it but I came to know only today that the mighty Ravan, the emperor of Lanka has brought to Lanka a woman — another man's wife. She is the noble wife of Shri Ramachandra and she is a woman

of unexampled nobility and chastity. On account of Ravan's infatuation for Sita, the empire of Lanka will be destroyed. Eventhough Ravan, the emperor of Lanka is a mighty hero under whose heels the whole universe shudders cannot enjoy peace or happiness if he antagonises Shri Ram and Lakshman. The people of Lanka will have to face a terrible war and our Rakshasa race which has been prosperous and illustrious for ages will be decimated."

The ministers fell into deep thought. "Dear Lord! What counsel can we give at this juncture? You are far-sighted and you are a real well-wisher of the empire of Lanka. You are an enlightened person. You possess outstanding nobility, whereas we are merely ministers. So, only you must find a solution to this serious problem."

"What is it that I can do in this distressing predicament when the emperor of Lanka is maddened with sensual passion? At present, it is useless to give him any advice. The man who does not realise the value of dharma cannot practise it. I have found out from secret and reliable sources that Sugriv, Hanuman, Viradh and many other mighty heroes have joined Shri Ram. They are searching for Sita everywhere. Who would not extend help to noble men in this world? Shri Ram and Lakshman embody the virtues which their names signify. They are, indeed, great men. Lakshman destroyed the Vidyadhar, Khar and his fourteen thousand able warriors single-handed. I fear that the time has come for the total destruction of the Rakshasa Race."

"No honoured lord! Only you must make some plan to avert that disaster. Kindly make proper arrangements to protect the innocent citizens of Lanka."

"What you say is absolutely right but you should not forget that weapons, military arrangements and mighty armies cannot defeat noble men who follow the path of Dharma and sanctity and justice. Shri Ram is the very embodiment of nobility, righteousness and ethical excellence. The unexampled chastity of Sita is Shri Ram's impregnable armour. The Rakshasa warriors can never break that armour."

“Oh Lord ! What is destined to occur will occur; yet man has to put forth his efforts to avert his disasters. Who can make Ravan see reason ? He has slighted the advice given by you. When that is so, he would not care for others’ advice and he has insulted you. When that is so who else can advise him to give up his path of ignobility.”

“If Ravan does not give up his insistence and if he does not at once discard his ignobility, it is certain that Lanka will become a cemetery. The city of Lanka which is today resplendent like the Nandanavan will be covered with dead and bleeding bodies pecked at by vultures and ravens and the whole atmosphere will be filled with blood and decaying corpses.”

Agitation, fear and silence filled the atmosphere in the palace. All were silent. Vibhishan looked towards the ministers and heaved a long sigh. He sent for the caretaker of the city and ordered him to make the necessary arrangements for the security of the city and then he fell into deep thoughtfulness.

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## LXXIV

### THE SEARCH FOR SITA

Days passed. The wheel of time kept revolving ceaselessly. Sugriv had forgotten the promise he had given to Shri Ram. He was always lost in sensual delights in the company of Tara forgetting everything; and Shri Ram and Lakshman were spending days in great grief and disappointment in the garden of Kishkindha. They were experiencing great grief on account of the separation from Sita. They were spending every moment expecting some good news about Sita's welfare. They could not tolerate Sugriv's indifference to the promise he had given to them.

Lakshman's anger knew no bounds. He was greatly irritated and agitated. He went to the palace of Kishkindha and created a furore. A commotion arose everywhere. Lakshman's anger filled Sugriv with fear. He was greatly shaken by Lakshman's anger. He, at once, assured Lakshman that he would make arrangements to search for Sita. Sugriv who felt ashamed of his behaviour realised his folly and rushed to the garden outside the city of Kishkindha and humbly saluted Shri Ram and surrendered himself at his feet seeking his forgiveness.

At once, Sugriv sent for his commanders. The commanders appeared before Sugriv and showed their readiness to carry out his orders.

“Dear commanders! Today we have to begin a mighty task. We can breathe freely only after achieving it. Go at once in all directions and search for Sita. Remember you must bring the news of Sita's whereabouts without delay. I will also set off in search of Sita.”

At once, thousands of warriors went in various directions in search of Sita. They began to search for Sita openly and secretly in all the cities and towns, in all the gardens and forests, in all the mountains, rivers and islands.

Even prince Bhamandal hearing about Sita's abduction came to the Vanaradweep to meet Shri Ram. Standing before Shri Ram he began weeping like a child. His grief filled the atmosphere with pain and distress. Lakshman went a few steps forward; embraced prince Bhamandal and consoled him declaring that every effort would be made to find Sita and that she would be found surely. No sooner had prince Bhamandal calmed down, than Viradb, arrived from Pathal Lanka with thousands of Vidyadhar warriors.

Sugriv extended due hospitality to all the guests and gave prince Chandrarashmi, the son of Vali, the duty of making arrangements for their comfortable stay. Sugriv engaged himself at once in the task of searching for Sita.

Sugriv followed the path taken by Ravan when he carried away Sita. He rose to high skies and began flying through the sky. At that point all of a sudden his eyes fell on Kambudweep. Making some determination, he landed his airship on Kambudweep.

When he began walking slowly looking around with circumspection he saw at a great distance, the figure of a man. He was alone. Sugriv was greatly amazed. He speedily went forwards. When he approached him, he said with surprise, "Ah! he is the Vidyadhar Ratnajati!"

Sugriv was acquainted with Ratnajati. There was a very important reason for this. For some years, Ratnajati had been carrying out noble activities and spiritual austerities and discussions. He was also extending co-operation to others and he was renowned in the Vidyadhar world for his nobility and greatness. His only objective in life was to help others and to relieve the agonies of others; and when a necessity arose he did not hesitate to sacrifice anything to render help to others.

He had tried to fight against Ravan when he noticed that he was carrying away Sita ignobly but he had been crippled and defeated by Ravan and he was at Kambudweep in a helpless condition. He saw Sugriv approaching him. He felt greatly agitated and distressed and thought :

“Can it be that Dashmukh Ravan has sent this king of Vanars to kill me ? He has already defeated me and deprived me of all my powers. Now will Sugriv, king of Vanars take my life ? Have I to lose my life now ? Well. If it is so, let it be so. If I have to die for having endeavoured to save a noble lady from a disaster, such a death will be a bliss, not a blight. It will be a cause for jubilation, not for lamentation. My death will be fruitful and my life also will attain fulfilment.”

“Ratnajati ! What are you thinking of so deeply ? What is the matter ? You can't even get up. Don't you now fly through the sky ?” Sugriv said waking up Ratnajati from his deep reflections. Ratnajati stood up and bowed to Sugriv, the king of the Vanars. Ratnajati had been staying in a desert area in Kambudweep; he had been deprived of all his powers by Ravan. Sugriv and Ratnajati went to a lonely place and sat there. Ratnajati began narrating his sorrowful story.

“Oh you hero ! A mighty hero like you must know the cause for my miserable condition. That tragic event took place only a short time ago. That day I happened to be flying through the sky. Just then, the agonized screams of a noble woman fell on my ears. Greatly shocked, I looked around; and I noticed the *Pushpak* of Ravan, the king of Lanka, speeding towards Lanka. The horrified and agonized screams of a woman emerging from the *Pushpak* filled the sky. Her cries and screams pierced my heart like sharp arrows. I could not keep quiet. At once, I stood on Ravan's way and prevented him from going away. Now, I could hear her cries clearly. She kept crying out.” Oh Lord Shri Ram ! Oh brother-in-law, Lakshman ! Oh brother, Bhamandal !” The *Pushpak* continued to speed towards Lanka; but I didn't lose hopes. I went hurriedly forward and challenged Ravan to a fight. With the purpose of saving Sita from that disaster of being abducted, I challenged Ravan to a fight; but

Ravan deprived me of my power of flying through the sky. I fell headlong on Kambudweep; and Ravan sped away towards Lanka with Sita in his *Pushpak*. Since then I have been staying here. Oh you mighty hero ! Only you can save me.”

Sugriv embraced Ratnajati and said;

“Dear Ratnajati ! You have done me a great service in giving me news about Sita. In fact, I have been carrying out the impossible task of searching for her; and you have given me some useful information. Now, follow me without a moment's delay. I will take you to the holy presence of Shri Ram. He will be greatly delighted to hear this news about Sita. At once, get into my airship. You yourself give him this news about Sita. He will be happy to hear this news since this will help him to carry out the search.

Sugriv, the king of Vanaras and Ratnajati landed in the gardens outside the city of Kishkindha. Both approached Shri Ram and bowed to him respectfully.

“Oh Lord, by the efficacy of your blessings my search for Sita has met with some success. I have been able to get some information about Sita.”

“Really ? Sugriv ! Have you really got some news about Sita ?” and Shri Ram stood up at once.

Holding Sugriv's hands in his hands, he said in an agitated voice.

“Please tell me Sugriv ! Where is my dear Sita ? Tell me at once. Where is she ? How is she ? And which wicked fellow has abducted her -”

“Oh Lord of compassion ! My friend, Ratnajati will tell you all about Sita.” As soon as the king of Vanars gave a sign, Ratnajati sat near Shri Ram in great politeness. He touched the feet of Shri Ram with devotion and narrated the entire story. Lakshman, with concentration heard every word of Ratnajati and understood it. He felt greatly relieved to hear the news about Sita.

“O you hero ! Ratnajati ! You have displayed extraordinary courage in challenging Ravan to a fight. Oh ! I do not know how greatly Sita is grieved and where she is now.”

“My lord ! The agonised cries of Sita filled all creatures, all birds and animals with deep grief. I could not bear to witness her grief. Hearing the grief-stricken screams and cries of Sita, I drew my sword and attacked Ravan. I did not care to lose my life in defending and trying to save Sita.”

“Dear Ratnajati ! You are indeed blessed ! You are indeed brave, kind and compassionate. That ignoble Ravan might have deprived you of your powers but I will destroy all his powers and potentialities and take a severe revenge against him by sending him to the kingdom of Death. Only after that will I breathe freely. Is Sita crying in grief ? Is her lamentation filling the skies ?”

“O my lord ! What shall I say ? The tears kept flowing from her eyes like rivers. She was weeping bitterly. She kept repeatedly saying, “O Ram ! O Lakshman ! O Bhamandal !” She said nothing else but her heart-rending cries had no effect on Ravan. He was not at all moved by her grief.”

What Ratnajati said filled Shri Ram with inordinate grief but he was also delighted to hear some news about Sita; and he tried to console himself by repeatedly questioning Ratnajati about Sita. He tried to seek consolation and relief by passing his hand gently over the shoulders of Ratnajati, the king of Sursangitnagar. But he could not check his grief and agitation. He heaved a deep sigh and got up and began walking to and fro.

Lakshman, Sugriv, Bhamandal, Viradh, Nal, Neel and the other Vanara heroes heard the entire story of Sita from Ratnajati and were waiting for Shri Ram's commands.

“Dear Sugriv !”

“Dear Lord ! What are your commands ?” The king of Vanars stood up and bowed his head in veneration.

“How far is Lanka from here ? How can we reach Lanka ?”

“Dear lord ! It matters very little whether Lanka is far or near. We are like blades of dry grass before Lankesh Ravan the world-conqueror. We are nothing compared to his extraordinary might and abilities.”

“O you great heroes ! Stop thinking of Victory or defeat and show me the way to Lanka. Show me where Ravan is. Then I will find out his greatness as a warrior and the nature of his abilities. Lakshman’s arrows will automatically test his abilities”. Shri Ram said in a serious manner. Endorsing Shri Ram’s words, Lakshman said in a voice sharpened by burning anger :

“Who is this mean fellow, Ravan ? We have not even heard his name. Is it that sensual satyr who abducted Sita by means of deceptive tricks ? Are you glorifying that ignoble fellow who misusing his abilities has been committing enormities. I will surely cut off his head like a true Kshatriya, and in accordance with the traditions of Kshatriyas. Like spectators, you will see that drama of destruction.”

Old Jambhavan, who had been listening silently till now said in a serious and dignified voice :

“Revered Lord ! What you say is absolutely true. There is no doubt about it but I have to explain to you a certain actual circumstance. Once, a supremely enlightened person by name Anantavirya made this prediction to Ravan. “The hero who lifts the Kothishila will surely kill you”. Therefore, my humble suggestion is that Lakshman should be taken there and he should lift the Kothishila. That will remove the doubts and suspicions of all the people here.”

“So be it Jambhavan. Don’t worry. We will make the necessary arrangement.” Lakshman said in a serious voice.

At once, an airship was got ready. Lakshman, Bhamandal, Jambhavan, Viradh, Nal, Neel and the other great warriors sat in the airship. The airship began flying through the sky and in a short while, it reached Kothishila.

"This is Kothishila. Lakshman, you lift this, so, that all might believe that Ravan's death will take place in your hands". Jambhavan said in a serious voice pointing towards the Kothishila. Lakshman was silent for a few moments. Then, he stepped forward; stretched both his hands and in the twinkling of an eye he lifted the Kothishila as if it were a creeper. The cries of applause uttered by divine beings reverberated in the skies. Jambhavan and the other warriors applauded Lakshman clapping their hands. Their cries of elation reverberated in the skies. All were convinced that Lakshman would kill Ravan and that no power in this universe could save Ravan from that disaster.

All sat in the airship in great joy and elation and returned to Kishkindha. They conveyed to Shri Ram the news of Lakshman's success. His joy knew no bounds. Greatly delighted with what he heard Shri Ram embraced Lakshman. His eyes sparkled with affection for his brother.

"Brother Lakshman! Now, it is certain that the time of Ravan's death has approached; and that it will take place in your hands. There is no way left to us except war."

"O Lord of compassion! It is certain that we will attain victory in the war; but it is the moral duty of noble heroes to send a messenger to the enemy before declaring a war. We should send a message to the enemy. If Ravan receives our message and agrees to return Sita to us, there will be no need for a war which will cause the death of thousands of soldiers," said an old and experienced statesman of the Vanardweep.

"But it is not all likely that Ravan who is arrogant will accept our message," said Bhamandal giving a reply to him.

"Even this is true but a noble hero must act according to the principles of morality. It is absolutely necessary that every effort should be made to avoid a war and to solve the problem peacefully. We should attempt to find a peaceful solution though we know that Ravan will not budge an inch."

“If Ravan respects ethical principles and codes of noble conduct we too will have to act according to those principles and codes. If he slights those principles, then we too need not observe them. The principles of morality are the same for all. All are equal in the eyes of moral principles.”

“Dear Lord! It is an eternal truth that just as a wicked man does not discard his wicked ways, a noble man also should not discard his noble ways, Why should we ignore the principles of morality? It is likely that our message may make him see reason. If he discards his wickedness and acts sensibly and nobly, we can avoid war and establish peace before the storm of violence destroys countless soldiers.”

Bhamandal realised the wisdom in the suggestion of the old hero; but yet he felt that if he delayed action caring for such formalities, it would cause harm to Sita instead of bringing her relief. He knew very well that Sita would be experiencing inordinate agony and facing painful situations in Lanka. He thought that even a moment's delay would be harmful to Sita and so he said to Shri Ram:

“Oh you hero! If you wish to send a messenger and thereby if you wish to respect the principles of noble conduct, by all means, you may do so. But in this situation, I do not think that such measures would help Sita and I think that even a moment's delay is improper.” Bhamandal expressed his opinion in clear terms. Sugriv, the king of Vanaras placed his hand on the shoulders of Bhamandal who was excited and agitated; and said in a serious voice :

“Dear Prince! You are absolutely right. I too feel that delay is improper. So, we shall send a hero who will go to Lanka and meet Vibhishan, who is known for his nobility. Only he is noble among the Rakshasas. I am sure he will persuade Ravan to return Sita to us; and if Ravan does not take his advice Vibhishan will surely surrender himself to Shri Ram without any hesitation. Moreover, we will send such a hero to Lanka as will stun Ravan by his abilities and will bring back Sita.”



Bhamandal gave his assent to Sugriv's proposal.

After being quiet for a while, he said :

"Why should not I myself go to Lanka ?"

"You cannot. Gaining entry into Lanka is the most difficult task demanding extraordinary abilities. This can be achieved only by an experienced hero and in my view, no one is capable of carrying out this task except Hanuman. He knows Ravan very well and he also knows the method of entering Lanka."

And Sugriv at once ordered a messenger by name Shribhuti to go to Hanapur. Accordingly, Shribhuti sat in an airship; and set off in the direction of Hanapur.

Shribhuti went to Hanapur; met Hanuman and conveyed to him the message, of Sugriv, the King of Vanars. Soon after receiving the message Hanuman came to Lanka accompanied by Shribhuti and approached Shri Ram with great humility. He touched the holy feet of Shri Ram with his hands and saluted him. Sugriv, the king of Vanars got up from his seat; requested Hanuman to be seated there and introduced him to Shri Ram. He explained to Shri Ram Hanuman's extraordinary abilities and potentialities.

"O Lord of compassion! This is Hanuman, the son of Pavananjay. His humility, his heroism, his sense of justice, his ethical excellence and his military abilities are unprecedented and unexampled. He is a great friend of ours. He is an incomparable warrior. In the entire Vidyadhar world, there is no one who can match him in ethical virtues or military abilities. Therefore, I entreat you to send him to bring us the news of Sita's welfare. He will surely succeed in carrying out this task."

For a while, Shri Ram kept looking at the resplendent face of Hanuman with fixed eyes. His well-built body and extraordinarily strong limbs showed that he was a mighty hero. Shri Ram felt a natural affection for Hanuman. Laksh-

man also forgot himself looking at Hanuman. He felt that Sugriv's account of Hanuman's abilities was inadequate and that he exceeded the description. He said in a resounding voice. "Really, he is an extraordinary hero. He is the very image of heroism and valour. He is the very embodiment of humility, ability and wisdom and possesses the determination to carry out any duty."

Hanuman said in a humble voice :

"Dear Lord ! Revered Shri Ram ! Sugriv the king of Vanars has praised me only because of his love and affection for me. The Vanardweep abounds in heroes and warriors. I am not really so great as he has made me out to be. There are such renowned heroes as Garva, Gavaksh, Gavaya, Sharam, Gandha, Madhan, Neel, Nal, Angadh and Jambhavan. There are many other warriors of whom I am one. Dear Lord ! We are all ready to serve you. in your endeavour to get back Sita."

"O you mighty Lord ! If you command me I will at once bring the entire Rakshasdweep and place it at your feet. I will devastate Lanka. I will create a terrible commotion among the Rakshasas. I can bring Ravan and all his relatives in one hand and throw them at your feet. I can bind Ravan to a pillar in his palace and bring Sita safely here. Kindly give up your worry and anxiety. I will carry out any command of yours with the greatest ease."

"O mighty hero ! I know that you can do all these things with an effortless ease. Nothing is impossible for you. I know that you can bring Sita here without any difficulty overcoming all impediments but at present these things need not be done. For the time being, you go to Lanka and find out all details about Lanka. Find out where Sita is and what her condition is. Find out her circumstances. Yes, after meeting her. you give her this signet-ring of mine. That will make her believe that you are my representative. Moreover, while returning you must bring her coronet."

"Hanuman. Kindly tell her that the separation from her has been causing inordinate anguish to me. Tell her that the

fires of separation have been consuming me and that I am unable to bear with the separation; that in her absence, life is unbearable for me; that day and night, Ram keeps thinking about her, Dear Hanuman ! Tell her also that on account of her absence, my life has become totally dark, bleak and blighted; that I have given up all my joys and jubilations and that I did not experience while travelling through forests, this anguish which I am experiencing on account of her absence. Tell her that I am deeply grieved to think of the dark clouds of calamity that have enveloped her and the mountains of agonies that might have fallen upon her; that her grief must be inordinate; that she has been subjected to an inconceivable injustice and indignity; that my heart broke when I heard Ratnajati's account of her abduction. Give her also this message. "My dear goddess. Discard your worry and agitation. I will bring succour to you without a moment's delay. Brother Lakshman will come to Lanka, will destroy Ravan and will take revenge against him for the enormity he has committed and for having disgraced you. The days of your sorrow are going to end soon. The dark night of distress is going to end and there will be soon a dawn of delight in your life. Ram and Lakshman will soon enter the impregnable fort of Lanka and will release you from Ravan's clutches."

Shri Ram embraced Hanuman with great affection. Hanuman humbly saluted the feet of Shri Ram and said, "My Lord. I will at once go to Lanka and convey your message to Sita. Kindly stay here till I come back having carried out my mission."

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## LANKASUNDARI

Hanuman, the son of Pavananjay set off towards Lanka in his airship. His airship flew at a tremendous speed over the countless kingdoms, cities and villages among the Vaithadhya mountains. Hanuman kept watching with fascination the various beautiful objects and aspects of nature as countless thoughts and plans passed through his mind.

“Dear Lord ! This is Mahendrapur,” said the pilot of the airship waking Hanuman from his reveries.

“Oh is it Mahendrapur ? This is my mother’s native place. Please land here.”

Accordingly, the pilot landed the airship in a safe place outside the city of Mahendrapur.

“This is the city of Mahendrapur from where my revered mother Anjanadevi had to go away in great grief and anguish. After being disgraced she went away weeping bitterly. Yet, she was blamed for no fault of hers. King Mahendra deemed it a sin even to look at her face. What a cruel and stone-hearted man he is !” and Hanuman’s face reddened with indignation. He began to shake with anger. Blood began to flow from his eyes.

“O ! I will teach a lesson to king Mahendra and Prince Prasannakirthis for having caused anguish to my mother”.

At once, the war-drums were beaten. All of a sudden, there arose a tremendous commotion among the citizens, the guards, the caretakers and the armies of King Mahendra. Screams of

fear arose from the palace. All began running hither and thither in utter amazement, anger and fear.

It was as though the whole universe was shaken by an unexpected explosion. The earth began to sway and shake.

King Mahendra ordered his armies to get ready for a war. Prince Prasannakirti sat in his chariot and came out of the city to face the sudden and unexpected invasion.

The whole area around Mahendrapur changed into a battle-field. Hanuman spoke contemptuously to Prince Prasannakirti and provoked him to fight. The two stood face to face. The battle-field began to reverberate with the noises of swords and other weapons.

A terrible war broke out. The metallic noises of clashing swords and the whizzing noises of arrows filled the air. Hanuman was greatly grieved at the thought of the death of countless soldiers. His tender heart was grieved with repentance. "What have I done? I have engaged myself in a battle unnecessarily. I have engaged myself in this fight forgetting the purpose with which I set off. Now I must stop this war and carry out my task of going to Lanka".

A few moments . . .

A few hours.

Prasannakirti's chariot was smashed by Hanuman. It broke to pieces and the charioteer was killed. Prasannakirti's weapons were broken to pieces. Hanuman rushed forth in great fury. He captured Prasannakirti. King Mahendra began to shudder with grief and fear to see his son captured thus.

In consequence, the old king entered the battle-field to fight against Hanuman. Hanuman did not like to fight against his grand-father. So he thought of a clever plan. Accordingly, within a short time, he captured King Mahendra.

The war ended. King Mahendra and Prasannakirti had to stand with bowed heads in their own court.

There was silence in the court. All were in a state of worry and agitation. Hanuman stood up from his seat. He bowed to King Mahendra with respect and folding his hands, said :

“O king! You do not know me. I am Hanuman, your grand-son... the son of your daughter, Anjanadevi. I am proceeding to Lanka as commanded by Shri Ram. The wicked king, Ravan has carried away Sita forcibly. I must go to Lanka; and meet Sita and then I will have to persuade Ravan to send back Sita to Shri Ram.”

While I was proceeding towards Lanka, I happened to see your kingdom and your city; and I remembered, at once, the disgrace that my mother once faced here. My blood began to boil with anger and in that excitement, I decided to fight against you.”

“Revered Lord ! Kindly pardon my sin. Now I will proceed to Lanka without a moment's delay. I request you to go to Kishkindha and to meet Shri Ram.” King Mahendra was greatly delighted to hear Hanuman's words. His eyes sparkled with amazement and joy and he shed tears of joy. He affectionately embraced Hanuman and asked him to be seated.

“Dear child ! I have heard a lot about your greatness and heroism. I have heard people speaking of you with admiration. But I did not get an opportunity of meeting you and now I am supremely happy to meet you. In the past, I used to hear people admiring you and thought that I might not be able to meet you but today I have seen you. I am indeed happy. Today, I have found that whatever I heard about your heroism is true.”

“Dear child ! You say you are going to Lanka in accordance with Shri Ram's commands. Proceed to Lanka at once. May you succeed in your endeavour. After achieving your objective you return to Shri Ram. You need not worry about us. Prasanna-kirti and I will at once proceed to Kishkindha to meet Shri Ram.”

King Mahendra made arrangements to proceed to Kishkindha.

Hanuman set off towards Lanka.

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## THE DADHIMUKH DWEEP

The whole country was enveloped in tremendous and fiery flames. Hanuman saw the country. His airship was proceeding towards its destination.

Hanuman noticed one extraordinary sight in the midst of those terrible flames and he was overawed with the sight.

Two great munis were steeped in the *Kayotsarg* meditation and three young women sat before them in deep meditation and flames of fire surrounded them.

Hanuman was greatly agitated. His heart began to palpitate with fear when he saw that sight and without a moment's delay exercising his incomparable powers, he brought large quantities of water and poured it over the island. It seemed as if there was a heavy down-pour of water. Within a few moments, the fire was extinguished. The atmosphere became calm and serene. Hanuman's joy knew no bounds. He heaved a sigh of relief: "Compassion removes the sorrows of people. Hence, when a compassionate man removes the sufferings of others, he experiences extraordinary delight, whereas a heartless person feels delighted at the sight of the sorrows of others."

The three young women achieved success in their austerities. Their meditation ended. They attained the powers which they desired. They performed circumambulations around the munis and then addressing Hanuman, they said in all humility.

"O you supreme of heroes! By means of your abilities and wisdom you have saved the munis from a terrible impediment. Moreover you have also saved us from being consumed in the flames. On account of your help, we have easily attained supernatural powers. You are indeed a man of abounding benevolence."

"O you fascinating one! Who are you?"

"O you noble man! Gandharvaraj is the king of the Dadhimukh Dweep. Kusumamala is the queen-consort of Gandharvaraj. We are their daughters. As soon as we reached

the age of marriage, many kings, princes and Vidyadhar princes desired to marry us. Everyone was desirous of marrying us.

Of them, there was one Vidyadhar. His name is Angarak.

He is the veritable god of fire. He is the very embodiment of all-consuming fire. He moved heaven and earth to win our hands. He employed many kinds of trickery and continued to harass us with his undesirable and disgusting actions and he began to pursue us maddened with infatuation. But our father reprimanded him. He sent him away thus disgracing him. He did not also care to listen to the advice of other kings. He continued to harass us. Some time passed thus. Then one day, a supremely benevolent muni came to the city. Our father approached him; bowed to him with devotion and said.

“Revered Gurudev! Who will marry my daughters?”

The muni possessed infinite knowledge. He was enlightened. He could visualise the past, the present and the future. Exercising his all-seeing power, he said, “O king! The hero who kills Sahasagati, the Vidyadhar will marry your daughters.”

Accordingly, our father began to search for the hero who could kill Sahasagati but he was not successful in his attempt. He could not find a hero who could kill Sahasagati. Therefore, seeing no other alternative than attaining divine powers, we decided to carry out austerities to attain supernatural powers. Accordingly, we sat before these munis in meditation to attain those powers.”

“But when Angarak, the Vidyadhar came to know that we were carrying out meditation and austerities, to attain divine powers, he created that tremendous conflagration to impede our endeavours. But O you hero! You have utterly defeated his devilish designs. You have done us a great benevolence by extinguishing those terrible flames. Moreover, on account of the help rendered by you, we have been able to complete our meditation and to attain the divine power called *Manogamini* (the power that enables one to go to any place in a moment).”



The three young ladies bowed to Hanuman and stood before him.

“Dear sisters ! My lord Shri Ram alone can kill Sahasagati. I am going to Lanka in accordance with Shri Ram’s commands. I am going to get some news about Sita who has been abducted by the ignoble king, Ravan. If he exercises at least a little sense he will surely release Sita. Otherwise, Shri Ram and Lakshman accompanied by countless Vidyadhar warriors will invade Lanka and will destroy Ravan. It is certain that they will release Sita from Ravan’s captivity”.

“O you great hero ! You are indeed blessed. You are the hero, we have been yearning to see. We have been eagerly waiting for the opportunity of seeing you. We are supremely happy to have seen you. Our joy defies description. We are supremely happy to know that you are Shri Ram’s dearest and most trusted devotee and follower. Kindly come to our city. Our father, Gandharvaraj will be supremely delighted to see the hero who saved his daughters from a disaster and who helped them to attain divine powers.”

“Certainly, I desire to comply with your request but I have to proceed urgently. It is already late.”

“Dear brother ! There won’t be any delay. We too desire that you should carry out your great mission. We too respect Shri Ram’s commands. His mission should be achieved.” They said in a humble manner.

Unable to reject their entreaty, Hanuman entered Dadhimukhnagar, following them. King Gandharvaraj fell into deep thoughtfulness, when he noticed his daughters entering the city accompanied by a stranger. The princesses approached their father; saluted him with veneration; and introduced Hanuman to him. King Gandharvaraj was delighted to meet Hanuman. He embraced Hanuman affectionately. After extending due hospitality to him, he said.

“Oh you mighty hero ! You proceed to Lanka, at once without any worry. We will proceed to Kishkindha and meet Shri Ram.

\* \* \* \*

Hanuman proceeded to Lanka, without a moment's delay.

"Dear Lord ! We have reached Lanka," said the pilot of the airship, with evident elation.

"Land our airship in some secret place outside Lanka."

Hanuman was quite familiar with Lanka since he had visited the city before. He was quite familiar with the various parts of Lanka such as its main gate, the gardens in it, the rest houses, the secret military stations and the arsenal. He was also quite familiar with the security arrangements but Vibhishan after consulting the minister had made some new security arrangements. The fort of Lanka was well protected by a supernatural power called *Aashalika*.

The *Aashalika* power.

The dense darkness of time; the victor over time !

The *Aashalika* power would frustrate the endeavours of the greatest heroes who tried to enter the city. Hanuman, by virtue of his incisive intelligence, saw through the *Aashalika* power. He took up his mace and proceeded cautiously towards the main gate of the city.

"Be careful. You monkey ! Where are you running to ?" The *Aashalika* roared terribly and approached him, assuming a dreadful form. At once, the monstrous form stood on Hanuman's way.

Supernatural powers can bring about such miracles. They are the lords of the great lore which amazes and stupefies the whole universe. Countless tremendous powers and potentialities of this kind lay latent and concealed in the sun-centre of the soul. We can awaken them and exercise them if we master the appropriate arts.

Hanuman got ready to encounter with courage, the danger that cropped up. He, at once, entered the mouth of the *Aashalika* power which had assumed a monstrous form. The power was immensely delighted to see that it had swallowed Hanuman.

Since, it believed that it had swallowed him, it began to exult over its victory but its exultation did not last long. Hanuman struck it with his mace and paralysed it from within. He tore off its body and came out. This was the only impediment he had to overcome. After overcoming it, he found it easy to enter Lanka. By means of his own supernatural powers, he destroyed the *Aashalika* power. Vajramukh, the Rakshasa warrior who was guarding the fort took up his sword and came forward furiously to attack Hanuman.

Actually, Hanuman was a warrior of outstanding skill. He was at once heroic and intelligent. This kind of attack was but a children's game for him. He held Vajramukh's hand and killed him by dealing deadly strokes to him with his mace.

The man who is determined to achieve success in his endeavour goes forward surmounting the impediments and difficulties that appear on his way. Such a hero never feels helpless; nor is he daunted or discouraged by such impediments. He faces them with patience and heroism and overcomes them.

Vajramukh was killed.

Lankasundari was the valiant daughter of Vajramukh. She was renowned throughout Lanka not only for her extraordinary beauty but for her unexampled accomplishments and virtues such as politeness and wisdom. Many Rakshasa warriors and statesmen were yearning for her hand in marriage, but no one had been able to secure her.

Can man in this world attain what he desires? No; yet he keeps yearning to attain what he desires; and writhes in agony if he does not attain them.

Lankasundari was greatly grieved to hear about the death of her father. She never believed that her father who was a mighty Rakshasa hero would be killed. So, she wanted to know who had killed her father. She took up her sword and rushed out of her palace. The sight she saw as soon as she reached the passage of the main entrance of the palace stupefied her. Her father's body lay in a pool of blood and nearby a mighty hero was fighting and killing Rakshasa warriors.

Lankasundari exercising her supernatural powers assumed a dreadful form. It was as if she had assumed the form of a lightning. She attacked Hanuman repeatedly. Hanuman was shaken by this unexpected attack. But he retaliated ably. He also realised that a woman was attacking him and he too began to fight in accordance with that circumstance. Lankasundari had exercised her powers several times even before and had fought against warriors but she was spell-bound by Hanuman's skill and prowess as a warrior.

Hanuman repulsed Lankasundari's attack and destroyed her supernatural devices and weapons and he totally defeated her powers. Lankasundari who had never been defeated was today utterly routed. Hanuman's powers paralysed her powers. A voice from within her said : "Who is this hero who has paralysed and annihilated all my supernatural powers and unexampled might?" She observed Hanuman and was dumb-founded. Hanuman's fascinating appearance made her forget herself. She was full of admiration for his ability, skill and appearance. She became infatuated with the hero who had killed her father, a short while before. Her father's dead body still lay in the courtyard of her palace. Of course, she despised Hanuman who had killed her father but soon she became enthralled by his fascinating appearance and his outstanding abilities and in consequence, she became infatuated with him. She had come out with her sword and had attacked him but soon she became infatuated with him and surrendered herself at his feet. She stood in shyness as passion flashed through her veins and thrilled her. Infatuation inebriated her.

"O you mighty hero ! Kindly forgive me".

She said in a humble voice.

"Be fearless."

"Really, I have attacked you thoughtlessly and unwisely."

"No, young lady. Your action was not thoughtless. Whatever you did, you did only after thinking about it."

"How ?"

"It is natural to be incensed against the man who kills one's father and it is also natural to think of killing such a person."

"I never thought about your extraordinary heroism."

"Oh you mad girl. We cannot understand a person's heroism by thinking. We can experience it only by a fight. A person's heroism can be realised only in a fight against him."

"But..."

"I think you are sad because you couldn't kill me. Is that not so?"

"Not at all".

"Then?"

"In fact I am supremely happy".

"Happy? What for?"

"If I had killed you there would have been no end to my grief and repentance."

"Oh, that is not true. You would have been happy if you had killed me but now you say you are happy that you have not killed me."

"You have spoken the truth. I have an entreaty to make to you."

"What is it?"

"Some enlightened man once told my father that the hero who would kill him would marry me."

"Oh!"

"Therefore I entreat you to marry me."

"Do you think you will be happy if you marry me?"

"Why not? Surely, I will be happy? You are unexampled as a hero. If I can marry you I will be supremely happy. I will be proud of you and I will deem myself fortunate."

“But I hope you will not repent after marrying a stranger like me.”

“I have known enough of you. You are no more a stranger to me. I have seen your fascinating appearance; your extraordinary heroism; and heard your words. Is this not enough.”

Hanuman thought for a while silently and gave his consent to marry her. After performing her father's obsequies, she took Hanuman into her palace. That evening they dined together. Later, Hanuman married Lankasundari in accordance with the Gandharva system of marriage.

Lankasundari felt supremely happy to have married Hanuman; and Hanuman deemed his marriage with Lankasundari his first victory and an indication of good fortune.

Hanuman sat with Lankasundari in the balcony of her palace enjoying the cool breezes that were blowing. The sun set in the west. Gradually the night approached.



## LXXVI

### THE COMPLETION OF THE TWENTYONE-DAY FAST

Hanuman spent the night in sensual enjoyments in the company of his newly married wife. Lankasundari. When the day dawned, he took leave of her and entered the city of Lanka.

In the entire city of Lanka, if there was any righteous, noble and sagacious man, it was only Vibhishan. Therefore, Hanuman decided to meet him first and then to proceed with his task. Vibhishan was indeed, just and noble; and valued ethical principles. He knew very well that somehow Vibhishan would have come to know of Sita's abduction by Ravan; and that he too would have thought of some solution to the problem. He thought that if he could attain his objective of getting Sita released with the help of Vibhishan, the destruction of countless people in a war could be avoided.

Hanuman knew very well the ins and outs of Lanka. He was quite familiar with every mansion, every rest-house and every part of Lanka. He was also familiar with Vibhishan's palace. So, he at once, went to the gate of Vibhishan's palace. He gave his signet-ring to the door-keepers. The door-keepers took the ring to Vibhishan. Vibhishan was happy to find that Hanuman had arrived. He came personally to receive Hanuman; and extended a hearty welcome to him.

Vibhishan took Hanuman into the chamber of discussion; and offered him an honourable seat; and after he was seated, he said.

“Dear Hanuman! How are you? I hope everything is all right in your place.”

“If everything was all right, there would have been no need for my coming now.”

“Dear Hanuman! May I know the purpose of your visit?”

“Oh you noble prince! The whole world knows that Sita, the wife of Shri Ram has been abducted; and that the abductor is none other than Ravan. Sita has been placed in the *Devaraman* garden. Honoured Vibhishan! You are the younger brother of Ravan. So, you must prevent Ravan from indulging in such ignoble actions. I wonder why you are indifferent towards his enormity.”

“Dear friend Hanuman! What you say is absolutely true. I have already tried my best to persuade my elder brother to send back Sita to Shri Ram; and I will try again to persuade him to do so.”

“That is very good. But when will you try to advise him to send back Sita? If you delay, the empire of Lanka will be destroyed; and the Rakshasa race will be decimated. You must make your endeavours at once. I have come here with this purpose as commanded by Shri Ram.”

“Dear Hanuman! What you say is true. I too believe that Sita must be returned to Shri Ram without a moment's delay; and that is the right course. I will meet my elder brother and will entreat him to act justly. Then we will think of the future course of action after finding out his opinion.”

Hanuman was delighted by the words of Vibhishan. He stood up; and saluted him. Vibhishan went upto the door to see him off. Hanuman went straight to the *Devaraman* garden, where Sita was staying as Ravan's captive.

The *Devaraman* garden where Sita was staying!

Though the great lady stayed there, the cottage appeared unclean and blighted. No doubt there was sanctity but there



was no cheerfulness or joy. Life existed there, no doubt, but the place was silent and desolate like a cemetery.

Sitadevi sat in the shadow of the Ashoka tree with her head bowed in anguish. Her dry and unkempt hair fell over her forehead and cheeks. The ground had grown wet with the tears that had flowed from her eyes constantly. Her face looked bleak and blighted, dull and cheerless, like a lotus covered with snow.

Her body had grown weak and emaciated. Her lips had dried on account of her anguish and constant sighing and like a hermitess, she kept reciting the name, "Ram ! Ram ! Ram !"

Her clothes had become soiled and torn but she did not care for garments or for comforts.

Hanuman saw Sitadevi. He stood quiet for sometime, lost in an adoration of her innate nobility. He began to think, "Sita is a woman of sublime virtues. She is a *mahasati*. The very sight of Sita sanctifies the beholders. It is natural that Shri Ram should experience such anguish over his separation from her. Any man would be steeped in grief when separated from such a beautiful and noble wife.

Hanuman used to be agitated by one puzzling question, "Such a great hero as Rama; . . . . Shri Ram who went away to the forests renouncing wealth, power and royal splendour to carry out his father's word; who was so dispassionate and disinterested as to discard his attachments for his mother, father, brothers and other relatives and who could rise above all selfish considerations. . . . . would such a noble hero experience agitation and anguish over the separation from a mere woman ?" He found an answer to this question after seeing Sitadevi. He realised that Shri Ram's anguish was not caused by any desire for sensual pleasures in the company of Sita and that he was anguished by the separation from his wife who was beautiful in appearance, noble in character and absolutely and wholeheartedly devoted to him.

The stream of Hanuman's thoughts continued to flow.

Poor Ravan would be ruined by two forces; Shri Ram's extraordinary heroism and his own sinful karmas. "Ah! Yes if he acts according to Vibhishan's suggestion and advice he will certainly escape that disaster. If he sends back Sita honourably to Shri Ram he would never punish him; on the contrary he would forgive him, but Ravan would not heed Vibhishan's advice. He will only reprimand and chide Vibhishan. He will publicly dishonour Vibhishan. Do I not know the nature of that arrogant Ravan? Well, let me bring some joy to Sita. Let my message flash like a lightning and brighten the darkness of grief and anguish that envelops her."

Hanuman climbed the Ashoka tree and dropped Shri Ram's signet-ring into Sitadevi's lap. Sita was shocked and amazed. She looked around and then saw with amazement the ring that fell into her lap. She took up the ring and saw it closely. At once, smiles appeared on her face and a divine radiance flashed out of her eyes. "This is my lord Shri Ram's signet-ring!" She pressed it to her breast. Hanuman was greatly moved to see Sita's joyful smiles. He shed tears of joy. When the attendant Trijata noticed the change in Sita's behaviour, she at once ran to Ravan's court and conveyed to him the news.

"May the emperor be victorious. My Lord! Today Sita is very cheerful. Her bleak and blighted face has suddenly grown cheerful and joyful. I am seeing such cheerfulness in her face only for the first time after her coming to Lanka."

"Really? Very good!" At once, Ravan took off the garland of gems from his neck and presented it to Trijata for having brought the happy news and then he went hurriedly to Mandodari's palace.

As soon as he entered Mandodari's palace, he called in a loud voice :

"Mandodari! Mandodari!"

"What's the matter? My lord!" said Mandodari amazed by Ravan's sudden and unexpected visit to her palace. Mandodari,

who was lying on her bed got up somewhat shocked. The attendants moved back and stood aloof. Ravan sat near Mandodari.

“My Lord ! What may be the purpose of your sudden visit?”

“Dear one ! Fortune has favoured me ! The goddess of fortune has smiled upon me. The time has come for the fulfilment of my desires.”

“My lord ! I wish it may be so.”

“Trijata just now brought the happy news that Sita is today extremely cheerful and joyous; that anguish has disappeared from her face and that she has been swaying in delight. I think she has forgotten Ram. How long can her patience last ? She must have thought, “It is futile to desire to be reunited with Ram. That will never happen. The emperor of Lanka has been yearning for my love. He has grown mad with his infatuation for me. Therefore, why should I not experience happiness by fulfilling his desire ? Can any woman retain her patience endlessly ? I have done everything possible to return to him. I have yearned to go back to him but he too is a human being. I do not know whether he knows my thoughts and feelings.”

“My lord ! As a matter of fact, woman can never exist without the company of man. The woman who is separated from her husband keeps grieving over her lot throughout her life and finally falls into the jaws of death. Sita is also a woman. She needed so many days to forget her husband Ram. Moreover, in this world, can there be any unfortunate woman whom you desire and who does not desire you ? There can be no such woman. Ah ! I knew that Sita would love you some day or the other because you are unexampled in your heroism; you have conquered the whole universe and you possess a fascinating appearance. Only a woman can know the heart of a woman. Women generally show hatred and contempt outwardly towards a man whom they love and adore inwardly and they generally pretend to admire and adore a man whom they inwardly despise. I too believe that she inwardly loves you and adores you.”

“Dear goddess ! You are speaking the truth. I too have had such experiences. Now, you devise some means of enabling her to have a union with me. There should not be even a moment’s delay in this matter. You, at once, meet her and make the necessary arrangements. We should not lose an opportunity that comes our way. Time and tide waits for no man.”

“As commanded by you, my lord !”

The empress of the empire of Lanka, Mandodari agreed to be Ravan’s messenger and decided to go to the *Devaraman* garden. Ravan went back to his palace and kept eagerly awaiting Mandodari’s arrival.

Poor Ravan ! He believed that Sita was really cheerful because of a change in her mind. He thought that what Trijata had said was true. Oh ! Sita’s cheerfulness was thus mistaken and misunderstood. A man interprets an event in a way that is favourable to him. Sita’s cheerfulness led Ravan on the wrong path. He mistook a mirage for water and began running after it. He began building castles in the air. He began dreaming sweet dreams regarding Sita and in order to secure Sita’s favour, he began to act thoughtlessly and decided to stake his status, his prestige, his honour, his fame and his imperial splendour for her favour.

Mandodari !

Thoughtless and foolish Mandodari ! She decided to discard all sense of propriety and shame out of her blind adoration for her husband. She forgot the splendid traditions of the Rakshasa race and decided to act as Ravan’s messenger, not realising that this action of hers would be a stain upon the glorious history of the Rakshasas. She followed the wrong policy of acting according to her husband’s wishes without realising whether her husband’s policy was right or wrong. Though she knew very well that Sita had been brought by force and though she despised Ravan she forgot the duty of advising him to act sensibly and justly. It is likely that she did not scrutinize her husband’s policy. It is also likely that she knew that her husband was wrong. She probably did not like to speak out the bitter truth

to him. He might not like it. Whatever it might be she did not think of the disgrace that her action would bring upon Lanka, the people of Lanka, the Rakshasa dynasty and the Empire of Lanka. On the other hand, she extended active co-operation to her husband whose wrong policies and actions would ruin the noble traditions of the Rakshasa dynasty.

When Mandodari's chariot stopped at the main gate of the *Devaraman* garden, the attendant Trijata came running to her. On approaching her, she saluted Mandodari and said :

"Honoured Queen ! A strange transformation has taken place in Sita. Today, her face is decked with sweet smiles. Her heart seems to be swaying in delight. She seems to have forgotten all her grief and anguish. I think she will surely act upon your suggestion today; and that the long cherished desire of the emperor of Lanka will be fulfilled."

"I have come here only to carry out the emperor's task."

Trijata ran back to Sita and informed her of Mandodari's arrival. Sita at once concealed the ring at her waist and kept looking with fixed eyes at Mandodari who was approaching her. Mandodari approached Sita and sat near her. She did not allow Trijata even to offer her a seat. Trijata stood silent at a distance. After being silent for a few moments, Mandodari said.

"Sita ! You have been sad and depressed all these days. Only, today, I see a little cheerfulness in your face. I am really happy about it. She kept silent for a while to watch the effect of her words on Sita. At the same time Hanuman who sat concealed in the Ashoka tree kept watching carefully the feelings and thoughts appearing on the face of Mandodari. Trijata had no interest in their conversation.

"The emperor of Lanka is indeed the lord of incomparable wealth. The beauty of his form and the charm of his face are unexampled." She continued in the same vein gently stroking Sita's shoulders; "And Sita is unexampled in her beauty not only in the whole world but in the three worlds. Destiny might not have united you in marriage with Ravan but it is really fortu-

nate that you should thus secure his favour. If you decide to accept the emperor's offers of love the people of Lanka will celebrate the event with joy and elation. Gods and goddesses will shower flowers upon you. Sita! Take my suggestion and make us all happy. All the other queens of Ravan and I will render service to you and carry out your commands with devotion and you will become the supreme empress of the empire of Lanka."

Every word uttered by Mandodari pierced Sita's heart like a poisoned arrow. Her heart broke when she heard those words. The flames of indignation rose in her mind. So, she decided to attack Mandodari with the arrows of angry words so that she might not give such wicked suggestions in future. Accordingly, she said in an angry voice.

"You sinner! Are you a woman? How could you come here as a messenger of your wicked husband? It is a great sin even to look at your face. Ah! If you cannot understand yourself how can you understand me and Shri Ram. Can I ever forget my Lord Shri Ram? He is always with me, day in and day out. Brother, Lakshman also will arrive soon. He will destroy your wicked husband just as he destroyed Khar. Moreover, the day is not far when Lanka and the vast Rakshasa empire will be destroyed. If at least now you have understood the truth get away from here, at once. Never show me your black and blighted face again. Get away, you wicked woman!"

Flames of anger began flashing from Sita's eyes. Her words came out like lava. Mandodari was stupefied by her words and began shuddering with fear. She could not endure Sita's repudiation. She went away from there. She was thinking only of this, "Then, what may be the secret of Sita's cheerfulness? Has Trijata given false information? No. That is not at all possible. Playing with the emperor of Lanka is like playing with a cobra. Trijata must have noticed cheerfulness in Sita's face. Can there be some other cause for Sita's cheerfulness?"

Trijata had retreated. She began running behind Mandodari. The other attendants and guards had gathered around

Mandodari outside the garden. They were all saying the same thing. "Sita was cheerful today!" Mandodari wondered why Sita had spoken thus to her. This puzzling question agitated her. She gave up worrying over it, thinking thus :

"Why should I get into this confounding snare. It is not possible to win Sita's favour. Let the emperor of Lanka do what he deems proper. I will not come here again to persuade Sita to accept his love."

The attendants and servants went to have their food since it was noon. Hanuman found an excellent opportunity to meet Sita and to converse with her.

So, he descended from the Ashoka tree; and stood before Sita, bowing to her with veneration.

Sita became alert when she saw some stranger standing before her. She set right the fringe of her sari. Hanuman saluted her and said in a humble voice.

"Revered goddess! May Shri Ram and Lakshman be victorious. I have come here in accordance with Shri Ram's commands, to know your whereabouts and to convey to him some good news about you. After hearing about your welfare Shri Ram will proceed to Lanka with the determination of destroying the enemies. It was I who dropped Shri Ram's ring into your lap so that you may not have any doubts or suspicions regarding me."

Hanuman again prostrated before Sita. Sita's eyes welled up with tears of joy. She was overwhelmed with joy. She said with amazement.

"Dear child ! Who are you ? How could you come to Lanka? How could you cross the vast ocean to reach Lanka ? How is my dear Lord ? Where did you meet Shri Ram and Lakshman ? How is my dear lord spending his time ?"

"Dear mother ! I am Hanuman, the son of the illustrious hero Pavananjay. My mother is Anjanadevi, a veritable goddess. I could cross the ocean and reach here because I have mastered the supernatural power of flying through the sky.

The great hero, Sugriv, the supreme king of the Vanardweep is at the feet of Shri Ram day and night, rendering service to him. The sublime hero, Shri Ram and Lakshman are residing under a *sal* tree in a garden outside the city of Kishkindha, the capital of the Vanardweep.

Dear Mother ! On account of his separation from you, Shri Ram has been experiencing inordinate agony and anguish. Just as a forest-fire burns all the trees and plants in a forest, Shri Ram's sorrow has been causing grief to the entire Vanardweep. Moreover, Lakshman has been steeped in grief like a child bereaved of his mother.

He always keeps looking for you in all directions in grief and agony. He remains silent always. The two brothers sometimes grieve over your disappearance and sometimes rage against your abductor. Of course, King Sugriv always tries to comfort them, but nothing can solace them. No assurance can bring them cheer. The words of comfort and assurance spoken by friends and well-wishers bring only greater distress to people who are experiencing anguish.

Hearing about the calamity of your abduction, all the Vidyadhar kings have joined Shri Ram ready to render service to him. Your brother, Bhamandal also has come to Kishkindha. Viradh, the king of Pathal Lanka has become a self-appointed body-guard to Shri Ram. King Mahendra and Prince Prasanna-kirti are out to destroy the enemy and the garden of Kishkindha has become a royal court. All are ready to render service to Shri Ram and are desiring your welfare.

King Sugriv sent his warriors and spies in all directions to search for you and he himself set off searching for you. It was he who brought the news of your abduction. It was on hearing the news brought by him that all came to know that Ravan had abducted you and brought you to Lanka. Then Shri Ram, the Supreme Lord, in accordance with King Sugriv's suggestion, placed upon my shoulders, the great responsibility of meeting you in Lanka and bringing him news about your condition. Moreover, he gave me his signet-ring to be given to you so that



you may believe that I am Shri Ram's messenger. He also ordered me to take your coronet and to convey it to him. Therefore, dear Mother! Kindly give me your golden coronet so that I may convey it to Shri Ram. In that case, he will know that I have been successful in my search for you. Moreover, he will be supremely happy to see your coronet."

The tears kept streaming forth from Sita's eyes. At once she overwhelmed with surging emotions took off her golden coronet from her head and gave it to Hanuman. She said :

"Dear Child! Take this coronet of mine and leave this place at once. If you stay here longer, some calamity may occur to you. If that meanest of mortals, Ravan comes to know of your arrival, he will at once come here and some calamity may occur to you."

"Mother! You need not at all worry about it. Nothing will happen to me. I will myself give Ravan, an indication of my visit but I entreat you to stop fasting and to take some food. Kindly end your twenty-one day fast. I will not leave this place until you take food."

On account of Hanuman's persuasion and also because of the happiness of having heard some news about Shri Ram, Sita ended her twenty-one day fast.

Hanuman stood there humbly until Sita ate food and then said in a humble voice.

"Mother! You are the very embodiment of affection. Impelled by your affection for me you have told me to leave this place at once. I think you are afraid of what Ravan might do. Probably, you might fear that Ravan's warriors may kill me but dear mother I am a messenger from Shri Ram and Lakshman. I have the ability of conquering the three worlds. Even if Ravan comes here with all his army, I can face him and rout him.

"Mother! You do not know my abilities. That is why you are bidding me leave this place at once. but if only you give me

a command I can carry you away on my shoulders even while Ravan keeps watching the sight with stupefaction. He abducted you by means of deception but I will carry you back to Shri Ram defying Ravan openly and in the presence of all.”

Sita's bleak and blighted face grew cheerful on hearing the heroic words of Hanuman. She said, “Dear child, you are capable of all that. I have the fullest confidence in your abilities. You are a messenger of Shri Ram and Lakshman. I cannot sit on your shoulders. I cannot touch other men. You please return to Shri Ram and give him news about me. Then Shri Ram will do what is proper. You have carried out your duty thoroughly. In fact, you are a mighty servant of Shri Ram. Now, you may leave this place. I will keep awaiting the arrival of Shri Ram and Lakshman.

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## LXXVII

### HANUMAN'S HEROISM

“Mother ! I will go away from this place, but before going I will make the Rakshasa warriors taste a little of the strength of Shri Ram’s messenger so that they may not forget him. Ravan, who deems himself, a conqueror of the universe will not easily admit that others are heroic, but today even he will taste a little of an ordinary person like me.” Hanuman said seeking Sita’s consent. She gave her consent to his plan. Then, he prostrated to Sita and began romping through the garden. The earth began to shake as he kept romping through the garden.

Hanuman began his sport of destruction in the *Devaraman* garden. He caused a tremendous commotion and violence. He uprooted mighty Ashoka trees and threw them on the ground. He uprooted huge banyan trees and threw them away. He destroyed every tree. He smashed down the Champaka trees. He uprooted and threw away plaintain trees and Mandara trees. The sky began to reverberate with the noise of the trees being thrown on the ground. He destroyed flower-plants, bowers and creepers. He smashed green plants, under his mighty feet. In a way, *Devaraman* garden became a playfield for Hanuman’s destructive sports. A tremendous commotion appeared everywhere. The guards were stupefied. They began to burn with anger on seeing Hanuman’s dance of destruction. In consequence, all the guards joined together and fell upon Hanuman to capture him but their efforts failed miserably.

Hanuman used even trees as his weapons. It is well said, “All things become weapons in the hands of a mighty hero”.

Hanuman killed every guard with one deadly stroke. One Rakshasa warrior went running to Ravan. Ravan was already

in a state of excitement and agitation. Mandodari had told him what Sita had said. He was in a state of great agitation. He was unable to find out the cause for Sita's cheerfulness.

"Why is Sita cheerful today ? Has not the plant of my love sprouted in the garden of her heart ? Are all my endeavours going to end in disappointment ?"

Just as he was thinking thus, the guard came into his chamber and said.

"My lord ! A tremendous commotion has arisen in the *Devaraman* garden. The entire garden has been devastated. It has become a cremation-ground. Some mighty Vidyadhar has been destroying the garden. On account of his destructive sports, the heavenly garden has become totally devastated. He has killed all the guards except me."

"What did you say ? Has the whole garden been destroyed? Go and inform Akshakumar to appear before us at once."

"A Vidyadhar in the *Devaraman* garden ! It is impossible ! Who can he be ? How did he enter the impregnable fort of Lanka ? What courage had he to enter the *Devaraman* garden? Can he be a follower of Ram ? Has he met Sita ?"

"May the Emperor be victorious ! Revered father ! I am awaiting your commands." Akshakumar said to the ten-headed one.

"Go at once to the *Devaraman* garden with some soldiers. It appears that some Vidyadhar has created some commotion there. Bring him dead or alive to me."

"As commanded by my dear Lord !" Akshakumar saluted Ravan and at once set off to the *Devaraman* garden with some soldiers. The soldiers surrounded the garden. Akshakumar rushed towards Hanuman like an intoxicated elephant.

Hanuman fearlessly encountered Akshakumar. "Well brother ! You have come at the right time. One should have some fruits before eating food."

“O you monkey! Do not prattle unnecessarily. I will destroy you within the twinkling of an eye.” Akshakumar began shooting arrows at Hanuman. Hanuman also released counter-devices and confounded Akshakumar.

Akshakumar began to fight in a ferocious manner. Hanuman carefully avoided and escaped every attack made by Akshakumar. After fighting for sometime thus, Hanuman cut off his head.

A terrible commotion arose in Lanka when people heard that Akshakumar had been killed. The Rakshasa warriors were filled with a nameless dread. When Sita heard about all this, she began to fear that some calamity might occur to Hanuman. She shuddered at the very thought of what might happen to Hanuman. We naturally experience anguish when we fear some calamity to those whom we love. This is natural for human beings.

Ravan was furious when he heard that his son had been killed. Restraining his anger a little, he sent for Indrajit and said, “Indrajit! Go at once to the *Devaraman* garden and bring that monkey into my presence. Hurry up! Carry out this task without a moment’s delay.” Indrajit was unable to understand how an ordinary monkey could enter the impregnable fort of Lanka.

This secret was known only to three people in Lanka namely Vibhishan, Sita and Lankasundari. Ravan did not know that the hero who had destroyed the *Devaraman* garden was none other than Hanuman. As soon as Indrajit entered the garden, he saw Hanuman. He knew Hanuman very well. He had personally witnessed Hanuman’s heroism in the war against Varun. But Indrajit who had been incensed and grieved by the death of his brother at Hanuman’s hands, did not like to remember the friendly relations, he had with Hanuman. He roared out;

“O you monkey! Take care. I will have peace of mind only after spilling your blood upon the ground which is covered with Akshakumar’s blood.”

At once, a terrible fight broke out between the two heroes. Fear and anxiety filled the people of Lanka. On earlier occasions,

if any wars took place, they took place only outside Lanka. It was for the first time that a war was taking place in the very heart of Lanka. Such an event had not occurred in the entire history of Lanka.

One man was facing single-handed countless Rakshasa warriors. This was something unimaginable. Hanuman did not really want to fight. He merely wanted to make the Rakshasa warriors realise the incomparable might of Shri Ram's warriors. He wanted to return to Kishkindha after displaying his might a little. For him, it was mere fun; a frolicsome sport for some moments. It was his way of pleasing Sita.

Hanuman released counter-devices of greater strength and destroyed all the weapons released by Indrajit. Hanuman killed most of Indrajit's soldiers, Indrajit was confounded by the death of his soldiers and by the dearth of the weapons. Just then, Hanuman's cries of victory reverberated in the skies; "Indrajit! This is a fight against a mere soldier of Shri Ram. He has a vast army of greater heroes than I. If you at least now desire to save the empire of Lanka and the Rakshasa dynasty from total devastation, persuade Ravan to send back Sita to Shri Ram."

Indrajit finding it impossible to defeat and capture Hanuman decided to use the most powerful device he had. Accordingly, he released against Hanuman the supernatural device called the *Nagapashastra*. In consequence, Hanuman was bound head to foot with the *Nagapash*. Indrajit's face grew resplendent with exultation. Hanuman did not think it timely to defeat and disgrace Indrajit. Of course, he was capable of breaking off the *Nagapash* but he saved Indrajit from that disgrace because he desired to display his stupendous might in the court of Ravan by breaking off the *Nagapash*.

After much difficult, Indrajit had attained his victory by deceptive means. He was elated by his victory. Indrajit took Hanuman to Ravan's presence. Countless Rakshasa warriors and the citizens of Lanka kept gazing at Hanuman with wonder, amazement, curiosity and doubts. Hanuman was made to stand before Ravan. Ravan was hissing like a king Cobra. He

thundered out. "O you wicked monkey ! What have you done? Having been my follower whose refuge have you sought ? The man whom you serve is a beggar wandering through forests eating the roots and fruits available in forests. Your master is a beggar wearing soiled and torn clothes. Those two brothers who are like Bhils or aboriginals, cannot help you. What can they do for you ? I know that you have come to Lanka in accordance with their commands. What have you achieved by coming here ? Unnecessarily, you have risked your life.

In fact, your master is very clever and deceitful. He has duped you by sending you here. I thought you were my loyal follower. But today you have entered my Kingdom as a messenger of someone else. You can be fearless because you are after all a messenger. Today I will release you after imposing a small penalty upon you; but O you wicked monkey ! Why have you made bold to commit this enormity ?"

When Hanuman heard Ravan's words, his blood began to boil with anger. He gave a bitter reply to Ravan.

"O you Dashmukh ! You are wasting your breath unnecessarily. Stop your bragging. When was I your servant and when were you my master ? Are you not ashamed of uttering lies thus ? You shameless man ! Remember that war in which king Varun, captured your brother-in-law Khar and also remember how on account of his amity for you, my father released him from captivity. Also remember that Varun's sons, Rajiv and Sanjiv were about to decimate you and how you sought my help and how I saved you from disgrace and death. You have forgotten all those things and you say that I am your servant. Do you want to be my master ? O you mean mortal ! You do not deserve any help or consideration. You are indeed a terrible sinner. It is sinful even to converse with such an ignoble person as abducts another man's wife. I do not find any hero on your side who can save you from death. Lakshman alone is enough to destroy you. Escaping from him is like escaping from the jaws of death. Shri Ram will stay off. He need not fight against you. The day of your death is fast approaching."

Hanuman's words fell upon Ravan's ears like hammer-strokes. His anger shot up to the skies. He was incensed by Hanuman's words. This was the first time that he had heard such insulting words. He could not tolerate the disgrace. He angrily stepped down from his throne. Blood streamed from his eyes. He began to shake with anger. With a furious frown, he said: "You stupid fellow! You have unnecessarily antagonised me. Now you cannot escape death but you have come here as a messenger. It is against political ethics to kill you. Therefore, I order my men to take you in a procession on a donkey through the streets of Lanka and to drive you out."

Even as Ravan was saying this, Hanuman grew monstrous in stature and broke off the *Nagapash*. He became free in a moment and began leaping about. It was like an elephant breaking off the bondage of a lotus-creeper with its trunk and leaping about in elation.

As soon as he broke off the bondage of *Nagapash*, Hanuman with the speed of a lightning leaped and dealt a terrible blow to Ravan; and with another stroke he broke Ravan's crown into pieces. The precious stones that had been studded to it fell all over the floor of the court. All the people who were there were stupefied but Hanuman dashed out of the palace; created a mighty commotion in Lanka and went away from there.

Thousands of warriors cried, "Catch him! Kill him! Do not allow him to escape, but no one had the courage to go anywhere near Hanuman. Indrajit kept gazing with stupefaction at Hanuman who broke off the *Nagapash*; disgraced Ravan and disappeared in a moment, in a magical and supernatural manner. He felt that he could not catch Hanuman. He stood utterly dazed and confounded.

Indrajit was non-plussed by Hanuman's heroism, his slaying of Akshakumar and the way in which he had disgraced Ravan himself. Ravan's fury was futile. Even a warrior of Shri Ram displayed such heroism! This shook Indrajit if not Ravan.



This event brought about a change in Ravan. He who had been thinking of Sita now began to think of taking revenge against Shri Ram. Ravan was the very embodiment of pride. The disgrace he had suffered at the hands of Hanuman was worse than death. He became mad with fury.

Vibhishan also was not inactive. He had been silently and carefully watching the actions of Hanuman. He knew the destruction that Hanuman had caused in the garden. He also knew how Hanuman had disgraced Ravan. One question kept appearing in his mind again and again. "Why have all these unhappy things occurred? It is all on account of the obstinacy of the emperor of Lanka. It is all on account of his lust for a woman!" He was greatly agitated over his elder brother's contemptible and ignoble action. He had no solution to the problem of what might happen to Ravan and how he could be prevented from committing enormities. "What will happen if he continues to be obstinate?" The answer to this question was clear enough, "The destruction of Lanka and the decimation of the Rakshasa dynasty."

Vibhishan was deeply worried. He was full of contempt for Ravan's ignobility and inhumanity. He was deeply grieved over it. He was full of contempt and abhorrence for the flatterers and time-servers who surrounded Ravan but the flatterers did not care for his attitude because they enjoyed Ravan's favour and patronage. Ravan ignored Vibhishan's advice and valued their wicked advice. Vibhishan felt that the events would lead to a terrible disaster but he was unable to do anything.

Sita who had been kept captive in the *Devaraman* garden began dreaming of a joyful and happy future. She felt that happy days were not far in her life. Hanuman's visit filled her with new hopes and dispelled her despair. Colourful clouds of joy and elation began to hover through the firmament of her imagination. "Shri Ram and Lakshman will arrive. Ravan will be destroyed. Lanka will be devastated and my lord will release me from this captivity." She began weaving in her imagination a garland of joyful thoughts and emotions.

She began to take her food regularly. She always meditated upon the *Panch Parameshti* and endeavoured to remain calm and cheerful.

### Hanuman

Having taken Sita's coronet, Hanuman decided to proceed to Kishkindha. He met his newly wedded wife, Lankasundari and then set off to Kishkindha. Before leaving for Kishkindha he promised Lankasundari that he would soon return to Lanka and meet her. He wanted to reach Kishkindha without any delay.

No ancient *grantha* contains a description of the change that took place in the thoughts and moods of Shri Ram, Lakshman, Bhamandal, Sugriv and others, when Hanuman returned to Kishkindha.

Shri Ram !

Shri Ram was in deep grief in the garden outside Kishkindha.

Lakshman was filled with anguish like a child separated from his mother.

All were eagerly and impatiently awaiting the arrival of Hanuman. They were looking for Hanuman thinking that he would return after meeting Sita in Lanka. Even such heroes as Sugriv and Jambhavan deemed this an extremely difficult task. They were also greatly worried because they knew very well that Lanka was impregnable.

As soon as Hanuman's airship appeared in the sky over Kishkindha Lakshman shouted aloud, "Hanuman has returned!" Shri Ram at once stood up. He went forward to receive and embrace Hanuman. Hanuman approached Shri Ram and prostrated to him. Shri Ram embraced Hanuman. The whole atmosphere was filled with joy and elation. Hanuman humbly placed at the feet of Shri Ram, the coronet of Sita. Shri Ram took it up; pressed it to his heart; closed his eyes, lost in deep thought. He felt as though he had actually met Sita.

A few moments passed thus. Silence filled the atmosphere. Then all sat down in the shadow of trees. Hanuman sat at the feet of Shri Ram.

“Dear friend! I hope Sita is well.”

“Dear lord! How can Sita be well? She has been experiencing agitation and agony like a fish out of water on account of the separation from you. She always keeps repeating, “Ram...Ram...” She always keeps reciting that holy name.”

“What did she say when you gave her my signet-ring?”

“My lord! On seeing your signet-ring she was filled with joy and elation. She looked around eagerly and joyously because I sat concealed in the Ashoka tree and dropped the ring into her lap. She, at once, took the ring and pressed it to her heart and her forehead and experienced inordinate joy and happiness.

“Then?”



Sometime later Mandodari, the queen-consort of Ravan came there as his messenger. Oh! Sitadevi gave her a bitter reply which was like a slap on her cheek. Poor woman! She had to return disappointed and disgraced. Then, I appeared before Sitadevi. I saluted her and conveyed to her your message.”

“Then what happened?”

“I entreated her to give her golden coronet to be conveyed to you. At once, she gave it to me. For twenty-one days, she had been fasting.”

“Fasting for twenty-one days?”

“Yes! My lord! She had decided not to take food or water until she received news about your welfare. I prevailed upon her to end her fast. She ended her fast and I felt supremely happy.”

“Didn't Ravan hear about your visit?”

“No! I entered Lanka and married Lankasundari. I met Vibhishan, the noble prince and then I met Sita in the *Devaraman* garden.”

“Hanuman narrated to all those who had gathered there the story of his marrying Lankasundari. All were greatly happy to hear about it. All were greatly moved to hear about Vibhishan's endeavours to persuade Ravan to send back Sita. When Hanuman narrated all that had happened in Lanka. Lakshman began to swell with pride and joy. He could not contain himself. He stepped forward and embraced Hanuman. Shri Ram who was happy to hear all this said in a soft voice :

“Hanuman ! You are, indeed, a great hero, devoted to duty. Your visit must have given great relief and joy to Sita. The lotus of hope must have bloomed in the lake of her heart. Moreover, Ravan also would have understood by now what kind of enemy he will have to face and against what kind of heroes he will have to fight.”

Soon, Sugriv took Hanuman into the city. He requested Hanuman to take a bath and to take food. When Hanuman was taking rest after having had his food, Sugriv returned to the garden.

“Dear Sugriv ! Now preparations have to be made for a campaign against Lanka,” said Lakshman.

“As commanded by my lord !” Sugriv showed his readiness to carry out Lakshman's commands. That very evening, there was a meeting of all the Vidyadhar emperors, kings and warriors for a discussion. They discussed their plans to attack Lanka. Sugriv was given the command of the armies. Messages were sent to king Mahendra. Viradh. Bhamandal and others to join the campaign against Lanka.

The preparations for the war began in full swing. The atmosphere was filled with enthusiasm and elation.

\* \* \* \*

## LXXVIII

### THE INVASION OF LANKA

Extraordinary preparations were made for the war. Lakhs of horses, elephants, chariots and airships stood for miles around Kishkindha.

Crores of warriors got ready for the campaign with their weapons. Enormous quantities of weapons were kept ready. Chandrarashmi was in charge of the arrangements relating to the collection of weapons and organising warriors and vehicles. King Sugriv, Bhamandal, Prasannakirti, Viradh and Hanuman were deeply engaged in deciding upon the route, the army formations and other preparations relating to the strategy of war. Nal, Neel, Jambhavan, Angadh and the other great warriors were engaged in their respective tasks with great enthusiasm. They had also the task of explaining to people the cause for the war. Shri Ram and Lakshman were supervising all these preparations and were giving Sugriv and others, the necessary suggestions. All the preparations were completed within a short time. Prince Chandrarashmi entreated Shri Ram to begin the march at an auspicious time.

And on a splendid morning, jubilant with a golden radiance...

The drums of war were beaten.

Queen Tara decorated the foreheads of Shri Ram and Lakshman with the Tilak; flung upon them holy rice-grain and performed an *aarathi* wishing them success in their endeavour. The court-priest advised them to start in an auspicious *muhurt* and the march began in an atmosphere of absolute seriousness.

All the warriors sat in airships. Thousands of airships were filled with countless warriors, chariots, elephants, horses and weapons.

Hanuman's airship was at the head. Nal, Neel and Jambhavan, the valiant sat beside Hanuman. Bhamandal's airship was behind Hanuman's airship. The old king Mahendra and Prince Prasannakirti sat beside Bhamandal. Behind them thousands of airships carrying millions of warriors began to fly. At the rear, Chandrarashmi's moon-shaped airship was flying. Viradh's airship was flying keeping a watch on all the other airships and guarding them. At a little distance behind, two thousand airships were flying carrying horses, elephants, chariots and soldiers.

Shri Ram and Lakshman sat in a resplendent airship and began flying behind them. Behind them one lakh thousand warriors chosen by Sugriv were flying under his leadership in one thousand airships. Behind them all, one hundred airships were flying carrying servants and attendants.

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All were eager to fight and desirous of seeing Lanka. Hanuman had decided to capture the Kingdoms on the way and to increase his army by including the soldiers of those kingdoms.

The vast army was flying over the sea.

Sethu and Samudra were the rulers of that part of the sea. Their capital was the city of Velandhar situated on the Velandhar mountain. When they noticed a vast army flying over the sea, at once, they ordered their armies to get ready for a war and then suddenly a war broke out in the sky.

But those two kings did not know that Hanuman, the son of Pavananjay was himself at the head of the army. They committed a Himalayan blunder in attacking the flying army. Hanuman at once got ready for a war against Sethu and Samudra but Nal and Neel dissuaded him from fighting and said :

“O great hero ! You display your valour in Lanka leaving the task of routing these kings to us.”

A terrible war broke out in the sky. At once, Nal and Neel encountered Sethu and Samudra. Even before the hostile armies could enter the fight, Nal by virtue of his extraordinary tact, captured Samudra and Neel captured Sethu.

Elated by the heroism of Nal and Neel, Hanuman said, "Excellent! O you heroes! You have achieved a splendid success. Surrender these captives at the feet of Shri Ram."

Nal and Neel took the captives to Shri Ram.

"Dear lord! These two haughty kings began a war against us and tried to obstruct our passage. We have captured them and brought them before you."

The two kings ashamed of themselves fell at the feet of Shri Ram. Shri Ram, who was the very embodiment of kindness released them and restored to them their kingdoms.

A great hero forgives captured enemies when they seek his pardon. After being released from captivity, King Samudra humbly said to Shri Ram, "O lord of compassion! You have been gracious enough to forgive us. We entreat you to stay for this night at Velandhar and accept our hospitality."

Shri Ram could not reject King Samudra's offer of hospitality. He accepted his invitation and sent a message to Hanuman by Nal and Neel to land the armies near Velandharnagar and to enable them to take rest there for the night.

The Velandharnagar began to team with airships and armies.

Shri Ram and Lakshman were taken to the palace. All the others were given proper guest-houses.

Then folding his hands, king Samudra said in a humble voice.

"O you compassionate one! I humbly request you to accept the hands of my three absolutely beautiful daughters."

Shri Ram commanded Lakshman to marry them and the marriages took place. Thus, Shri Ram spent the first night of his march towards Lanka in the city of Velandhar.

Early next day, the armies began their march. King Samudra and King Sethu also joined the march with their armies. King Samudra and King Sethu sat in Hanuman's airship.

After they had travelled for sometime, King Samudra said to Hanuman; "O you noble Vanara hero! Now we are entering the boundary of Suveladri. The King Suvel is valiant and radiant. If we can conquer him and make him our subordinate, he will be of great help to us in future."

Hanuman at once accepted King Samudra's suggestion. Soon after his airship entered the area of Suveladri, he ordered his soldiers to blow the trumpets of war. King Suvel came with his vast army to fight against Hanuman. At once, Bhamandal brought his airship to the side of Hanuman's airship and said in a serious tone.

"You proceed further. I will face and defeat Suvel."

"Very good!" Hanuman gave his consent to Bhamandal's request. A terrible war broke out between Suvel and Bhamandal. Both were great heroes. Neither was inferior to the other. A tremendous commotion arose all around Suveladri. Nal and Neel attacked the armies of Suvel and compelled them to flee the battle-field. Bhamandal, at once, captured Suvel.

King Suvel was taken to the presence of Shri Ram. He sought Shri Ram's refuge.

The armies took rest on the second night at Suveladri; and the next day they continued their march.

After having travelled a long distance, Hanuman approached Shri Ram and said :

"We are now approaching Hamsadweep. Lanka is not far from there. Therefore, we should capture Hamsadweep and camp there. Hamsadweep is a place of strategic importance for us."

King Sugriv agreed to Hanuman's suggestion. Shri Ram consented to Hanuman's suggestion of stationing Hanuman's



armies at Hamsadweep. Accordingly the armies were ordered to proceed towards Hamsadweep. King Hamsarath received the news of the approach of the armies. He had already made the preparations for the war. Hanuman sent Nal and Neel to Hamsarath with a message of peace and friendship. He thought that if Hamsarath agreed to the proposal of peace and friendship war could be avoided. Nal and Neel conveyed the message to Hamsadweep. After discussing the matter with them in detail, Hamsarath accepted the proposal and he also agreed to surrender himself to Shri Ram. He received Shri Ram and Lakshman with great veneration and devotion and treated them with great hospitality. The armies were stationed at a safe place on Hamsadweep. Efficient arrangements were made for security. The responsibility of making security arrangements was given to Chandrarashmi, Nal and Neel.

Ravan had already received information of the arrival of Shri Ram and Lakshman with a vast army. In every nook and corner of the city of Lanka, people were talking about the arrival of Shri Ram and Lakshman with armies. A tremendous commotion appeared in Lanka.

Ravan called an emergency war-council. Kumbhakarna, Vibhishan, Indrajit, Hasta, Maricha, Saran, Swayambhu and other Rakshasa heroes attended the meeting and Ravan held a discussion with them. At the outset, Maricha gave his suggestion.

“Shri Ram’s armies consist of countless Vidyadhar kings and warriors. Shri Ram has arrived at Hamsadweep accompanied by such great heroes as Sugriv, the king of Vanardweep; Prince Chandrarashmi, the son of Vali; Viradh, the king of Patal Lanka, the old warrior, king Mahendra; Prince Bhamandal, King Samudra, King Sethu; Hanuman, the mighty hero, Nal, Neel, Jambhavan and other millions of mighty heroes and warriors. I am not daunted by them; nor am I influenced by them in any way but I am thinking of our battle-formations and preparations for war. We have to make large scale preparations with extraordinary caution and foresight.”

Dashmukh Ravan said, "Beat the war drums. Proclaim war and inform our warriors and soldiers to get ready for the war. Every soldier of mine will be Death-incarnate to the Vanara army. The captured Vanara soldiers will serve to feed our warriors. Our heroes and warriors are absolutely capable of destroying Ram's armies."

Vibhishan, who had been listening silently to the discussion going on in the war-council stood up and said in a serious voice :

"O you crest-jewel of the Rakshasa dynasty ! Kindly listen to my opinion and take your final decision after carefully thinking about it.

First of all, we have to discuss the question whether it was right on your part to have brought Sita here by force. Is it not a step that leads us to total ruin in this world and in the other world ? Has it not been a reproach on the splendid traditions of our Danava Dynasty ? I am really grieved by this unhappy event of Sita's abduction. When I heard about it, my heart broke to pieces. I am unable to hold my head straight on account of shame. No one has committed such an enormity in the resplendent history of the Danava dynasty. Well ! What had to happen, happened. Even now, it is not too late to mend matters. Shri Ram himself is coming to take back Sita. When that is so is it not proper on our part to restore Sita to Ram honourably and to repent our action. This step will not bring any disgrace or humiliation to us and it will not cause any stain or slur on us or it will not cause any slur or stain upon our reputation as great heroes. On the other hand, such a step would set right the situation; will bring about amity and cordiality between us and Shri Ram and Lakshman and will enable two mightiest forces of world to unite in amity and cordiality. If you remain obstinate and refuse to return Sita to Shri Ram, he will surely invade Lanka and take away Sita. In consequence, the Rakshasa dynasty and its noble traditions established by our noble ancestors will be totally destroyed. Our ruin is certain. We and all our supporters will be consumed by the flames of war and not a single individual will survive even to bemoan

our destruction. Maricha and Saran may not give you the right suggestion. They may not condemn your ignoble action but I am the younger brother of the Emperor of Lanka, a prince of the blood royal and therefore it is my duty to make you realise the truth. You may not relish my counsel. You may not accept my suggestion.

But if you are willing to accept my suggestion; and if you realise the wisdom underlying it, you must at once put an end to the preparations for the war and we must make preparations to receive Shri Ram and Lakshman with cordiality and hospitality. We have witnessed already the tremendous heroism and the prowess of Hanuman, the staunch follower of Shri Ram. We have known his terrible powers of destruction."

Vibhishan paused for a few moments; heaved a long sigh; turned towards Ravan and said in a serious and elevated tone:

"Dear brother! When I say all this, you should not think that I have any doubt regarding your extraordinary heroism, superhuman abilities and your militaric genius and prowess. At the same time, I am not also belittling your greatness, but I want you to realise the eternal truth that the final victory will be won only by truth and justice not by might. Kindly realise and remember that in the present situation, truth and justice are not on your side.

You possess boundless wealth, limitless splendour and incomparable might like Indra, the king of gods, but I am unable to understand why you are prepared to lose all these things for the sake of a woman who belongs to another man."

Ravan's agitation knew no bounds. Silence reigned supreme in the war-council. All were speechless. No one was capable of speaking a single word. All were in a great conflict. All of a sudden, Indrajit stood up in great excitement. He began to speak bitterly reprimanding Vibhishan and repudiating his arguments.

"You are a coward by birth. You yourself are preparing the way for the total devastation of our Rakshasa dynasty. From your venomous utterances, it is evident that you are not

my father's brother but his enemy. How can you show such fear and cowardice being the brother of Dashmukh, the conqueror of the universe? Fic upon you! I am ashamed of you. My father is an extraordinary hero. He within a trice defeated and disgraced Indra, the Emperor of Vidyadhars. He is the supreme lord of prosperity and pelf. The mightiest heroes of the world yearn for a place at his feet and they feel blessed when they can touch his feet. He is supremely enlightened and possesses an unexampled genius and regarding him you entertain such a wicked and villainous ideas. Are you not ashamed of yourself? Till today, I thought that you were like my father and that you were my prop and protector. Therefore, now I do not find words to express my contempt for you. I feel pained to insult you and to disgrace you. Yet, I cannot refrain from saying that you are out to destroy the Danava dynasty and that your ways and policies will bring disgrace upon our dynasty. Even before this, once you deceived my father by uttering falsehood. Did you not take a vow in the royal court of Lanka to kill Dasharath and did you not go to Ayodhya saying that you would kill him? But you returned to Lanka without killing Dasharath and you deceived my father by saying that you have killed Dasharath. How deceptive you are! How villainous you are!

And now you are endeavouring to save Ram, the son of Dasharath. Again and again, you try to spoil our plans by describing our enemies as great heroes. Are you not ashamed of all this? In fact, I deem it improper to allow you to participate in our secret political discussions." And then turning towards Ravan, he said in a harsh and bitter voice. "Revered father! Kindly listen to me and keep him out and do not take him into confidence." Vibhishan's face grew red with anger. He began to shake with anger and excitement. He spoke in a resounding voice which reverberated in the skies.

"O you fool! Stop your irresponsible prattle. I am not at all taking sides with our enemies. In fact, you are an enemy to the Danava race and your policies will result in the total ruin of our race. Are you not bringing disgrace and ruin upon our race by supporting your father who is blinded by his infatua-

tion for a woman and who is unable to see reason because he is blinded by extraordinary prowess and pride. Are you not inviting destruction? You are yet a child unable to realise the subtleties and complexities of political policies.”

And then for sometime, Vibhishan remained silent. Then turning towards Ravan, he said, “Dear Lord! Remember that this advice of your son and your ignoble character are sure to bring disgrace and destruction upon Lanka.”

Ravan, who was the very embodiment of pride was incensed by Vibhishan's sharp words. He could not bear to hear those words. In his mad fury, he forgot all sense of propriety. At once, he drew his sword and got ready to attack Vibhishan. Vibhishan also became indignant. He became wild with rage. He at once pulled up a stone-pillar and threw it at Ravan. Soon, the two began to fight against each other like intoxicated elephants but Kumbhakarna and Indrajit prevented them from fighting. Silence reigned supreme. No one had the courage to say anything. Kumbhakarna took Vibhishan to his palace and Indrajit took Ravan to his palace.

In a way, this marked the beginning of the fall of Lanka. It seemed to indicate the future possibilities. The domestic quarrel seemed to indicate the future disasters. Ravan could not realise Vibhishan's wisdom or sense of justice. Vibhishan did not like Ravan's unwise and indiscreet policies and actions.

Vibhishan was not at all influenced by Ravan's tremendous valour. He did not agree to the proposal of declaring war against Shri Ram.

Ravan roared out his order :

“You scoundrel! Get away from here. Don't show me your black face again. There is no place in Lanka for a disloyal fellow like you.”

Ravan's commands left no alternative to Vibhishan. Of course, he too had an equal right over the empire of Lanka but he thought it proper to sacrifice everything for the sake of justice and righteousness.

Who was there to console Vibhishan in that painful predicament? Indrajit and Meghavahan were staunch supporters of Ravan. The heroes like Maricha and Swayambhu inwardly approved of Vibhishan's policy but they did not possess the moral courage to state their opinions openly.

Vibhishan at once left Lanka and went away.

When the people of Lanka came to know of the dissensions and quarrels in the Royal family, they were full of sympathy for Vibhishan; and they did not approve of Ravan's policy of hatred and revenge for who would sacrifice their property and lives by opposing Ravan's ignoble actions and policies? The people who lived a worldly life did not like to court total ruin by trying to safeguard and uphold noble and lofty ideals.

Vibhishan decided to go to Hamsadweep and to seek the refuge of Shri Ram. Spies had already conveyed to Shri Ram and others information regarding the dissensions in the Royal family. But no one even dreamt that Vibhishan the gem among the Rakshasas would come to Shri Ram and surrender himself to him.

A great commotion appeared among the Rakshasa warriors and soldiers when Vibhishan left Lanka. The army became divided into two sections. Vibhishan's wisdom, nobility and far-sightedness were very greatly admired by the Rakshasa warriors and soldiers. Consequently, the news that Vibhishan went away from Lanka excited some sections of the army; and they went out of Lanka. They camped outside the city of Lanka; and were awaiting Vibhishan's commands.

King Sugriv and the various other Vanara heroes were greatly amazed and delighted at Vibhishan's unexpected arrival at the Hamsadweep. They were filled with surprise and suspicion. King Sugriv at once informed Bhamandal of the arrival of Vibhishan.

"O you noble hero! I am fully aware of the ideals and traditions of the Rakshasa race. We can even trust ghosts, goblins and spirits but not these Rakshasas."

The two at once went to Shri Ram. Hanuman, Nal, Neel, King Mahendra and Viradh, had gathered there already. The door-keeper announced the arrival of Vibhishan.

"May the king be victorious! Vibhishan, the younger brother of Ravan is waiting at the door seeking a meeting with you."

"Bring him to us with honour!" Shri Ram's thunderous voice reverberated everywhere.

Sugriv said in the middle :

"My Lord! These Rakshasas by nature are deceptive. They are cruel by nature and wicked in their actions. Kindly be acutious about them. Since, Vibhishan has come to meet you. you may meet him. Let us see what will happen."

At that time an old and experienced Vidyadhar warrior by name Vishal was sitting there. He was fully familiar with the royal family of Lanka and he had a more intimate knowledge of Prince Vibhishan. He saluted Shri Ram and said in a polite manner .

"O lord of compassion! What king Sugriv said is normally true regarding the Rakshasas but Vibhishan is an exception to this. He is a man of great nobility, wisdom and enlightenment. He has always been devoted to justice and righteousness. He is the only one among the Rakshasas who loves truth and justice and is capable of sacrificing everything for the sake of justice and righteousness.

I know very well the latest situation that has arisen in Lanka. I received the latest news about it. Only yesterday, a terrible quarrel took place between Ravan and Vibhishan in the chamber of discussions. Vibhishan advised Ravan to send back Sita to you honourably and to receive you with honour. On account of this a quarrel took place between Vibhishan and Ravan; and Ravan at once ordered Vibhishan to get out of Lanka and then Vibhishan came to you and surrendered himself to you. Dear Lord, after Vibhishan left Lanka one section of

Ravan's army left Lanka and came out of the city breaking off all relations with Ravan. They are now camping outside Lanka awaiting Vibhishan's commands. Therefore, you can allow Vibhishan to meet you. You need not have any doubts regarding his sincerity."

The facts narrated by Vishal removed all fears and doubts from the minds of the Vanara warriors and heroes and all were enthusiastic to meet Vibhishan. Soon, Vibhishan was ushered in by the porter. He saluted the feet of Shri Ram with a feeling of genuine devotion and veneration. Shri Ram embraced him affectionately. Enthusiasm and elation filled the atmosphere.

Then Vibhishan said in a polite voice. "O you, son of Dasharath. I have discarded my relations with my elder brother who has been pursuing the path of ignobility and I have come here seeking your refuge. Accept me as your devotee and servant. You can command me as you command King Sugriv. I will deem it a good fortune to carry out your commands."

Shri Ram was greatly impressed by Vibhishan's politeness, calmness, tenderness and the sweetness of his utterances. He embraced him again and said in an amiable manner. "Noble man, until now I was merely hearing people praising your extraordinary virtues. I have been hearing about your love of truth and justice but today you have succeeded in the ordeal, I am supremely pleased with you. So I proclaim you now king of Lanka. From today onwards Vibhishan will be the king of Lanka. All approved of the proclamation with loud cries of victory that reverberated in the skies. Nal, Neel, Mahendra. Viradh and various other Vidyadhars extended a hearty welcome to Vibhishan and received him. The atmosphere was filled with joy and jubilation. Then Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal took Vibhishan into the palace and treated him with hospitality. After Vibhishan had his food they began discussing the matters relating to the war. Shri Ram and Lakshman also joined them in the discussion.

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## LXXIX

# THE TERRIBLE WAR

### THE FIRST DAY

(On the first day of the war, Shri Ram made Nal and Neel commanders of the armies; and gave them an opportunity to display their heroism and prowess.

Ravan gave Hasta and Prahasta the responsibility of leading his armies and of organising the war on the first day.

In the first day's war, Nal, the heroic warrior slew Hasta; and Prahasta was killed by Neel. Hanuman and Prasannakirthi fought heroically and killed countless Rakshasa warriors; but at the end of the battle, the Rakshasa army caused a commotion in Shri Ram's army. The sun set; and the two armies returned to their camps.)

Shri Ram and the others passed eight days on the Hamsadweep. Meanwhile, King Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal formulated the fundamental strategies for the war. Vibhishan was profoundly impressed by Sugriv's strategic skill and mastery over the arts of war. He was dumb-founded by his war-tactics.

After making all the necessary preparations for the war, King Sugriv approached Shri Ram and said : "Dear Lord ! The preparations for the war have been completed. Now, we can, without any hesitation, proceed towards Lanka and invade the gates of Lanka."

"Then, why delay ? Issue commands to the armies to proceed towards Lanka." Shri Ram said, giving his consent

to the plan. Soon after Shri Ram gave this command, war-cries reverberated in the skies. The cries of victory issued by the millions of warriors reverberated in every nook and corner of Lanka. Within a short while Shri Ram's vast armies camped over a vast area near Lanka. It was as if a new city had been built for the war. Prince Chandrarashmi made excellent arrangements for the security of the camp on all sides. He made such tight security arrangements that no Rakshasa warrior or spy could gain access to the camp. He informed King Sugriv of the arrangements he had made.

King Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal at once proceeded in their chariots to Shri Ram's cottage.

"Dear Lord! Now, we have to make arrangements to enter the battle-field. The sun will rise in a few minutes. Kindly tell us who should be given command of our armies on the first day of the battle."

"As you like it!"

"My lord! According to me it is desirable that the responsibility of organizing the war on the first day should be given to Nal and Neel. The incomparable heroism of the two brothers will certainly create a commotion among the Rakshasa armies and will demoralise them."

"All right! Today Nal and Neel shall command our armies. Please send for them."

The two heroes were at once sent for. Shri Ram made them commanders of the army; blessed them and said;

"Oh you heroes! You are indeed the crest jewels of the armies. Today you rout the Rakshasa armies with your heroism and militaric prowess. You must display such heroism and abilities that they will be compelled to take to their heels."

"So be it, my Lord!"

The armies stood on the battle-field at the right time, ready to fight. Sugriv standing at the head of the armies announced in a loud voice.

“Dear warriors! Today the armies will be commanded and led by Nal and Neel. Therefore, we should try to decimate the Rakshasa armies under their leadership and guidance.”

“May the commanders, Nal and Neel be victorious!” The armies gave out a tremendous war-cry. At once Nal and Neel made excellent battle-formations. They requested Shri Ram, Lakshman, Sugriv and Bhamandal to be merely spectators and to be watching the war. At the same time, Hanuman was ordered to enter the war-front from the Northern side with one hundred thousand warriors.

The old King Mahendra and Prince Prasannakirthi were given the responsibility of safeguarding the Southern front assisted by one hundred thousand warriors. Viradh, the valiant was ordered to encounter the Rakshasa armies assisted by one hundred thousand able warriors. At a short distance from him, Nal and Neel stood armed in their chariots for the fight. The remaining armies were ordered to take rest in the camp.

On account of the hectic preparation for the war that was being made, anxiety and excitement pervaded Lanka. Ravan stood in his magnificent chariot, which excelled Indra's chariot. Bhanukarna who was a master of the arts of war held the reins of his chariot. Indrajit and Meghavahan stood in their chariots on the right side and left side of Ravan awaiting Ravan's commands. Kumbhakarna stood ready for the war in his chariot behind the chariot of Ravan. The other Rakshasa heroes like Shukra, Saran, Maricha, Maya, Sund stood in their chariots in their appointed positions at strategic points around Ravan. Millions of Rakshasa warriors entered the battle-field like darkening clouds of locusts. Approximately fifty yojanas of ground was covered with the Rakshasa armies. Ravan had appointed Hasta and Prahasta commanders of his armies for the first day. Hasta and Prahasta made extraordinary battle-formations to encounter Shri Ram's armies. They ordered Sund to stand ready with one hundred thousand warriors to fight against Viradh and to take revenge against him. Swayambhu was stationed on the Northern front with one lakh Rakshasa

warriors and on the Southern front the mighty Rakshasa hero Saran stood with one hundred thousand warriors.

Soon after the sun rose in the eastern horizon, a terrible war broke out between the two armies. The two armies began fighting with the determination of attaining victory. Neither army feared defeat. The battle-field began resounding with the clangour of weapons and the earth was covered with dead bodies. If some issued cries of victory, some gave out cries of agony and death. Within a few hours, the entire battle-field was covered with countless dead bodies. Countless horses and elephants lay dying on the battle-field but there was no sign of either side winning a victory. In consequence, in the next phase of the war, Nal and Neel commanded two lakh warriors to attack the Rakshasa warriors. Within the twinkling of an eye, Viradh with one lakh picked warriors pounced upon the Rakshasa warriors and within a short time, the Rakshasa warriors began crying in anguish and running away from the battle-field. The Vanara warriors were filled with joy and exultation.

Hasta and Prahasta stood in utter stupefaction, on seeing the Rakshasa soldiers running helter-skelter. They were totally confounded; yet they were not shaken or daunted. They at once, summoned up courage and confidence and drove in their chariots to the head of their armies. Seeing Hasta and Prahasta coming forward, Nal and Neel also rushed forward in their chariots which collided against those of Hasta and Prahasta. Nal challenged Hasta to a fight. Neel attacked Prahasta's chariot and drew him into a combat.

On the Northern front, Hanuman fought heroically against the Rakshasa warriors and made them lick the dust and scattered confusion among their ranks. The one lakh soldiers led by him displayed tremendous heroism and decimated the Rakshasa armies; and within a short time they broke Saran's chariot into pieces. Saran got a new chariot at once but Hanuman at once, killed his horses and when he tried to drive in a third chariot, he killed Saran shooting arrows at him. The Rakshasa warriors

began running helter-skelter when they found that Saran had been slain.

The fight between Prasannakirthi and Swayambhu on the southern front would be a delightful sight even to gods and goddesses. The young prince, Prasannakirthi was undermining the confidence and abilities of the old warrior, Swayambhu by displaying his mastery over various arts of war and was making him weak and weary but even Swayambhu was not a clay-image but an experienced hero and warrior. He surrounded Prasannakirthi and released counter-weapons to defeat the weapons released by him. Many of Prasannakirthi's soldiers were killed in the battle. Yet the remaining soldiers continued to attack the Rakshasa army with unshaken confidence and courage.

Seeing the turn that the fight was taking, Swayambhu was naturally worried but without losing courage he made new battle-formations with the determination of defeating and capturing Prasannakirthi. In consequence the chariots of the two heroes stood face to face. Prasannakirthi sent showers of arrows against Swayambhu and Swayambhu broke into pieces the wheels of Prasannakirthi's chariot with his mace. At the same time without wasting a single moment, Prasannakirthi leaped down from his chariot; pounced upon Swayambhu and dealt a deadly stroke to Swayambhu with his mace. Swayambhu's death produced a tremendous commotion among the Rakshasa warriors and the cries of victory issued by the Vanara warriors reverberated in the skies.

The terrible encounters between Nal and Hasta and between Neel and Prahasta had not taken a decisive turn even though it was afternoon. Victory hung in the balance. If at one moment, Nal achieved some victory over Hasta, the next moment Hasta achieved a victory over Nal. Thus their fight continued. The whole battle-field was reverberating with the clangour of swords and maces and with the whizzing noises of arrows. The heroes and warriors on both sides were fighting with invincible heroism. In the same manner, a terrible fight

was going on between Neel and Prahasta. They were not inferior to each other. So, none was prepared to accept defeat.

“Either I should die or you should die today”. With this determination, Nal rushed forward in a ferocious manner and broke Hasta’s chariot into pieces but Hasta was not in any way inferior to Nal. At once, he ascended another chariot and with one stroke, he sent Nal’s crown flying into the air and killed his horses. Nal began to fight in a more ferocious manner. He took up his sword, pounced upon Hasta and with one deadly stroke cut off his head. At the same time Neel also was continuing his determined fight with Prahasta. Driving his chariot around Prahasta’s chariot at a tremendous speed he showered arrows upon Prahasta. In retaliation, Prahasta also released a ceaseless shower of arrows. All of a sudden, Neel took up his trident and hit Prahasta’s chest. The stroke tore off Prahasta’s chest. Prahasta was slain thus.

The death of Hasta and Prahasta was a terrible calamity to the Rakshasa armies. The Vanara soldiers issued sky-cracking cries of victory. The cry of victory issued by Shri Ram reverberated in the whole universe. The Vanara warriors glorified Nal and Neel and approached Shri Ram. The whole atmosphere was filled with joy and jubilation. Nal and Neel politely bowed their heads and saluted Shri Ram. Shri Ram embraced the two brothers and praised them wholeheartedly. Just then, Prasanna-kirthi and Hanuman came there. Shri Ram embraced them and applauded them for their achievements.

“Actually, you are the most precious gems in our army. Your heroism and war-tactics have filled me with irrepressible elation and joy.” Shri Ram said in a dignified voice overwhelmed with joyful emotions.

Just then, there arose from the Vanara army, cries and screams of fear and anxiety. Their cries and screams filled the atmosphere. Some Rakshasa heroes had begun a fresh assault against the Vanaras with the purpose of avenging the death of Hasta and Prahasta. Maricha, Jwara, Uddhama, Vighna, Simhajagan and other Rakshasa commanders united and began to

attack the Vanaras. At the same time thousands of Rakshasa warriors were killing Vanara soldiers, risking their own lives. Within a few moments, thousands of Vanara warriors were killed. When Hanuman heard of this, he decided to go there with Prasannakirthi and to fight against the Rakshasas, but Sugriv prevented them from going. He personally went into the battle-field, rushing among the chariots of Santhap, Nandan, Durith, Vighna and Prathita and reaching the battle-front successfully stopped the rushing flood of Rakshasa warriors. The sun was setting in the west. The western horizon was crimson in colour like the battle-field that was covered with steaming blood. Maricha had begun an assault against the Vanaras to avenge the death of Hasta and Prahasta.

The Vanara warrior, Santap collided against Maricha out to rout him. He was one of the ablest commanders in Sugriv's army but he could not stand against Maricha for long. Maricha broke Santap's chariot to pieces and killed him. As soon as the commander Nandan received the news of the death of Santap, he killed Jwar, the Rakshasa commander.

The fight between Uddham and the Vanara hero Vighna assumed a new shape. Vighna displayed extraordinary skill and destroyed Uddham's chariot and tore off the flag that had been hoisted on the chariot. He broke to pieces, Uddham's bow and arrows. In consequence, Uddham was stupefied and anguished. No way out flashed to him. Yet with an unshaken determination, he ascended another chariot and attacked Vighna and with his sword, he cut Vighna's body into pieces.

Durit, the mighty commander of Prasannakirthi slew the mighty Rakshasa commander Sukra. At the same time, Simha Jaghan, the Rakshasa warrior killed Prathit, the Vanara commander.

The sun set in the west. Bugles were sounded to indicate a cessation of the war. The two armies returned to their camps. The entire battle-field appeared terrible and dreadful.

The soldiers having taken a bath began taking rest. The attendants and servants were engaged in their activities, in

torch-light. Some soldiers on both the sides were engaged in carrying away and cremating the dead bodies of soldiers.

In the first day's battle, Shri Ram's army suffered a lesser reverse than the Rakshasa army. Great warriors like Santap, Vighna and Prathita had been killed. The death of Hasta and Prahasta was a great disaster to the armies of Ravan. This was a loss to the Rakshasa army which could not be repaired. Moreover, Jwar, Sukra, Swayambhu and several other great commanders had been slain. This was also an irreparable loss to Ravan's army.

Sugriv said to Shri Ram :

"Noble Lord! Ravan will be infuriated by the death of Hasta and Prahasta and by the other reverses his army has suffered. Therefore, tomorrow's battle will be terrible and destructive. He will try to destroy our armies. He will give the command of his armies in tomorrow's battle to Indrajit or Meghavahan or some other invincible hero."

"Dear Sugriv! Let him give Indrajit, the command of the armies or let Ravan himself come into the battle-field. You need not worry. I will be at the head of our armies."

"My lord! That is impossible. As long as Lakshman is alive, you need not take the trouble. I am sure that Lakshman's arrow will pierce the hearts of the enemy-soldiers and will kill them" said Lakshman entering the conversation.

"Dear Lakshman! That is impossible. You will have to lead our armies but not tomorrow. Tomorrow, Hanuman will lead our armies and rout the enemy-armies. Hanuman shall be the commander of our forces tomorrow."

"Dear lord! I am grateful to you for this kindness you have shown me." Hanuman said accepting King Sugriv's plan.

"Tomorrow's war will be terribly destructive. Therefore I wish to be in the war-front and to teach a lesson to that arrogant, ignorant and unjust fellow, Dashmukh."



"I entreat you to give me this opportunity," Vibhishan appealed to Shri Ram.

"Oh king of Lanka! You are not different from us. When you feel that your participation in the war is necessary, you are absolutely free to occupy the leading position in any of our armies."

"I am grateful to you for your kindness."

Later Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal had a meeting in Sugriv's tent. Their first concern was to plan battle-formations for the next day's battle. Shri Ram invited Vibhishan to his tent to spend the night there. For a long time they were engaged in discussing the war situation. Lakshman accompanied by Angadh went round the camp supervising everything and then went and stood outside Shri Ram's tent. Meanwhile, Nal, Neel and Prasannakirthi were engaged in a discussion regarding the battle-formations and the devices to be used in the next day's battle.

In the Rakshasa camp, Indrajit, Meghavahan, Maricha, Kumbhakarna and others were holding consultations with Ravan. Ravan was in great fury and agitation. He was agitated by the death of Hasta and Prahasta who had been killed by Nal and Neel. Moreover, he was deeply agonized by the death of lakhs of Rakshasa warriors. While they were engaged in a discussion, Vajrodhar entered the tent accompanied by some spies.

"Dear lord of Lanka! Our spies have brought the news that in tomorrow's battle Hanuman will lead the enemy armies."

"Let them make Hanuman, the commander of their armies. Let Ram and Lakshman themselves enter the battle-field. I do not care. I will destroy the enemy soldiers fearlessly," said Kumbhakarna roaring with anger.

"Who will be made the commander of the Rakshasa army in tomorrow's battle?" said Indrajit.

"Vajrodhar is there!"

"My lord! I am supremely fortunate!" Vajroddhar happily accepted Ravan's command. He was thrilled with the prospect of war.

Vajroddhar was a lion among the Rakshasa warriors. He was known for his invincible might, his militaric genius and his mastery over the arts of war. It was believed that he would surely bring victory. All believed that he was capable of commanding the Rakshasa army in the battle with competence.

Vajroddhar inspected the armies; planned battle-formations for the next day and went to sleep.

### THE SECOND DAY'S BATTLE

(Shri Ram placed upon Hanuman's shoulders the great responsibility of organising the war on the second day. Dashmukh Ravan made his able and trusted warrior Vajroddhar, the commander of his armies for the second day's battle.

When Nal and Neel were killed in the battle Hanuman became agitated and entered the battle-front. A terrible battle took place between Hanuman and Vajroddhar. Hanuman cut off the head of Vajroddhar and struck terror into the hearts of the Rakshasa warriors, who felt utterly confounded.

Indrajit and Chandrarashmi came face to face. Hanuman killed Jambumali, the son of Ravan and filled Ravan with anguish. Just then Kumbhakarna entered the battle-field. King Sugriv threw Kumbhakarna into an extremely helpless position. Kumbhakarna tried to grab Hanuman. Indrajit and Meghavahan attacked Sugriv and Bhamandal and bound them with *Nagpash* and established supremacy in the war. All of a sudden, Angadh displaying extraordinary abilities released Hanuman from Kumbhakarna's clutches. As soon as Vibhishan appeared on the battle-field, Indrajit and Meghavahan ran away. A divine being by name Mahalochan approached Shri Ram.)

As soon as it was morning, both the armies stood face to face with each other. Hanuman and Vajroddhar were commanding their armies.

Ravan sitting on an elephant kept carefully inspecting the entire battle-field. He seemed to be trying to discover what was hidden in the future. Ravan was like the god of death-incarnate, and from his eyes flames of anger flashed out. His presence in their midst filled the Rakshasa warriors with great courage and confidence.

Indrajit and Meghavahan stood on the southern and the northern fronts with armies, out to destroy the enemies. Vajroddhar stood on the eastern side with a vast army intent on destroying the enemies. Kumbhakarna also stood in his chariot at a little distance.

Hanuman visualising the nature of the war that would take place on that day had made appropriate preparations and battle-formations. He had stationed Chandrarashmi and Viradh on the northern and southern fronts and had stationed Nal and Neel and Prasannakirthi at the head of his army so that the enemies might not break into his formations. He kept Bhamandal by his side. Sugriv who was behind Shri Ram was in charge of leading the remaining army.

Bugles sounded as soon as the sun rose in the east.

Vajroddhar went forward and commanded five lakh Rakshasa warriors to attack the hostile forces. At once, the Rakshasa soldiers attacked the Vanara armies. They attacked Shri Ram's soldiers with their powerful weapons. They launched attacks on all sides and began cutting off Shri Ram's soldiers as if they were blades of grass.

The Rakshasa army broke into the impregnable Vanara formations and attacked them. The formations of Shri Ram's soldiers were broken. Nal and Neel were slain. Prasannakirthi at once put their bodies in a chariot and sent them to the camp.

Noticing that his formations at the battle-front were routed, Hanuman at once rushed forth in his chariot. King Sugriv brought two lakh soldiers and reinforced the army at the front and strengthened it. Then, Hanuman greatly agitated by the situation produced a tremendous noise with his bow and shot

countless arrows at the Rakshasa soldiers. The Rakshasa army was stupefied. The Rakshasa soldiers began running helter-skelter. A terrible war broke out between the two armies. Seeing Hanuman at the head of the Vanara army, an old Rakshasa warrior rushed forth and tried to check his progress but Hanuman soon broke his chariot into pieces. He broke all his arrows into pieces. Within a few moments, Maali the heroic warrior felt greatly diffident and depressed. Seeing his pitiable condition, Hanuman said,

“You old and weak Rakshasa ! Run away at once. I do not think it proper to kill a weak and old fellow like you.” Just then, Vajrodhar's chariot arrived there. He challenged Hanuman to fight with him.

Hanuman sent ceaseless showers of arrows and repulsed Vajrodhar. Vajrodhar also stood his ground. He too sent showers of arrows against Hanuman. Hanuman ordered his charioteer to drive his chariot around that of Vajrodhar, and kept shooting arrows at him but Vajrodhar rendered powerless every arrow shot by Hanuman.

All the warriors who were there stood in utter stupefaction. They were completely lost in watching the encounter between the two heroes. If at one moment, it seemed that Hanuman would be killed, the next moment, it seemed that Vajrodhar would be killed. But gradually Hanuman showed his extraordinary abilities and after having gone close to Vajrodhar's chariot, Hanuman broke it into pieces with his mace.

Vajrodhar, at once, jumped off his chariot and began fighting with his mace. The two began to fight ferociously with their maces. As soon as he got an opportunity, Vajrodhar with one mighty stroke sent Hanuman's mace up. Just then, Hanuman using his sword cut off one shoulder of Vajrodhar. Vajrodhar continued to fight with one shoulder but he could not continue to face Hanuman for long. He turned round and round and fell down on the ground. At once, Hanuman cut off his head.

A tremendous commotion arose among the armies of Ravan. The death of Vajrodhar incensed and anguished Ravan. His

fury knew no bounds. His son Jambumali stood nearby. He rushed forward and collided against Hanuman. Hanuman's sword was steaming with Vajrodhar's blood. Just then, Jambumali challenged him to a fight. Hanuman turned towards him; and said : "You are inviting death unnecessarily. You are still a youth fit only to play games and sports. Get away from here and engage yourself in some pleasant sports with some beautiful damsels in the gardens of Lanka."

"Oh you talkative monkey. I have come to play the game of war with you. I will cut off your head and wear it on a garland around my neck and will delight the damsels of Lanka."

Even before he could complete his sentence, Hanuman took up his weapons to fight against him. Jambumali was yet in his adolescence. He had completed his studies relating to the *shastras* and the arts of war, just then and so he began showering arrows upon Hanuman. Hanuman stood his ground and broke every arrow shot by him.

On the southern front, a terrible war was going on between Indrajit and Chandrarashmi while Meghavahan and Viradh were engaged in a deadly fight on the northern front. Chandrarashmi displayed extraordinary abilities and routed Indrajit. At once, he was about to kill him but suddenly he received news that Viradh was surrounded by enemies and that he was about to be killed. He at once rushed to the north. Meghavahan had surrounded Viradh. Of course Viradh was fighting against him like a ferocious lion. Chandrarashmi's chariot approached Viradh. Without losing even a single moment he attacked Meghavahan with his trident. Meghavahan was bowed by the stroke. The trident broke off his crown. Just at that moment, Chandrarashmi destroyed his chariot but he ascended another chariot at once. Again a ferocious fight began between them.

Just then there arose a cry of anguish from the Rakshasa armies, "Jambumali has been killed." Hearing the news of his brother's death Meghavahan rushed in that direction.

Hanuman's exploits of killing Vajrodhar and Jambumali caused anguish to Ravan. Ravan who was greatly agitated

looked towards Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna's chariot sped to the forefront of the battle-field shaking the earth. Seeing the arrival of Kumbhakarna the Rakshasa soldiers recovered their spirits and launched a fresh assault against Shri Ram's armies.

Kumbhakarna left his chariot at a distance. He leaped down and pounced upon the hostile armies like a storm. He killed some by treading upon them and broke the heads of some with his fist and made two enemy soldiers collide against each other and killed them with his mighty strokes. Kumbhakarna wrought destruction among the soldiers of Shri Ram and created a terrible commotion among his armies.

Sugriv rushed forward and checked the progress of Kumbhakarna. Bhamandal also launched a fresh attack on him from the other side. The Vanara heroes like Dadhimukh, Mahendra, Kumudh, Angadh, and others surrounded Kumbhakarna and attacked him with their sharp arrows which went whizzing in the air. Kumbhakarna fell into a conflict. After thinking a little, he released the supernatural weapon called *Prasvapastra* against the hostile army. In consequence, the soldiers of Shri Ram's army fell into a deep sleep and began snoring.

Sugriv was shocked to see this sight. He at once released the counter-weapon called *Prabhodhini*. In consequence, the sleeping soldiers woke up with greater enthusiasm and energy, and attacked Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna stood in his chariot and continued to shoot arrows against his enemies. Sugriv brought his chariot near the chariot of Kumbhakarna and with his mace broke it into pieces.

The very next moment, Sugriv killed Kumbhakarna's charioteer with the result that Kumbhakarna had to leap out of his chariot in agitation. He took up his mace and attacked Sugriv. With one stroke he broke Sugriv's chariot into pieces. And then Sugriv taking up a large rock, threw it at Kumbhakarna but Kumbhakarna broke the rock into pieces.

Then Sugriv released the weapon called *Thadith-Danda*. It came exploding, and hissing like a terrible cobra, towards

Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna used many devices to defeat the *Thadith-Danda* but all those devices failed. The *Thadith-Danda* began hammering his huge body and within a few moments he fell on the ground unconscious.

How could Ravan remain calm when Kumbhakarna had fallen unconscious on the ground? He could not remain calm. His brow wrinkled into a frown and his face reddened with anger. Flames of anger flashed from his eyes. Then assuming a monstrous form, he thundered, "Now, I myself will go into the battle-field and destroy the enemies."

But Indrajit requested Ravan to be calm and said, "My dear lord! Such tremendous heroes as Yama, Kuber, Varuna, Indra, the king of gods could not stand against you. When that is so, how can these monkeys face you? You remain here. I will decimate those Vanara armies."

Indrajit!

A mighty warrior intoxicated with pride!

Indrajit, at once, attacked the armies of Shri Ram. He went inflicting death on countless soldiers and creating a terrible commotion among the enemy soldiers. He drove his chariot to the place where Kumbhakarna lay on the ground unconscious. Meghavahan also followed him to that place. The two brothers sent continuous showers of arrows and thundered, "O you monkey! Stop there. We do not fight against cowards who run away from the battle-field. We are Indrajit and Meghavahan, the sons of Lankesh Ravan. Where is that Hanuman and where is that Sugriv? We will send them to the abode of death at once; and where are those two brothers Ram and Lakshman? We will teach them a lesson today. Till now, they were facing only unarmed soldiers and innocent people. Today, let them face us and taste our strength a little."

Sugriv, laughing uproariously said, "O you haughty Indrajit! Taste the strength and heroism of Ram and Lakshman afterwards but now first taste a little of our strength also. Accept our hospitality a little and see how it tastes." Sugriv and Indrajit

collided against each other like huge rocks. A terrible fight broke out between the two. Meghavahan challenged Bhamandal to a fight. The heroes began to display extraordinary abilities daring death. Hanuman prevented Kumbhakarna from being taken away.

Indrajit and Sugriv !

Meghavahan and Bhamandal.!

When those supreme masters of warfare began fighting, the whole universe began shuddering with fear. Every atom of the earth shuddered under their stamping heels.

They released all the extraordinary weapons they had. They used all their supernatural powers, but the heroes continued fighting unwearied. The two brothers Indrajit and Meghavahan were not absolutely free from fear. Therefore, even before Sugriv released a supernatural weapon, they released *Nagapash* and bound Sugriv and Bhamandal with it. The *Nagpash* bound them so that they could not even breathe.

Just then, Kumbhakarna recovered his consciousness. Stretching his limbs, he sat up at once and his eyes first fell upon Hanuman who stood nearby. The very sight of him filled him with anger. Even as he was sitting, he hit Hanuman with his mace. Hanuman fell down unconscious. At once, Kumbhakarna stood up and grabbed him with his hands.

Suddenly, there arose a commotion among Shri Ram's soldiers. Sugriv and Bhamandal lay unconscious bound by the *Nagapash* and Hanuman had been grabbed in his clutches by Kumbhakarna. Using this opportunity, the Rakshasa soldiers fell upon the Vanara soldiers and began to decimate them.

The evening was approaching.

Chandrarashmi and Viradh taking two lakh soldiers with them attacked the Rakshasa army and killed countless Rakshasa soldiers. Prasannakirthi also joined them with one lakh soldiers. Ravan was in great agitation and indignation because he had suffered a severe reverse.



Just then, Vibhishan approached Shri Ram and said in a serious voice. "My Lord, I have been watching the war for the last two days. Sugriv and Bhamandal are like two eyes for our armies but Indrajit and Meghavahan have bound them with the *Nagapash*. If they are taken away to Lanka it will be impossible for us to keep them free from captivity. Therefore, I will at once go and try to release Sugriv and Bhamandal from the *Nagpash* and I will try to bring them here. Moreover, we have to release Hanuman from the clutches of Kumbhakarna before he is taken away to Lanka." Vibhishan at once drove his chariot towards Indrajit and Meghavahan and stood face to face with them. His thirty brigades of soldiers stood ready to carry out his commands.

When Indrajit and Meghavahan saw Vibhishan before them, they found that they had to face a tough problem. They fell into deep thought. "Vibhishan who is equal to our father and who is therefore venerable is standing before us. How can we fight against him? We grew up from childhood to manhood under his guidance. He trained us in the arts of war. He bestowed upon us the light of knowledge and revealed to us the deepest mysteries of the universe. He taught us to eat food, to play games and taught us the principles of administration. Now, how can we fight against him? We should get away from here. Why should we fear to respect the principles of propriety relating to Vibhishan, who is venerable?"

At once they drove their chariots back and began proceeding towards Lanka and in the hurry, they forgot to take Sugriv and Bhamandal with them. Vibhishan would not have allowed them to return thus if they had not forgotten thus to take Sugriv and Bhamandal with them.

Kumbhakarna grabbing Hanuman began attacking Sugriv's soldiers. The Vanara soldiers felt utterly tired and weak.

Shri Ram was thinking of rushing forth and releasing Hanuman from Kumbhakarna's clutches but just then, Angadh,

the great hero, appeared and rushed furiously towards Kumbhakarna.

Angadh occupied a very important position in Sugriv's vast army. He was a great master of the arts of war. His method was to achieve his objective by means of intelligence; not by means of strength. He began going round Kumbhakarna and attacking him with arrows. Sometimes, he shot arrows from a distance and sometimes, he went near him and attacked him. It seemed as though he was playing hide and seek with him rather than fighting. Angadh played this trick a couple of times. Kumbhakarna moved heaven and earth to get him into his clutches but everytime Angadh escaped from Kumbhakarna. Once, Kumbhakarna lengthened his hand to catch hold of Angadh but just then Hanuman having been freed from his clutches ran away from him and stood at a distance. Kumbhakarna felt baulked as Angadh and Hanuman attacked him together.



The problem of releasing Sugriv and Bhamandal from the *Nagpash* confounded them. They had to be released from the *Nagpash* before they were taken away to Lanka but no one could think of any method by which they could release them. At this point, Shri Ram invoked a divine power called *Mahalochan*.

*Mahalochan* understood by means of his extrasensory perception that Shri Ram was invoking his aid. He thought, "Shri Ram is meditating upon me. There must be some important thing to be done." At once, he appeared before Shri Ram.

"Dear lord! What help shall I render to you? I cannot forget the promise I gave you", *Mahalochan* said to Shri Ram in a tender voice. Shri Ram explained the entire situation to *Mahalochan*. The divine being *Mahalochan* bestowed upon Shri Ram a divine power called *Simhaninad*. Moreover, he also gave Shri Ram two divine weapons called *Musal* (The pestle) and the *Hull* (the plough) and a divine chariot.

Moreover, he taught Lakshman a divine mesmeric power called *Garugi*. He also gave him a chariot and a divine weapon called *Vidyuthvadana* which could destroy enemies.

Lakshman at once exercised the divine mesmeric power. On account of its effect, the serpents that bound Sugriv and Bhamandal disappeared in mortal dread.

The sky reverberated with the cries of victory issued by Shri Ram's soldiers.

The sun set in the west.

There was a cessation of war for the day.

The armies returned to their respective camps.

The soldiers of the hostile armies bathed and had their food and spent and remaining part of the day in remembering the thrilling exploits of great heroes. Joy and jubilation pervaded Shri Ram's camp. On the contrary, despair and distress filled the hearts of Ravan's soldiers. Ravan was agitated with overpowering anger and anguish when he thought of the death of Vajrodhar and Jambhumali, the retreat of Indrajit and Meghavahan, Kumbhakarna's swoon, Hanuman's escape and the decimation of lakhs of soldiers. The various Rakshasa heroes like Indrajit, Meghavahan, Kumbhakarna, Maricha, Simhajagan, Ghatodhar, Kumbha, Nikumbha and others sat near Ravan. Deep silence prevailed in the camp. After a long silence Ravan spoke in a resounding voice.

"On account of my confidence in you, I have lost much during these two days. I have remained aloof, till now trusting your heroism and valour, but tomorrow's war will not be thus. Tomorrow I myself will lead the armies into the battle-field and will destroy Ram, Lakshman and their armies."

All were silently listening to him. There was no reaction from any side. Of course all were equally angry and agitated.

"Let Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal appear before me. I will not allow them to escape alive and if that traitor, that villain, Vibhishan appears before me, I will slay him too."

Then, he suggested the battle-formations for the third day's battle; gave them relevant commands and sent them off.

Ravan, during his discussions with the Rakshasa heroes, had vowed to destroy Ram, Lakshman and their armies but yet he was not free from fears and doubts. During the past two days, he had observed the extraordinary heroism and militaric prowess of Shri Ram's army. He had witnessed the tremendous heroism of Sugriv, Bhamandal and Hanuman. He had observed the militaric prowess and strategic skill of Nal, Neel and Angadh. He had observed from close quarters the dauntless heroism of Prasannakirthi, Viradh and Chandrarashmi. At the same time, he was being deeply agitated by his thoughts relating to Sita. "Even after I attain a victory over the enemies, Sita may not accept my love. She may commit suicide." These thoughts filled him with anxiety and despair. He could not think of any solution.

Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal met Shri Ram. In that day's battle, Shri Ram had examined and realised the abilities of the Rakshasa heroes and warriors except Ravan. Shri Ram said in a slow and serious manner.

"My dear heroes! Our fighting today was excellent. Even gods would applaud our achievements. The entire credit for all this goes to you. The war we fought against Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Meghavahan was indeed tremendous. From today's battle, we have been able to realise the abilities and potentialities of the Rakshasa heroes and their mastery over supernatural weapons. But remember that tomorrow none of them will return alive to Lanka. In tomorrow's battle, Ravan will himself lead his armies. It is going to be a great test to you. It is going to be a great ordeal to you. You have to face it."

At this point, Vibhishan said folding his hands :

"Dear lord! You are absolutely right. Your conjecture is true. In tomorrow's battle, Ravan will enter the battle-front and will wage a deadly war. Therefore, I entreat you to permit me to fight against Ravan tomorrow.

“O you king of Lanka ! You may lead our armies and fight against Ravan tomorrow but remember we must somehow or the other defeat and capture Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Meghavahan and the other Rakshasa heroes. We must capture them dead or alive. We must somehow or the other defeat them or destroy them. Then the only problem will be regarding Ravan.”

“May your wish be fulfilled.” Sugriv said in a serious voice, encouraging Shri Ram.

The night had far advanced. Darkness had enveloped the camp. Silence reigned supreme everywhere. Only the low noises of the guards walking up and down could be heard. After having held a long consultation relating to the next day's war all went back to their respective tents. Only Shri Ram sat in his tent alone thinking of something deeply and looking into nothingness.

### THE THIRD DAY

(In the third day's battle both the armies suffered inconceivable loss and experienced frustration and the bitter fear of defeat. Ravan himself came into the battle-field leading his armies. Vibhishan tried to awaken him from his stupor of arrogance; but Ravan was only incensed by his words. He began to boil with anger. The two brothers began to fight in a terrible manner. Lakshman bound Indrajit with the *Nagpash* and sent him to his tent. Shri Ram also inflicted a similar disaster on Kumbhakarna. Chandrarashmi took Meghavahan captive. As soon as he heard about this Ravan became deeply agitated and released a divine weapon called the *Amoghvijaya* against Vibhishan; but Lakshman at once came forward and himself faced and received the stroke of that weapon. In consequence, his chest was severely wounded. On account of unbearable pain and grief, Lakshman collapsed to the ground. Infuriated by this event, Shri Ram broke to pieces the five chariots of Ravan. Ravan terrified ran back into Lanka. Seeing Lakshman lying unconscious on the ground, Shri Ram on account of grief and anguish swooned. Just then the sun set. The war ended for the day. The battle-field was covered with countless dead bodies of soldiers.)

The eastern horizon grew rosy. Birds began to twitter in the sky. Both the armies entered the battle-field and stood ready to fight. There was still sometime for the sun-rise. Sugriv, the king of Vanaras, Prince Bhamandal and Hanuman had made extraordinary battle-formations. They knew very well that on that day, Ravan would personally lead his armies. Ravan would not only lead his armies but would also launch severe attacks on Shri Ram's armies. Vibhishan had advised Sugriv that even before Ravan launched his attacks, he should, accompanied by Bhamandal and Hanuman, attack Ravan's armies; that he need not be daunted by Ravan; and that he would fight against Ravan and kill him. He had also added that a terrible war would take place between him and Ravan.

Hanuman brought his chariot close to Sugriv and whispered to him, "I think to-day, Vibhishan will break down Ravan's arrogance."

"But should we remain silent spectators? To-day even Lakshman will not be quiet. He is awaiting Ravan's appearance."

"You are right. Shri Ram was also saying, "Let Ravan appear in the battle-field."

The conversation between the two commanders ended. The sun had appeared in the east spreading out his tender golden splendour. His radiant rays had begun to envelop the earth. The two hostile armies collided against each other. A terrible war broke out between them. Indrajit and Meghavahan fought ably in the beginning and created havoc among Shri Ram's armies. The war began in a ferocious manner; and step by step, it grew terrible. Noticing that their soldiers were retreating with fear, Sugriv, Bhamandal and Hanuman pounced upon the Rakshasa armies and began decimating them. When Chandrarashmi, Nal, Neel, and Viradh saw the way in which the three heroes were creating confusion and commotion among the Rakshasa soldiers, their enthusiasm and elation swelled to the skies. They, at once, surrounded Indrajit and Meghavahan; and began to fight against the Rakshasa princes. Indrajit was fighting like an infuriated lion. Chandrarashmi was fighting as if on

that day he had planned to display his militaric prowess and as if he was taking part in a militaric contest.

Within a short time, the Rakshasa armies felt confounded. The soldiers of Indrajit and Meghavahan began to take to their heels. Ravan was greatly distressed to see this sight; and at once came to the battle-front in his chariot. Nobody could stop Ravan's advance as he kept raining arrows against the enemies continuously. Shri Ram's soldiers stood stupefied and dazed. Their agitation increased moment by moment. But when Shri Ram saw Ravan fighting ferociously, he sat in his chariot and got ready to rush towards Ravan; but just then Vibhishan stopped him; and said;

"Kindly wait a little, my lord. Please allow me to fight against Dashmukh."

Having said this, Vibhishan drove his chariot towards Ravan and stood facing him. Then, pulling the string of his bow made a loud noise which seemed to break the ear-drums of Ravan. Seeing Vibhishan coming up thus unexpectedly, Ravan said in a contemptuous manner.

"Vibhishan! Whose refuge have you found? Have you sought the refuge of Ram who is courting death at my hands? Pooh! Pooh! Ram has sent a lamb to face a lion! He is trying to save himself by sending you thus to face me. This easily reveals the extent of his heroism." Ravan spoke tenderly to Vibhishan.

"Dear child! You are my brother. You are my younger brother. Even now my heart overflows with affection for you. Do not behave madly and do not try to impede me thus. To-day, I will surely send Ram, Lakshman and the Vanara armies to the abode of Death. You fool! When that is so, why do you interfere in this matter and increase the number? Dear Vibhishan! Come back to me. I welcome you back to our city. Your position in the court is always reserved for you. Even now, I am ready to give you protection and refuge. Won't you listen to me?"

“My dear brother ! I extend a hearty welcome to you. Do you know why I have come to meet you ? Shri Ram who is like the god of death-incarnate was about to come to fight against you; but I pleaded some pretext and dissuaded him from doing so. I have come to talk to you. Do you realize why I have come here ? Even now there is time to mend matters. Please realize that I have come here to persuade you to pursue the path of righteousness and truth. I came here under the pretext of fighting against you; but the truth is I wanted to speak to you. Dear brother ! Please listen to me. Please release the noble lady, Sita; and send her back to Shri Ram. Oh you lord of Lanka ! I am your younger brother. I will never entertain any evil thoughts against you. I always wish for your welfare. I did not surrender myself to Shri Ram either because of the fear of death or because of a desire for the status of Kingship, but I came away from Lanka and sought Shri Ram's refuge fearing dishonour, disgrace and the ridicule of the people at large. Therefore, I entreat you to release Sita and to avoid disgrace to yourself. As soon as you do so, I will give up Shri Ram and return to you with all love and devotion.” Vibhishan's serene voice reverberated in the battle-field. Ravan began to burn with anger. He felt choked with anger and agitation. He wondered what he should do with Vibhishan who was his younger brother whom he had brought up with affection; whom he had elevated to a high position and today who was preaching sermons to him. Incensed by this thought he said thundering :

“O you coward ! O you stupid Vibhishan ! Are you trying to intimidate me ? On that day, I allowed you to escape alive because I did not like to commit the sin of fratricide but today your death has become essential and inevitable.”

Ravan made a terrible noise by pulling the string of his bow.

“O you lecherous fellow ! O you meanest of mortals ! I too did not kill you on that day because I did not want to commit the sin of fratricide. If I had killed you on that day, this disaster would not have befallen the Rakshasa dynasty, and this disgrace would not have besmirched the lofty history of the Rakshasa



race. Now you are not my brother but a butcher ! A butcher I tell you !” Vibhishan also produced a resounding noise with his bow.

The very next moment, a terrible fight ensued between the two brothers. Indrajit, Meghavahan and Kumbhakarna and other Rakshasa warriors came running with fear and anxiety but even before they could reach Ravan to help him, Shri Ram stopped Kumbhakarna on the way. He prevented them from entering the battle front. Lakshman challenged Indrajit to a fight. Neel began to fight against Simhajagan. Durmursha challenged Gatodhar to a fight. Chandrarashmi did not allow Meghavahan to move away. Bhamandal surrounded Vighna.

No warrior remained inactive. All were engaged in a terrible fight. The fight between Indrajit and Lakshman was so dreadful that it would cause a shudder in the hearts of gods and goddesses. Indrajit was endeavouring to rush to Ravan's rescue but Lakshman stopped him on the way. Agitated by this, he released a divine weapon called *Thamasashtra* against Lakshman. The *Thamasashtra* began flashing towards Lakshman sending out terrible flames of fire. Lakshman released the *Tapanashtra*. The two collided on the way and fell down having lost their power. Then Lakshman released the *Nagapashastra* against Indrajit. At once Indrajit fell down unconscious bound by the *Nagapashastra*. Viradh without a moment's delay put Indrajit in his chariot and as instructed by Lakshman took him to their camp.

Bhamandal sent Vighna to the abode of death and approached Shri Ram. The Rakshasa soldiers had got the unique opportunity of witnessing the fight between Kumbhakarna and Shri Ram. When Kumbhakarna who was stolid like a mountain was being attacked by Shri Ram with arrows and when he screamed and shrieked with fear and agony, fear filled the hearts of the Rakshasa soldiers. Shri Ram kept raining arrows upon Kumbhakarna until he began panting for breath. Indrajit was about to be captured alive and Shri Ram released the *Nagapashastra* to capture Kumbhakarna.

The *Nagapashastra* went hissing and swishing at a tremendous speed towards Kumbhakarna and even before Kumbhakarna could do anything to paralyse it, it attacked him and he fell down like an uprooted peepal tree. At once, the Rakshasa soldiers lost all their courage and self-confidence. As commanded by Shri Ram, Bhamandal took Kumbhakarna to their camp. Meghavahan also was tired of fighting yet he was fighting like a ferocious lion. Chandrarashmi was fighting displaying as much skill and prowess as his father Vali used to display. When he got an opportunity, he leaped off his chariot, seized Meghavahan just as a lion seizes a lamb and carried him captive to his camp.

Shri Ram, Lakshman, Sugriv, Hanuman and the other great Vanara warriors approached Vibhishan. Vibhishan of course, was not equal to Ravan in heroism and militaric prowess but he was superior to Ravan in sense and wisdom; therefore by means of his intelligence he used to counter Ravan's attacks but would the mighty hero Ravan be shaken by such tactics? He with the purpose of putting an end to Vibhishan took aim and sent a divine weapon called '*trident*'. Lakshman broke the *trident* into pieces. At once Ravan released the divine weapon called *Amoghavijaya* which had been bestowed upon him by Lord Dharanendra.

*Amoghavijaya* possessed invincible power.

The *Amoghavijaya* went speeding towards Vibhishan making dreadful noises. Everyone ran away hearing its dreadful noises. No one had the courage or capacity even to look at it. All ran helter-skelter utterly confounded.

Shri Ram stood silent thinking of the situation. His tender face was covered with the clouds of deep thoughtfulness. He was lost in deep thought, "What should be done now?" Now his decision would mean either protection to Vibhishan or his destruction. Vibhishan's life was hanging in the balance. Shri Ram was greatly agitated and in his agitation, he roared :

“Lakshman! Fie upon us! We are unable to protect the life of Vibhishan who has sought our refuge. We are unable to safeguard him. Fie upon us!”

As soon as he heard the words of Shri Ram, Lakshman, the mighty hero stood up and with the purpose of safeguarding Vibhishan stood shielding him. Ravan saw Lakshman standing on the way to safeguard Vibhishan and said in a reverberating voice :

“O You fool! I have not yet aimed an arrow against you. Why are you unnecessarily courting death? Yes. You too must die. I have to kill you. That is what I have to do. This coward Vibhishan has come to fight against me, and is unnecessarily courting death. He is like an insect flying between clashing swords and will be cut to pieces.”

And at once Ravan directed the *Amoghavijaya* towards Lakshman. The divine weapon began speeding towards Lakshman.

Lakshman, Sugriv, Hanuman, Bhamandal and Viradh moved heaven and earth to paralyse the divine weapon but all their efforts failed and in a few moments, the mighty weapon hit the chest of Lakshman dealing a dreadful blow to him. In consequence, Lakshman's chest was wounded and hot blood began flowing out. He fell down like a tree that had been cut off. A terrible commotion arose in the Vanara armies.

But Lakshman was alive. That was evident. The divine weapon had made him powerless and unconscious but he was severely wounded and had fallen down unconscious. They doubted whether he could be brought back to life. The surgeons who had accompanied the Vanara armies washed Lakshman's wounds and bandaged them but they felt that they could do nothing to bring him back to consciousness. They were feeling absolutely helpless. Shri Ram began to burn with anger. With the determination of killing Ravan, he sat in his resplendent chariot, and issued war-cries. Within the twinkling of an eye the two mighty heroes collided against each other. The lions

tied to Shri Ram's chariot pounced upon Ravan's chariot and tore it off to pieces. Ravan leaped into another chariot. The lions tore off that chariot also to pieces. Thus Ravan changed five chariots and Shri Ram broke all the five into pieces with his mighty strokes. Ravan's anger, agitation and fear knew no bounds. He thought; "Ram will naturally die of the anguish caused by the separation from his brother. When that is so, why should I fight against him?"

Thinking thus, Ravan drove his chariot towards Lanka at a great speed. After Ravan thus ran away from the battle-field, Ram returned to the place where Lakshman was lying unconscious. Seeing Lakshman lying unconscious, Shri Ram also collapsed on the ground and swooned.

Sugriv and the other Vanara heroes were in great grief and agitation. The Vanara soldiers stood stupefied and speechless. The faces of the commanders and the warriors of Shri Ram's armies were covered with gloom and despair. In accordance with the advice of the doctors, the attendants smeared cool sandal-paste to Shri Ram: sprinkled cool water in his face and fanned him. As soon as Shri Ram recovered his consciousness he embraced Lakshman; and began lamenting aloud.

"Dear child! What has happened to you! Why are you thus lying unconscious? Tell me what your agony is. Why are you silent? Why don't you say anything? I am your elder brother. I am your brother and dear friend. You may not be able to speak. Well! At least try to convey your meaning by means of some signs. Look here! Sugriv, Bhamandal, Hanuman and the other friends of ours are here looking upon you. Oh dear Lakshman! Open your eyes; and look up a little! Are you ashamed of opening your eyes? Ah! Ravan, the mean fellow ran away from the battle-field. I think you are ashamed of this event. Oh! Lakshman! Open your eyes at least once. I will do what pleases you. Look here! I will set off and bring back Ravan dead or alive."

Shri Ram made a terrible noise by pulling the string of his bow and rushed towards Lanka.

At this point, Sugriv intervened and said :

“My dear lord ! What are you going to do ? The night is not yet over. Ravan, the night-wanderer has run back to Lanka. Here, Lakshman is lying unconscious attacked by a divine weapon. At such a time as this, if a mighty hero like you loses heart what about ordinary mortals ? How can the Vanara army retain courage and self-confidence ? The death of the demon, Ravan has approached. Now, all our efforts should be directed towards helping Lakshman to regain his consciousness.”

The tears were flowing ceaselessly from Shri Ram’s eyes. His flower-soft face had faded away. His throat was choked with overpowering sorrow; and he had grown weak and withered. He said in a voice shaken by agitation and anguish.

“Oh you lord of Vanaras ! No one can fathom the depth of my sorrow. Lakshman is not merely my brother; but he is my dear friend, beloved companion and the only prop of all my hopes. He is everything to me. To-day, I am experiencing greater sorrow than the one I experienced at the time of my coming away to forests discarding all my power and royal splendour. Ah ! My wife has been abducted; and my brother’s life has been taken...yet I am alive. It is really amazing ! Why has not Ram’s heart broken to pieces ? Oh dear friends ! Sugriv, Hanuman, Bhamandal, Nal, Neel, Angadh, Chandra-rashmi and all dear Vidhyadhars ! I entreat you all to return to your places. Dear friend Vibhishan ! I am greatly ashamed of my inability to keep my word given to you. I have not been able to keep up my promise that I would crown you king of Lanka. I have not been able to keep it up. This makes me greatly sad. My inability to fulfil my promise is causing greater anguish than the grief caused by the abduction of my wife and the death of my brother. But my dear friend ! Tomorrow morning you will see that I will send Ravan, your brother and my enemy to the abode of death. I will make him follow Lakshman there. I will kill him; and I will surely make you King of Lanka. And after that ? I will take my brother Lakshman’s body in my arms and fall into fire. This is my decision.

Shri Ram began sobbing like a helpless child placing his head upon Lakshman's chest. His throat was choked with grief. Vibhishan took up Shri Ram in his arms; and wiping his tears off with his upper-cloth said in a serious tone .

“Dear lord! Your grief is causing anguish to the entire Vanara army. Your lamentations are causing inordinate agony and anguish to us. Oh you supreme of heroes! Kindly have a little patience. Lakshman is not dead. The divine weapon *Amoghvijaya* has only pierced and penetrated his body. It has not killed him. One who is attacked by it remains alive for one night. Therefore, stop lamenting and seek some way of bringing him back to life. We have to do something before the dawn; and if we delay till dawn, we will not be able to do anything for him. Therefore, we should set about doing something at once. We have one full night at our disposal to help Lakshman to come back to life. We should do something before dawn. Within that time, we should free him from the power of the divine weapon by means of medical or magical remedies.”

“Then, do you mean that my dear Lakshman can come back to life?”

“Why not my lord? He will surely regain consciousness if the proper treatment is given to him.”

“Then why delay?”

Vibhishan, by means of his supernatural powers created seven strong forts around Ram and Lakshman for their safety. He created four gates and made all arrangements for the security of the fort. Vibhishan knew very well the deceptive tricks of Ravan. No one could even imagine what Ravan could not do on such a dark night. Therefore, Vibhishan made such tight arrangements that not even a bird could enter the fort. Sugriv, Hanuman, Kundatar, Dadhimukh, Gavaksh and Gavadh were guarding the seven gates on the eastern side. The seven gates on the western side were being guarded by such heroes as Neel, Samarver, Durdhar, Manmath, Jaya, Vijaya and Sambhav. On the northern side, such heroes as Angadh, Kurma, Mahendra,

Vihangam, Sushena and Chandrarashmi stood guard keeping a vigilant eye on the gates. The gates on the southern side were being guarded by Bhamandal, Viradh, Gaj, Bhuvanajit, Nal and Manda and Vibhishan himself.

Shri Ram kept dreaming of the possibility of bringing Lakshman back to life. He could think of nothing except the task of bringing Lakshman back to life. Meanwhile, Sugriv, Hanuman and Bhamandal met and began discussing what they should do to enable Lakshman to regain his consciousness. Though they thought for a long time; they could not think of any solution to the problem. There was no one in the entire world who could nullify the power of the *Amoghavijaya*. If Lakshman's life was not saved before dawn, no power could help him regain consciousness and Shri Ram also would give up his life unable to bear with the grief. Everyone knew how deeply Shri Ram loved Lakshman.

Night was passing quickly. The first *prahar* of the night was half over. As moments passed by the impatience and agitation of Vibhishan, Sugriv and others increased.

“What should be done to save Lakshman's life?” This question kept agitating the minds of all.

**ONE NIGHT . . . . MANY EVENTS :**

It was a dreadful night. It was a night of anxiety and bitter agitation. Lakshman lay unconscious...and Shri Ram was in great anguish and grief.

Dashmukh Ravan was experiencing bitter agitation and anxiety. All kept shuddering as they remembered the dreadful war that had taken place during the past three days. The future of the war was vague and indefinite. No one could guess who would win at the end; and what turn the war would take.

A Rakshasa attendant came running into the *Devaraman* garden. She had a tender affection for Sita.

She approached Sita; and said :

“Noble lady! Dear Sita! In the war today, Lakshman the mighty hero was severely wounded and is lying unconscious. Shri Ram is lamenting over Lakshman’s condition. I have also heard that tomorrow morning, Shri Ram will enter fire carrying Lakshman’s dead body.”

Sita was stupefied to hear this. She stood up at once. She, with her eyes wide open in horror and anguish, asked the attendant, “Are you speaking the truth? Is all this true? Is Lakshman, the invincible hero killed really?”

“Dear lady! I heard people whispering to one another about these events in the palace. The news of the death of Lakshman has spread throughout Lanka like wildfire. This has become the talk of the town.”



Sita could not bear to hear all this. She became unconscious and collapsed on the ground. When she fell down unconscious, the atmosphere in the *Devaraman* garden became bleak and blighted. All the attendants came running to Sita and surrounded her. They sprinkled cool water on her face. Within a short time, she regained her consciousness but her heart-rending lamentations filled even the hard-hearted Rakshasa attendants with anguish. She kept lamenting thus for a long time. The hearts of those who had gathered there melted away in compassion.

“Dear child Lakshman! Where have you gone leaving my revered lord alone? Ah! Without you by his side my lord cannot live even for a moment. Fie upon me! I am an unfortunate woman. A wretched and despicable creature! On account of me my Lord Shri Ram and my brother Lakshman had to face this disaster but what is it that I can do? We cannot alter the decrees of Destiny. Where shall I go now? Dear Mother Earth! Be gracious towards me and receive me into yourself. I will reach your lap and lie there forever. Let my head break into pieces. I wish that this too, too, solid flesh would melt, thaw and disappear as vapour. Let my heart break into pieces. Now I do not wish to live even for a moment. I cannot live even for a moment separated from my dear lord Shri Ram and my child; my brother-in-law Lakshman.” Her loud lamentations; her sobs and sighs filled the dark night that enveloped the earth.

One of the attendants, a Vidyadhar maiden had mastered a divine power called *Avalokini*. By means of this power, she could see the past, present and the future. She could visualise the secrets concealed in the womb of the future. The attendant pitied Sita who was in great misery. She went to a lonely place in the garden and sat down there in meditation. She invoked the divine power, *Avalokini* and the goddess appeared before her. She said to the goddess in a humble manner :

“O goddess! In this war between Ram and Ravan who will be victorious at the end? Will Lakshman die or come back to life? What will happen to the noble lady, Sita?”

“O you noble lady! Shri Ram will be victorious in this war. Before dawn, Lakshman will be freed from the power of *Amoghavijaya* and will come back to life. Shri Ram and Lakshman will enter Lanka and will release Sita from captivity.”

And the *Avalokini* power disappeared. The Vidyadhar maiden at once ran to Sita and informed her of the revelations made by the *Avalokini* power. When Sita heard this, she felt greatly comforted and consoled.

The first phase of the night was not yet over. Sita kept thinking of the condition of Shri Ram and Lakshman and hoping that Lakshman would come back to life before dawn.

And Ravan!

“Very good! Today Lakshman has been slain!”

Ravan was exulting over Lakshman’s fall, but he felt agitated when he thought of Kumbhakarna, Meghavahan and Indrajit who had been taken prisoners by the enemies. The magnificent palace of Lanka built of marble, its roof studded with precious stones and the vast empire of Lanka could not inspire any confidence in Ravan.

“Ah! Dear brother Kumbhakarna! You are myself though different in appearance. Oh Indrajit! Oh Meghavahan! You are like my shoulders. Dear Jambumali! Where have you gone leaving me in the lurch? Oh! Where can I search for you all? Alas! My family has been broken to fragments.” Thinking thus. Ravan swooned again and again. He began to make loud lamentations. Ravan, the arrogant! Ravan, the emperor of Lanka! Ravan who had routed the mighty heroes like Yama and Varun; who had attained mastery over a thousand supernatural powers and devices; who had conquered the whole universe was now sobbing like a helpless child. He was screaming and shrieking and cursing himself; and the city of Lanka was plunged in an ocean of grief. There was no one to wipe off his tears; and no one to console him in his distress. Ravan was steeped in agitation, anguish and anxiety.

Shri Ram's anguish knew no bounds. He could not think of any way of enabling Lakshman to come back to life. All were plunged in grief and agitation.

Unexpectedly, a Vidyadhar appeared on the eastern side of the fort where Bhamandal stood guarding the gate. Bhamandal tried to prevent him from entering the fort. The Vidyadhar saluted him respectfully; and said.

"Oh you hero ! If you are one of Shri Ram's well-wishers, take me to him, at once. I know a remedy by means of which, we can make Lakshman come back to life."

"But who may you be ?" Bhamandal asked him, with a feeling of suspicion.

The Vidyadhar showed no engerness to reveal his identity; but he said. "I am a well-wisher of Shri Ram's. I will tell you later who I am. Now, even a moment's delay will be disastrous."

Bhamandal, in accordance with the wish of the Vidyadhar, took him to Shri Ram. The Vidyadhar bowed his head to Shri Ram respectfully; and said.

"Oh you son of Dasarath ! I am Praticandra, the prince of Sangitpur Nagar. My father's name is Shashimandal; and my mother's name is Suprabha.

Once, it so happened that I set off through the sky, in the company of my sweet-heart, on a pleasure-trip. On the way, a Vidyadhar by name Sahasravijaya saw us engaged in amorous sports. There existed an ancient feud between him and our family. Suddenly, there broke out a terrible fight between us. He attacked me with a divine weapon called *Chandarava*; and I fell down. Fortunately, I fell into the territory of Saketpuri. On account of the terrible fall, even I was experiencing pain. I was experiencing great pain on account of the dreadful stroke of the mighty weapon. When I was lying there, fortunately, your younger brother Bharath happened to see me by chance. He came running to me. He lifted me up. He

showed me extraordinary compassion; and brought some miraculous water from the Ganga. He sprinkled the water upon me; and at once, I was freed from the power of the *Chandarava*.

Suddenly, a tremendous life-giving power flashed through my veins. I recovered my consciousness. Amazed at what had happened, I requested Bharath to tell me about the efficacy of the water. I will narrate to you in his own words the secret of the efficacy of the water.

“Once, a wealthy merchant by name Vidya came here from a city called Gajapur. On the way, one of his oxen became weak. Its body had grown weak and weary on account of carrying a heavy weight. Leaving it there, the merchant went away. The citizens of Nishturnagar happened to go treading upon it. In consequence, the ox died unable to bear its pain. But because of the auspicious thoughts, it entertained before its death, it became a divine being by name Vayukumar. He understood his earlier life by means of his *Avadhijan* or extrasensory perception. He grew indignant when he visualized the cruel behaviour of the citizens. He became incensed with anger. With the purpose of taking revenge against them, he cast a pestilence upon the city exercising his supernatural powers. The pestilence ravaged the whole area taking a heavy toll of lives; but the kingdom and family of my uncle, Dronamegh escaped from the fury of the pestilence. I was greatly amazed at this phenomenon. I desired to meet my uncle and to find out the cause for such a miraculous occurrence. When I met him and asked him about it, he replied. “Bharath! Sometime ago Queen Priyankara fell seriously ill but when she became pregnant, she recovered from her illness and when she gave birth to a female child, the whole family was freed from the disease. Therefore, the daughter was named Vishalya. Anyone whom Vishalya touches gets rid of the disease and becomes healthy. In this manner, by her touch and by the water in which she bathes my country is completely freed from the disease.

Once a great muni by name Satyabhutasharan visited our city. I met him, saluted him and heard his great discourses. Out of curiosity, I asked him :

“Gurudev ! What is the secret of Vishalya’s power ?”

“Dear king, all this is the result of the spiritual austerities. she performed in her earlier lives. The wounds on anyone’s body are healed if they are washed in the water in which she has bathed. The water has the power of curing all diseases.”

“Dear Lord ! Anything more ?”

“Yes ! This girl will marry Lakshman. Oh Bharath !” Hence, because of the words of the great muni and also because of our experiences, I concluded that the water in which Vishalya has bathed has the miraculous efficacy of curing any disease.”

After that, King Dronamegh gave me the water in which Vishalya had bathed. When we sprinkled that water on the sick people in our country, they were all cured of their illness and today, I have sprinkled that water on you and found that it has healing power because you are healed by it. You are now completely free from the effect of the divine weapon and you are absolutely healthy. Your life has been saved.”

Shri Ram, Bhamandal and Vibhishan were listening with concentration to the story narrated by the Vidyadhar. The Vidyadhar continued his narration :

“After I recovered from my agony by the efficacy of the water in which Vishalya had bathed, I felt certain that the water had miraculous efficacy. Therefore you must send someone to bring that water and to sprinkle it upon Lakshman before dawn. O you noblest of men ! Send someone urgently to Bharath to fetch that water.”

The first phase of the night was almost over. Someone had to travel to Ayodhya and fetch that water urgently to Lanka. It was an extremely hard job. Shri Ram looked towards Bhamandal. Just then, Hanuman and Angadh also came there. Chandrarashmi, Nal, Neela and Viradh also came up at once. Shri Ram looked around and said to Bhamandal : “Bhamandal ! At once, you go to Ayodhya taking Hanuman and Angadh with you. Explain everything to Bharath and before dawn fetch the

water, in which Vishalya has bathed. Remember! Even a moment's delay can be disastrous."

Bhamandal fell into deep thoughtfulness. Even before he could say anything, Vibhishan said :

"Bhamandal! Do not worry! I have an aerial-car which can fly through the sky. You can travel to Ayodhya in it. It travels in the sky at a tremendous speed. Do not worry. You can fly to Ayodhya and return much before dawn."

Bhamandal, Hanuman and Angadh saluted Shri Ram's feet and sat in the aerial-car. Within the twinkling of an eye, the airship sped away in the direction of Ayodhya. Shri Ram, Vibhishan and Chandrarashmi heaved a sigh of relief. They expressed their gratitude to the Vidyadhar, Praticandra.

One wonders why Praticandra's role is not given importance though he played a crucial role in the Ramayana war. It is not an exaggeration to say that Praticandra saved the life of Lakshman and such a man's role is not given importance normally. Bharath saved the life of Praticandra. Praticandra also with a feeling of deep gratitude saved the life of Lakshman.

The airship reached Ayodhya.

It was almost midnight.

At that time, Bharath was sleeping soundly in his palace. In order to awaken Bharath, Angadh sang a song. Angadh knew very well the age-old tradition that a king should be awakened at a time of calamity, with caution. Bhamandal and Hanuman also joined Angadh in singing the song. Bharath was amazed to hear the song at midnight. At once, he woke up. He saw Bhamandal standing before him holding his hands and with his head bowed in respect. Bharath at once recognised Bhamandal. He also recognised Hanuman who was standing nearby but he did not know Angadh.

"What may be the purpose of your visit at this time of the night?" Bharath asked at once. He was filled with various kinds of doubts and fears.

“Dear lord ! We have come for the water in which Vishalya has bathed.”

“What for ?”

“Your brother, Lakshman was attacked by Ravan with a divine weapon. Somehow or the other, Lakshman should be freed from the effect of that dreadful weapon before dawn; otherwise Lakshman’s death is certain.”

“But...” Bharath fell into a conflict.

“What’s the matter ?”

“I do not have even a drop of that efficacious water and Vishalya is in the city of Kauthukmangal.”

“It does not matter. We have an airship which can travel at a tremendous speed. We can reach Kauthukmangal in an hour.”

They requested Bharath also to accompany them and, at once, they began flying towards Kauthukmangal. On the way, Bhamandal narrated to Bharath the story of the war at Lanka. Bharath was greatly grieved to hear the dreadful calamity that had befallen Lakshman, but he felt relieved to realise that Lakshman’s life could be saved by the efficacy of the water.

“I too will accompany you to Lanka. I will bring millions of soldiers from Ayodhya and destroy Lanka.”

“Dear King ! You need not worry about anything. You need not come to Lanka. The only necessary thing is that Lakshman’s life should be saved. If that is achieved, the destruction of Lanka is certain. Tomorrow’s war will prove disastrous to Ravan. Tomorrow, the sun will bring a message of devastation to the Rakshasa race. We have under our command, a vast army of mighty heroes and warriors who are eager to capture and to destroy Lanka. Therefore, dear lord ! You remain at Ayodhya taking care of the Kingdom and consoling your mothers. This is what is proper.”

Hearing the words of Bhamandal, Bharath became silent. Very soon, they could see the magnificent palaces, and sky-high temples of Kauthukmangal. The airship landed on the vast roof of the royal palace of king Dronamegh. Leaving Bhamandal and the others in the airship, Bharath went into the palace to meet King Dronamegh. He woke up King Dronamegh and informed him of the arrival of Bhamandal, Hanuman and Angadh. King Dronamegh at once went to the airship and took Bhamandal, Hanuman and Angadh into the palace, with due honour.

“Dear king! We cannot waste even a moment. Vishalya should at once be taken to Lanka because it is a question of saving the life of Lakshman, the mighty hero from death.”

“Bharath, I will gladly send Vishalya to Lanka. She too has already fallen in love with Lakshman. The enlightened Gurudev also once prophesied this event but Vishalya alone will not marry Lakshman. Lakshman has to accept the hands of her one thousand companions while marrying her. Are you agreeable to this condition?”

“Surely O king! As soon as the war is over Lakshman will marry Vishalya and her thousand companions. The marriage of Vishalya and Lakshman will take place in Lanka with all *eclat*.” Angadh gave this assurance to Dronamegh.

Then King Dronamegh sent for Vishalya. Bhamandal and the others were greatly impressed with Vishalya’s spiritual powers resulting from her spiritual austerities of her earlier life. King Dronamegh instructed Vishalya to proceed towards Lanka at once. Vishalya was greatly thrilled and delighted at the prospect of meeting Lakshman. She at once got ready and sat in the airship requesting her father to send her companions later.

Bhamandal expressed his deep gratitude, to King Dronamegh and sat in the airship. The airship flew towards Ayodhya. It halted for a short while there; and after Bharath alighted from it, it began speeding towards Lanka.



The third phase of the night had almost ended. Only three hours were left for the day-break.

The airship was speeding towards Lanka. Bhamandal took it higher and higher into the sky. He began to entertain a fear; "If Ravan comes to know of this, he may cause some impediment."

Naturally impediments are feared in respect of auspicious actions.

Vibhishan, Sugriv, Viradh, Jambhavan and the other mighty heroes and warriors were impatiently and eagerly looking for the arrival of those who had gone to fetch the miraculous water. Shri Ram experiencing conflicting feelings of hopes and fears said to Sugriv... "Have Bhamandal and the others returned?" Sugriv said in reply to this, "Not yet, but they will soon be here." He moved a few paces forward and looked in the direction of Ayodhya.

The fourth phase of the night began. Some minutes passed.

In the eastern horizon the darkness slightly brightened. Sugriv, Vibhishan and the others began to shudder with fear. Their hearts were filled with fears and doubts... "Has the sun risen?" Just then all their fears vanished. Suddenly fear gave place to delight. They saw the airship approaching them. Vibhishan gave out the first cry of jubilation. Sugriv ran to Shri Ram and said to him, in a rather loud voice.

"My lord! Vishalya has been brought here!"

Shri Ram stood up at once. The airship landed near Lakshman. At once Vishalya leaped out of the airship. She saw her beloved Lakshman lying unconscious on the ground. The sight broke her heart but, at once she offered a prayer to the *Panchaparameshtis* and sat near Lakshman. She touched with her hand Lakshman's chest which had been wounded. She closed her eyes and began the meditation.

Vibhishan, Sugriv, Bhamandal, Hanuman, Chandrarashmi, Nala, Neel, Angadh and others stood around them holding weapons in their hands.

Vishalya's touch had a miraculous effect.

At once, the power of the *Amoghavijaya* was shaken. The divine power left Lakshman's body. It was not a demon or a spirit but a divine power, a goddess, therefore she left Lakshman's body and rose into the skies and disappeared.

But as the goddess was flying into the sky, Hanuman leaped to the skies and caught her in his clutches. She began to struggle to get out of Hanuman's clutches. She humbly entreated him.

"Oh you mighty hero ! Kindly release me. I am not to blame for this. I am the sister of Goddess Prajnaptini. Lord Dhara-nendra placed me in Ravan's hands. Therefore, my duty is to carry out his commands. I am not at all at fault. I have not been able to withstand the efficacy of Vishalya's spiritual power which she attained by performing spiritual austerities in her earlier life. Therefore, I had to leave Lakshman and fly away. Now I entreat you to release me."

Hanuman graciously released her. The great power saluted him and disappeared.

Vishalya was thrilled and delighted at the very sight of Lakshman. After the great power left Lakshman, she began passing her hand on his body tenderly.

He was still lying unconscious. After having passed her hand over Lakshman's body for a while, Vishalya said to Bhamandal, "Bring some *Gorachan* a scented paste." At once, Bhamandal brought it. Vishalya mixed it with water in a gold vessel and smeared it to Lakshman's body. Gradually the wounds on his body healed and he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes. His pale face became bright again.

Bhamandal sent Angadh by the airship to Kautukmangal to bring Vishalya's companions, at once.

Shri Ram shed tears of joy. His eyes rained affection on Lakshman. Standing near Lakshman he kept looking at him with fixed eyes. He looked upon Vishalya with overflowing

affection. Sugriv and the other great heroes swayed with delight and elation.

Eastern horizon grew rosy.

Cool breezes began to blow as harbingers of the sun. Birds began to sing gleefully and to twitter in the skies. Just then Lakshman opened his eyes and saw Vishalya sitting beside him.

Vishalya was filled with joy and elation. She lowered her eyes with shyness. Her heart overflowed with love. Her white face became flushed and reddened.

Lakshman stretched his limbs and sat up. He looked round a little silently. Then he stood up. He embraced Shri Ram. Sugriv issued a cry of jubilation which reverberated in the skies. The Vanara armies issued cries of joy and jubilation. The whole atmosphere was filled with joy. The day dawned.

But Ravan did not come out of Lanka, on that morning; nor was there any sign of his coming out of Lanka. There was absolute silence in the battle-field.

Bhamandal humbly approached Shri Ram and said . . . .

“Oh you, ocean of compassion! King Dronamegh has bestowed a great benefit upon us. The noble lady, Vishalya has brought back to life not only Lakshman but all of us. She also bestowed a great benefit on Sita. Therefore, we deem it our duty to inform you of a condition put forth by Vishalya. Vishalya and her thousand companions had decided to marry Lakshman. In consequence, King Dronamegh told us that Lakshman should marry Vishalya and her companions and we promised him that he would fulfil his desire.” Shri Ram was delighted to hear this.

“I command Lakshman to marry Vishalya and her companions at once.”

Lakshman gave his silent consent to carry out his elder brother's command.

At once, the battle-field changed into a marriage-pavilion. The whole area was filled with joy and jubilation. Preparations for the marriage were in full swing. The musicians began to . . . play on musical instruments. The Vidyadhar kings made magnificent arrangements for the marriage. The marriage took place while the musicians were playing on musical instruments. While the priests were reciting the holy verses, Lakshman married princess Vishalya and her thousand companions.

The news of Lakshman's recovery spread like wildfire throughout Lanka. The attendant who possessed the *avalokini* power informed Sita of the development.

Sita was overwhelmed with delight. She was supremely happy.



**THE ROYAL COURT OF LANKA**

Ravan stopped the war on the fourth day and invited all his ministers for a consultation. Since he was very arrogant and obstinate, he never liked to hear anyone else being praised in his presence. For having given sensible advice to him, he once got ready to kill his younger brother Vibhishan who loved justice and righteousness. So Vibhishan left him for good. He knew very well what kind of counsel his ministers would give him but he had been facing reverses in the war and all his endeavours to achieve a victory were ending in a failure. He had suffered heavy losses and reverses. He had caused the death of lakhs of Rakshasa soldiers for the sake of Sita. Apart from this, he had suffered a heavy loss of chariots and weapons. The great Rakshasa heroes Indrajit, Meghavahan, Kumbhakarna and others were captives in the Vanara camp. Many of his sons had died, fighting. Even now, Sita shunned and despised him. She considered it a terrible sin even to look at his shadow Ravan knew all this but what could he do? He had no self-control. His infatuation for Sita had blinded him to reason. He was determined to attain Sita even if it meant the loss of his empire. He would not mind any loss but he was bent upon attaining Sita. He planned to carry out his evil desires on the strength of the counsel of his minister.

All the ministers arrived and occupied their seats in the royal court but on that day the magnificent golden palace of Lanka appeared to them to be bleak and blighted. It seemed to have been enveloped by hellish murkiness. The floor studded with gems appeared to be flooded with blood. Gloom and grief filled the faces of all the warriors, lords and attendants in the palace. There was despair in the face of everyone. The lamps

studded with gems were giving out dim light. All the ministers had arrived and all were looking at Ravan with impatience. A few minutes passed. There was perfect silence in the court. There was no noise anywhere. The atmosphere was filled with agitation, anxiety and fear. Just then they heard trumpets blown to announce the arrival of Ravan. The emperor of Lanka entered his court with all grandeur and pomp. The minister stood up and saluted him. Ravan slowly climbed the steps of his magnificent throne and sat on it. The throne far outshone the splendour of all the radiant things known to man. Ravan was silent for a while. He observed carefully the feelings expressed in the faces of his ministers and the ministers who possessed extraordinary intellectual brilliance and wisdom kept studying Ravan's face.

Ravan displayed all his wealth and splendour. But he seemed to be diffident and depressed. His face was covered with the dark clouds of anxiety and agitation as if the whole range of Himalayas was pressing his head down. His face looked pale and sunken with anxiety as if he feared some disgrace or defeat at the hands of his enemies. He appeared to be helpless and seemed to have sensed the displeasure of his ministers. He seemed to have lost his self-confidence and trust in his own abilities and appeared to be desiring others' support and help; yet he was making a pretence of being calm and undaunted. He seemed to be visualising the destruction that distortions could bring about. After being silent for a while he said aloud.

"Oh you devoted ministers of Lanka! Today I expect from you an intelligent and well-thought out counsel. I am confident that you will give me proper advice at this critical juncture!"

"Dear Lord! We are always at your service. We are prepared to render you devoted service. Our positions and possessions are but your benefactions."

The Chief minister said standing up and saluting him.

"I heartily compliment you for your wisdom and intelligence. Dear ministers! Our empire of Lanka owes all its prosperity and progress to your intelligence and wisdom. On

several occasions your counsel has saved Lanka from dreadful disasters and has helped it to attain progress and prosperity. Even in the midst of the dreadful darkness of despair your counsel has been a guiding light. In fact, you are the pillars of the empire of Lanka." Ravan paused for a while and then continued.

"You are all aware of what happened in the battle-field during the last three days. You are also aware of the losses and reverses we have suffered and the reverses we have caused our enemies. Well! Such events are common in wars. So, I am not worried about the losses we have suffered but I am experiencing inordinate distress because of the captivity of Kumbhakarna my dear brother who is now in our enemy's hands. The enemy bound him with *Nagapash* and carried him away captive to his camp. Ram has carried away my sons Indrajit and Meghavahan captives. You advise me regarding the way in which we can end their captivity. Yesterday when I tore off the chest of Lakshman with the divine weapon *Amoghavijaya* and threw him down, I was certain that Ram also would follow Lakshman to the abode of death, grief-stricken and I hoped that soon after his death, the Vanara armies and the Vidyadhar warriors would take to their heels and that I would return to Lanka with my brother and my sons and the other heroes of our army.

But Lakshman is alive and this is a great misfortune to the empire of Lanka and to the Danava dynasty. Lakshman has recovered from the effect of even such an extraordinary weapon as the *Amoghavijaya*. What shall we do now? How can we get Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Meghavahan released from captivity? My dear Ministers! In this critical moment, only you must show me the way and guide me."

The entire court was plunged in deep thought. All were pondering over the crisis that had arisen. Nobody could think of any way out. Just then, the Chief Minister began speaking with reverberating accents.

"Your highness! There is only one solution to this problem and that is to release Sita and restore her to Shri Ram. What

I mean is that if we should free Kumbhakarna and the other Danava heroes, we should first release Sita from our captivity. I think my suggestion does not accord with your desires. Yet I deem it my duty to give you the counsel that will save the empire of Lanka and the Rakshasa race from total destruction and ruin.

Oh you mightiest of heroes! We have lost everything. Those heroes that were killed on the battle-field cannot come back to life but we can at least save the lives of those who are alive. Such mighty heroes as Hasta, Prahastha and Mahodhar have embraced death on the battle-field. Many kings and princes have gone to the abode of death. The battle-field is covered with the dead bodies of countless warriors and the foul smell emanating from them has polluted the entire atmosphere around Lanka. Ah! I agree that when a necessity arises to safeguard truth and righteousness and to protect our culture, such things are inevitable but O you king of kings! Think a little and think about what we have done. Are you fighting for truth and righteousness? Is truth on our side? Have we done all this to safeguard our culture. No! Not at all. No such problem has arisen. We ourselves have to take the initiative to prevent this violence and bloodshed. We have to see that the sublime Rakshasa culture is not stained and the only way is to return Sita honourably to Shri Ram. This is my considered opinion. The other ministers are free to express their opinions”.

The aged Chief Minister was shaking with emotion. He was finding it difficult to remain standing. So, he completed his speech and sat down. Again, there was silence in the court, Ravan fell into deep thoughtfulness. His eyes were fixed on the ground. Breaking the silence he began addressing his ministers in a lofty and elevated voice.

“The suggestion given by the Chief Minister was also given by Vibhishan when Hanuman came to Lanka but this suggestion cannot be acted upon now. It is not possible to act upon this suggestion. Now, I need a suggestion that can be implemented. If I could send back Sita to Ram, where was the need for this war? Moreover, I would certainly act upon the Chief



Minister's suggestion if I have any doubt regarding my achieving victory in this war; but I am absolutely confident of attaining a victory. I do not care for anything. I am only worried about Kumbhakarna and the others who are in captivity. I welcome any suggestion that can guide me to release them."

"Dear lord! We cannot think of any way. Kumbhakarna and the others cannot be freed from the enemy's captivity until and unless Sita is released from captivity and returned to Shri Ram. Shri Ram and Lakshman are not fools to release the enemies they have captured. They too are princes of great intelligence and abilities. They are fighting for justice and righteousness." Ravan interrupted saying, "Is it right on the part of Ram to fight such a destructive war for the sake of a woman? Do you call it culture?"

The Chief Minister gave a firm reply in the same vein:

"Is it right on your part to fight such a destructive war for the sake of a woman who does not belong to you? Is it a sign of noble culture? O dear king! Do you realise what you are doing? You have completely failed to realise that Ram and Lakshman are fighting not for the sake of Sita but to safeguard the chastity of a helpless woman.

One of the greatest ideals of our culture is that the chastity of a woman should not be affected and you are slighting this lofty ideal. This war is taking place because of your unjust and unrighteous action of keeping Sita in captivity. According to the loftiest ethical principles, violence is inevitable to safeguard culture. But today you are completely ignoring all these lofty ethical principles and moral values and you are behaving unjustly. On account of your arrogance you are out to cause the destruction of the entire Rakshasa race."

As the Chief Minister was thus speaking, the entire court was spell-bound. All were excited by the speech. The Chief Minister's well-meant counsel made Ravan forget himself. Greatly agitated and irritated by the Chief Minister's words, Ravan said:

“But dear Chief Minister ! How can we give importance to the ideals of culture in politics ? Culture is made for man; but man is not made for culture. All is fair in love and war. I am enamoured of Sita. I value her more than my life. She is dearer to me than life ! Therefore, Ram has to give up his attachment for Sita. He must give her up. Instead of being his queen, she will be my....”

“Dear King ! Your words are totally improper. Absolutely wrong ! What is culture ? What is politics ? I have taught these things even to your ancestors. The political set-up that does not safeguard culture should be cast away. Similarly, culture which enables men to attain spiritual elevation and to lead a noble life should not be dependent on the political set-up. In other words, political power should be governed and guided by culture; not the other way about.

What right did you have to abduct Sita and to retain her in Lanka ? As the Chief Minister of the vast empire of Lanka and as the spokesman for the splendid Rakshasa culture, I assert and declare that you have bismirched the illustrious and sublime Rakshasa culture and tradition.”

Ravan's heart was lacerated by the words of the Chief Minister; but he said nothing. If he said anything improper in reply to the words of the Chief Minister, the citizens of Lanka would be angry with him; and there would be domestic dissensions leading to serious consequences. So, he thought it wise to restrain himself in that situation. After recovering his composure, he said;

“Dear Ministers ! I have thought of a plan. I will tell you what it is. You please think over it and see if it is suitable. I will send an intelligent and tactful messenger to Rama's camp. He will convey my message to him.”

“What is the message ? By whom are you sending it ?” Several voices said at once.

“Samant will convey my message to Ram.”

“All right !”

“I will send my message to Ram by him. He will convey to him our intention of using the four expedients... *Sama* amiability; *Dan* benevolence; *Bhed* discrimination and *Dand* punishment.”

“Will there be any mention of the possibility of releasing Sita?”

“No, that is not possible. I will never return Sita to Ram.”

“In that case, your embassy will bear no desirable fruit.”

“Let us see what will happen.”

And Ravan, at once, sent for Samant. He, at once came and saluted Ravan; and awaited his commands. Ravan sent a definite message by him to Shri Ram. After Samant went away, Ravan addressed his ministers; and said.

“We shall dismiss the court only after knowing what reply Samant brings.”

Samant speedily went towards Shri Ram's camp. Samant possessed an attractive and magnetic appearance and manners. On many former occasions, Samant had conveyed Ravan's messages to many kings of the *Aryavart*; and had brought back the desired replies using his inherent skill and tact. He possessed not only the power of speaking in a pleasant and agreeable manner but also patience, restraint and the power of sweet utterance. He had the power of understanding the proprieties of place, time and circumstances. But the mission he had to carry out on that day was surely difficult. He had to carry out the commands of Ravan however hard they were.

He had heard a lot about Shri Ram and Lakshman; and he had developed a deep attachment and veneration for them. He was supremely happy that at least under the pretext of conveying to them Ravan's message, he could see those great personalities. But of course, he was deeply worried because of the nature of the message he had to convey on that day.

He approached the main gate of Shri Ram's camp. He gave his signet-ring to the guard and informed him of his desire to

meet Shri Ram. Asking Samant to wait at the gate the guard went in, to convey the news to Shri Ram. The guard approached Shri Ram; bowed to him and gave him the signet-ring and informed him of the arrival of the messenger.

“Let him come in.”

The guard saluted Shri Ram and retreated.

“A messenger has come carrying Ravan’s message,” said Shri Ram looking towards Lakshman. His voice was serious.

Lakshman was silent.

Soon, Samant entered ushered in by the guard. Samant bowed respectfully to Shri Ram and said in a sweet voice.

“Ravan, the emperor of Rakshasas has sent a message to you, my Lord!”

“What is the message?”

Samant cleared his throat; and said employing formal and ceremonious language, in accents that sounded sweet and impressive.

“O you greatest of heroes! My lord, Ravan, the conqueror of the universe desires a cessation of war. If you agree to this proposal, we can save from death countless human beings and we can also avoid violence and bloodshed. But the emperor of Lanka desires that you should fulfil two conditions.”

“Dear brother! It is not merely a desire of the Emperor of Rakshasas. We shall call it a great desire; not a mere desire.” Shri Ram said smiling looking towards Sugriv.

“The Emperor of Rakshasas desires that at once Kumbhakarna, Meghavahan, Indrajit and others should be released from captivity.”

“And the second one?” said Sugriv with excitement and agitation.

“Yes. Yes. I am coming to that. His second condition is that Shri Ram should surrender Sita to him.”

The second condition mentioned by Samant infuriated Shri Ram. Lakshman's blood began to boil with anger. Sugriv made an angry movement towards Samant. Just then, Samant said again.

“In the place of Sita the emperor will surrender to Shri Ram half his empire and will also give him a gift of three thousand Vidyadhar damsels. Shri Ram! Try to be content with these.”

“Stop your senseless talk! Go and inform your Emperor that Ram will not be satisfied with half his empire and that he would be satisfied only with the whole of his kingdom which he will conquer after killing him. You also tell him that Ram does not desire three thousand Vidyadhar damsels and that he desires only Sita.”

“O you son of Dasharath! Kindly give up your obstinacy and accept the proposal of Ravan. This will be beneficial to all of you.”

“Tell your Emperor that Ram does not desire kingdom; nor does he desire a large harem of damsels. If that villain desires to see his brothers and sons alive, he must send back to me Sita with honour. No need of unnecessary words. What is the use of mere talking? When Ravan enters the battle-field again we will see who will win or who will lose and who will be totally destroyed.”

“O Ram! What wisdom is there in staking your life for the sake of a woman? Ah! Yes, once Lakshman survived the attack made by Ravan. He was almost dead but somehow he came back to life but that may not happen again. If again Ravan attacks him, he may die. How can you save your life and the lives of your warriors after Lakshman's death? Only Ravan is capable of destroying the whole universe; therefore, O you compassionate one! I think it proper that you should consider Ravan's proposal deeply and ponder over it seriously.”

At this juncture, Lakshman's anger flared up.

“O you wicked fellow ! Even now you have not been able to realise our abilities and the abilities of your armies. Have you not witnessed our tremendous abilities in the terrible war that took place during the last three days ? His brothers have been captured. Some of his sons have been killed in the war. Except those women in his harem, what other relatives remain with Ravan now ? Yet he has been boasting of his abilities. Fie upon him ! You too have committed an unpardonable blunder in bringing the message of such a mean fellow. Now, Ravan is alone and helpless like a withered tree. We will see how he will face us tomorrow. Everything will be clear tomorrow. Where is the need for a mirror to see what there is in one’s hand ? Get away ! At once go away from here. Go and tell your king to get ready for the war. My hands are itching to destroy him. Let him come to the battle-field if he is a real hero”.

When Samant was about to give a reply to Lakshman, Angadh dragged him to the gate of the camp and pushed him away.

Samant having failed thus in his mission returned to Lanka. He narrated in Ravan’s court all that took place in Shri Ram’s camp. Ravan heard his narration with increasing agitation. “What should be done next? What method should be adopted to achieve my objective ?” This became a serious problem to Ravan. He said to his ministers :

“Kindly let me know your opinion.” Helplessness, gloom and impatience were writ large on Ravan’s face. He had not experienced such distress and agitation at any time before. The ministers were mute with gloom.

“O you king of Rakshasas ! Please be patient. Instead of pursuing the path of perplexity and anxiety please pursue the path of serenity and felicity. O you compassionate lord ! Please do not forget the truth that the path of war and violence can never bring peace. It can bring only destruction and devastation. You are now the beloved king of Lanka and the guide to the Danava race. It is in your hands to shape their destiny. Whatever step you take it should not be a step towards violence

and bloodshed. Think calmly of what has happened. Kindly take such a step as would help us to maintain the splendour of the Rakshasa race. Take such a step as would bring felicity to all.

The only way to prevent the destruction of the Rakshasa race is to send back Sita to Ram. There is no other way. Therefore do not think of retaining Sita. You have already witnessed the dreadful consequences of your obstinacy to retain Sita. Now you understand the terrible calamities that will ensue if you remain obstinate. Whatever step we take we should think of the pros and cons of the step before we take it. You should not take a hasty or thoughtless decision. Please think of the benefits that will accrue from the restoration of Sita to Shri Ram. Even now Indrajit and Meghavahan are alive but they are in captivity. Many Rakshasa warriors and heroes are in captivity. They have not yet been killed. Please see how you can save their lives and how you can meet them again. We wonder why you are so bent upon reaping the destruction of Lanka and the Rakshasa race. Kindly send back Sita to Shri Ram and if you do so, the clouds of calamities that have enveloped Lanka will disappear.”

The wicked Ravan kept listening to the counsel of his Chief Minister who was old and sagacious but his evil destiny impelled him to pursue the path of destruction. Therefore the Chief Minister's words of wisdom produced no effect on Ravan. The advice of the ministers that he should send back Sita to Shri Ram, put rancours into his soul and made it bitter. He dismissed the court for the day. He went to his private chamber and began walking there to and fro, lost in deep thought. The Emperor of Lanka was speeding towards destruction.

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## LXXXII

### BAHURUPINIVIDYA

(THE POWER OF ASSUMING MANY FORMS)

“Shall I surrender Sita to Ram and get Kumbhakarna and the others released? Indrajit and Meghavahan are like my shoulders. Somehow or the other I must release them from captivity. I know Ram will not accept any proposal of peace which I can make. He desires only Sita, and I? I too have been doing all this only for the sake of Sita. Life without Sita has no attraction for me and to retain Sita and to attain her, war is the only way. Therefore, I should get ready for the war. In the Rakshasa army, there is no other hero of my level. Will the Rakshasa race be destroyed?”

Ravan kept thinking thus, lying on his bed. Sometimes, he walked to and fro and sometimes he lay on the bed restless and worried.

“Most of the warriors and heroes in Ram’s army are alive. Ram, Lakshman, Hanuman, Sugriv, Angadh, Chandrarashmi, Bhamandal, Prasannakirthi and all the other heroes are alive. Ah! They may be alive. Now they will not be able to escape death. I will surely kill them. Moreover, I am unable to understand how Lakshman can be alive even after being attacked by me with such a tremendous weapon as the *Amoghavijaya* but after the death of Ram and Lakshman, all the warriors of the Vanara army will run away from the battle-field and if they do not run away from the battle-field I will tear their bodies to pieces and throw them to kites and vultures and I have the greatest weapon the *Sudarshan Chakra* which I can use as the last resort to destroy anyone. It will surely cut off head of



Lakshman but, I should not fight now with the idea of using only that weapon. In such a situation as this the *Bhahurupini-vidya* (the power of assuming many forms) will be useful and appropriate but I do not possess that power. I should attain it. It is absolutely necessary that I should attain it. If I attain it, by virtue of that power, I can assume many forms and in the battle-field millions of Ravana's will appear. The enemy will see Ravana wherever he casts his eyes and will not be able to know which form is real Ravana and which is only an assumed form. If I use that power the enemies will be confounded and stupefied and then easily I can kill Lakshman."

Ravana felt elated at the very thought of the *Bhahurupini-vidya*. He left his chamber and went to Mandodari's Chamber. Now, there was only Mandodari to share his joys and sorrows. But, Mandodari was in a state of deep anguish and grief, on account of the death or captivity of the princes and countless mighty Rakshasa heroes. Moreover, after hearing that Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Meghavahan had been captured she gave up food. Actually, Mandodari was a woman of an extraordinary character. If on one hand she loved chastity and purity, on the other hand, she went to the extent of persuading Sita to accept Ravana's love. She had never persuaded Ravana to send back Sita to Shri Ram. On the contrary, deeming Sita her husband's love, she tried her best to bring her into Ravana's harem. Moreover, she was also ready to make Sita the Queen-consort of Ravana. She had different views regarding herself and her husband.

Mandodari enthroned Ravana in her heart and never gave room to anyone else there. She never desired the company of anyone else except that of Ravana. She had surrendered herself heart and soul to Ravana. Her self-surrender to Ravana was absolute. She was absolutely contented with Ravana but Ravana was not contented with only Mandodari. He had in his harem thousands of beautiful queens and mistresses. Even then he was not satisfied. He brought Sita by force but Mandodari did not complain against his action; nor was she inwardly agitated over his action. It is difficult to estimate her greatness. Ravana knew Mandodari through and through. He was absolutely inti-

mate with her. Therefore, he again and again went to her; discussed all his problems with her and liked to be consoled by her in his distress. He used to overwhelm her with love and affection. On that day also he went to Mandodari seeking her advice and consolation but Mandodari was in great distress. She was like a withered leaf. She seemed to be a mere skeleton without life or consciousness. Absentmindedly she received Ravan but she did not look towards him. She was experiencing a tremendous anguish. Ravan knew the depth of her agitation, worry, anguish and gloom. He was not so stupid as not to be able to realize the feelings of a mother who has lost her son.

“Manda...” Ravan said affectionately to attract Mandodari’s attention. Mandodari looked towards Ravan.

“Dear Mandodari! I know how much you are grieved by what has happened. I can understand the grief of a mother’s heart. I am moving heaven and earth to get Indrajit and Meghavahan released.”

Ravan sat near Mandodari and tried to console her in her distress. But his words had no effect on Mandodari. She kept looking at her husband with fixed eyes.

“Dear Mandodari! I desire to attain the divine power called the *Bahurupini*, the power of assuming many identical forms. As soon as I attain that power, I will kill Lakshman and at once I will release from the enemy’s clutches my brothers, sons and friends; and then of course, Sita... will be mine.”

Ravan tried to console Mandodari but she was disconsolate and depressed. Her anguish showed that she had visualised the destruction of Lanka, of the Emperor of Lanka and of the Rakshasa race.

“I will start meditation in our temple in order to attain that power. You will have to bear the responsibility of assisting me in this endeavour; will you?”

“As commanded by you! My lord!”

“Remember that I will have to carry out the meditation secretly. Our enemies should not come to know of it. Therefore you will have to be extremely cautious.”

“I will act according to your wishes.” After that Mandodari ate food with Ravan. The emperor of Lanka gave her all the necessary instructions. Ravan took a bath; put on holy garments; and proceeded towards the temple of Shantinath in his palace. Mandodari also followed her husband to the temple, carrying the things necessary for worshipping the Lord.

Ravan felt immensely delighted when he worshipped the Lord. His face became radiant with devotion. He worshipped Lord Shantinath with sandal paste rendered fragrant by saffron and musk and with fresh and fragrant flowers. After having completed the worship with substances, he offered devotional worship to the Lord. Then he sat upon a dignified seat in the lotus-posture; closed his eyes and concentrating his mind totally on Lord Shantinath, he became deeply absorbed in meditation.

Ravan became deeply immersed in his meditation. Ravan rose to the level of a supreme Yogi. Devotion filled him to the brims of his being. He began to glorify the Lord in a soft and tender voice

Victory to thee, Oh Lord Shantinath !  
 I salute thy feet and pursue thy path.  
 Victory to thee, thou Lord of Light !  
 Thy very sight fills all with delight;  
 Fills all with a blissful light  
 Thou steerest us though from afar  
 Across this ocean of samsar.  
 The very utterance of thy holy name  
 Brings us all fulfilments;  
 Ends all our attachments.  
 May the recitation of thy name  
 Reverberate in the highest skies !  
 Those who perform the eight kinds of worship to you,  
 Will attain all their heartfelt aspirations.  
 Blessed are the eyes that see thee every day !  
 Blessed is the soul that is brightened

By thy sublime grace.  
By touching your holy feet, men can attain purity.  
By seeing your holy face. men can attain felicity.  
By contemplating on thee. men can attain serenity;  
Just as iron becomes transmuted into gold  
By the touch of the philosopher's stone.  
Oh Lord ! I salute thy feet always.  
May I wear the dust of your feet on my forehead  
And  
May the darkness of my sorrow disappear.  
May those that worship thee attain all princely splendours.  
O thou all-knowing and all-seeing Lord !  
I implore thee only to give me the heart to worship thee in  
every life of mine.  
I implore thee only to give me the strength to lead the life divine.

After having completed his devotional worship, the Emperor of Lanka took up the holy garland of beads and began carrying out the austerity to attain the divine power. Mandodari said to the commander Yamadand who was standing at the gate of the temple;

“Yamadand ! Let our officers proclaim throughout Lanka with drum-beats that for eight days from today our citizens must live in absolute conformity to the principles of Dharma. During this period, no one should commit violence or theft. All people should refrain from their routine-activities like business. No one should entertain sensual desires during this period. Those who break this imperial command should be seriously punished. They should be given capital punishment.”

Yamadand carried out the command of the queen. In accordance with her command, he got her order proclaimed everywhere in Lanka. The citizens of Lanka were amazed to hear this unexpected proclamation. The citizens who were agitated by fear of destruction, anxiety and anguish were overwhelmed with delight when they heard this proclamation. A ray of hope that they will be saved from total destruction flashed in their hearts naturally. All became absorbed in spiritual activities. Grand ceremonies were organised in the Jin temples.

People began to throng the *upashrayas* to hear discourses and to attain enlightenment. Devotional activities were organised in temples. Gifts were given generously to the poor and the destitute. A revolutionary change appeared in the atmosphere of Lanka.

When Shri Ram's spies heard the proclamation, they were amazed and shocked. They had not even dreamt of such a possibility. What could be the reason for such a proclamation at the time of war? Was Ravan, fearing defeat, seeking the refuge of dharma? Or has any extraordinary event occurred? They thought of various possibilities. They at once began searching for the secret cause for this proclamation and they also discovered the cause. At once they hurried back to their camp. They conveyed to Sugriv whatever information they had gathered. Now it was Sugriv's turn to be amazed and shocked. He at once rushed to Shri Ram's tent. Shri Ram and Lakshman were discussing their future plans with Vibhishan, Bhamandal, Angadh, Viradh and Prasannakirthi. Shri Ram welcomed Sugriv; offered him a seat by his side and said with eagerness :

“Dear king of Vanaras! What's the matter? What may be the purpose of your hurried visit?”

“Dear lord! Have you heard about the proclamation made in Lanka?”

“No! In Lanka...? What kind of proclamation has been made?”

“O you compassionate one! In Lanka a proclamation is being made with drum-beats that for eight days from today all should live according to the principles of dharma and that they should discard such evils as violence and that they should not do any work during these eight days. Moreover, it is announced that anyone who breaks this royal command will be given capital punishment.”

“What may be the purpose behind this proclamation?”

“It is the purpose that shocks and amazes us. The purpose is to keep the common people in a mood of elation. Meanwhile,

Ravan will carry out some austerities to attain the “Bahurupini” power.

“Is the king of Lanka trying to attain powers ?”

“Yes. my Lord !”

Shri Ram at once became silent and fell into deep thought. After a short pause, he said :

“In that case for the next eight days there will be no war.”

“And then after eight days, there will be a terrible war ! In case the king of Lanka attains the *Bahurupini* power, our success in the war will be doubtful.”

“What do you suggest ?”

“Even before he attains the *Bahurupini* power, we should do something to prevent him from attaining it.” Sugriv suggested a way out. Shri Ram smiled and said :

“O you king of Vanaras ! Is it proper to prevent Ravan from attaining powers when he is engaged in spiritual austerities and how can we prevent him from attaining those powers ? Ravan is incomparable in carrying out his determination and I do not at all like to do such a base thing as interfering with his spiritual austerities. Please do not worry. No evil can befall us. He may attain the *Bahurupini* power or any other power but it is certain that when he comes back to the battle-field he can never return alive. His death is certain. Even Destiny cannot prevent it.”

Sugriv was silent.

But Angadh who was in the counsel chamber could not keep quiet. He went out of the chamber. He felt that Sugriv’s suggestion was sensible and wise and that it deserved serious consideration but from the moral point of view, Shri Ram’s opinion appeared to be right. Yet Ravan was wicked and deceptive and he felt that with such a deceptive and wicked person, morality would not be effective or proper; so, he took with him

twenty five chosen soldiers and disappeared into the dark night. Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sugriv never thought that Angadh would thus make bold to enter Lanka.

From his spies, Angadh had found out that there were no guards near the temple in which Ravan was carrying out his austerities. So, he, with his soldiers went flying through the sky and arrived at the premises of the temple. When he entered the temple he saw Ravan seated in the lotus-posture deeply immersed in meditation. He was absorbed in meditation seated on a dignified seat studded with gems, in order to attain his objective. At once, Angadh remembered what Sugriv had said. He had said that if Ravan was not prevented from attaining the power called *Bahurupini*, their success would be doubtful. He shook with a nameless fear and made a strong determination to disturb Ravan and to prevent him from attaining the power. He thought that if he succeeded in doing so, there would be no fear at all.

In consequence, Angadh and his soldiers began to adopt several methods to disturb Ravan's meditation but their actions had no effect on Ravan who was in deep meditation. His meditation was not disturbed; on the contrary, it became deeper and deeper.

Ravan's meditation continued. Every night Angadh and his followers began to disturb Ravan but their efforts were in vain. In consequence, on the night of the seventh day, Angadh adopted a dangerous method. He challenged Ravan to a fight and said, "O Ravan! Have you become a coward? Since now no power in this universe can save you from the dreadful arrows of Shri Ram and Lakshman, have you taken recourse to this hypocrisy? O you fool! Remember that you abducted Sita in the absence of Shri Ram. Are you not ashamed of that cowardly act? Will it not be improper if I in your very presence abduct your wife Mandodari?" Having said this, Angadh who was intensely agitated and excited held the hair of Mandodari who was weeping aloud and began dragging her away holding her hair. Mandodari was stupefied by this unexpected calamity. She was stunned. The palace of Lanka was always guarded by countless

warriors and from such a place, Angadh was dragging Mandodari holding her hair. How fool-hardy Angadh was!

Angadh entered the temple; dragged Mandodari by the hair in the very presence of Ravan who was in meditation and then he said to Ravan :

“Look here ! I am abducting your wife in your very presence. Can anyone face me now ?”

Even then, Ravan sat mute and silent lost in meditation with a serene face, reciting the mantra as if nothing had happened. Ravan possessed an unexampled self-restraint and self-control.

Immensely pleased with Ravan's spiritual strength and his tremendous concentration and meditation, the goddess of *Bahurupini* power appeared in the sky and the entire sky became filled with a divine splendour. The skies reverberated with the auspicious sounds of musical instruments. It was as if a new kind of morning had dawned. The voice of the goddess was heard in the skies : “Ravan! your endeavours have attained fruit. I am immensely pleased with your spiritual strength. Tell me what you desire. If you desire it I will surrender the whole world at your feet. When that is so, what can Ram and Lakshman do to you ?”

“O you mighty goddess! You are indeed capable of all things. I am fully aware of your capabilities but for the time being, I do not need anything but whenever I pray to you you must appear before me. No, you may return to your abode. I am grateful to you for your benevolence”, said Ravan in a humble manner. The goddess disappeared at once. Angadh and his soldiers ran towards their camp. When Ravan came out of the temple he saw Mandodari lying on the floor in the corridor. Infuriated by the sight, he roared out !

“Dear Mandodari ! Which fellow had the courage to insult you thus ?” Mandodari narrated to Ravan all that Angadh had done; his arriving at the temple; the way in which he tried to disturb Ravan and the way in which he had insulted her. Ravan



on hearing all this forgot himself in anger. He roared like a lion; took a terrible vow to take revenge against Angadh.

Mandodari said in a serene voice; "Dear Lord! You have attained the divine power you desired. This is indeed a matter of great joy to us. Now all your aspirations have been fulfilled. The darkness of calamities that had enveloped us has disappeared. Soon, the day of felicity, prosperity and victory will dawn in our lives. You need not worry about anything. Take a bath; have your food and take rest."

Ravan entered the palace accompanied by Mandodari. He took a bath. Mandodari got excellent food prepared. Both had their food. While eating food Ravan said with a feeling of excitement;

"Dear Mandodari! Angadh insulted you, dragging you by the hair. Well, I will take a terrible revenge against him. I will destroy his lords, Ram and Lakshman and then I will drag Sita thus into our harem. I will force her to accept my advances and I will take an adequate revenge for the terrible insult you have suffered." Mandodari heard all this in silence. Ravan went straight to the *Devaraman* garden. Sita was sitting under the Ashoka tree in grief and anguish. She knew that the war had been stopped and that there had been no fighting during the previous eight days. She had also heard that Ravan had attained some extraordinary powers, but she had no exact information about it. The same question repeatedly arose in her mind causing deep agitation to her. "When shall I get freedom? When will the dark night of calamities disappear and the day of freedom and felicity dawn in my life?" Though she was deeply immersed in her distress, she noticed the arrival of Ravan. The attendants began bustling about briskly.

"Sita!" at once Ravan's powerful and arrogant voice fell upon her ears and she became stupefied. "To-day, I have come to make the final entreaty to you. Till now I have adopted all methods to persuade you to accept my love. I have used entreaties, appeals and arguments. I have left no stone unturned. I am like a worm wriggling in the dust of your feet. I have

made thousands of polite entreaties to you but you have not cared for my entreaties. You have always been obstinate and unyielding but this time you cannot refuse my entreaties. Tomorrow, I will fight my final war against Ram and Lakshman. A terrible war will take place and in it I will surely cut off the head of Lakshman with my *Sudharshan chakra*. Ram will also die of separation from Lakshman. Then, I will come straight here from the battle-field and will compel you to accept my advances. At that time, if you yield to me voluntarily, there will be no trouble but if you do not yield to me I will break my vow and will force you to surrender yourself to me. I do not care for the sin that I will be committing in acting thus. I will break my vow and will force you to yield to me.”

Hearing Ravan’s venomous words, Sita swooned and fell on the ground. The attendants took her up and laid her on her bed. No one tried to console her. Flames of anger kept flashing from Ravan’s eyes.

It was a mockery of fate that the queen of Ayodhya, the wife of Shri Ram and the daughter of the enlightened king Janaka, should thus be lying unconscious without anyone to attend upon her. Of course, there were the attendants engaged by Ravan but they stood helpless and stupefied.

The cool breezes that were playing about in the sky and the cool drops of dew that fell from the wings of birds enabled Sita to recover her consciousness. A new consciousness seemed to flow through her veins. She sat up and began lamenting over her misfortune.

But soon, she thundered with all her anger :

“O you meanest of mortals ! Listen. If Ram and Lakshman are killed in the war, I will fast unto death but remember as long as there is life in my body I will not allow you touch me. I do not care if I lose my life but I will not allow you to touch me. You may claw my dead body like a vulture afterwards.” Ravan forgot himself in his anger. “Such extraordinary attachment for Ram... ! Such love for him... ! Actually Sita has a boundless attachment for Ram. She can never love me. Really,

I have committed a great blunder. Being enthralled by my infatuation for her I have involved Lanka in a disastrous war. I scoffed at Vibhishan's counsel. I insulted him greatly. I have brought a reproach on the Rakshasa dynasty by acting thoughtlessly and by falling a prey to my infatuation. Oh! What I have done is improper but what is the use of regrets now? If I surrender Sita now to Ram that will be a great disgrace to me. The world will say, "Fearing Shri Ram's heroism, daunted by his radiance and dreading his vast army, Ravan has surrendered Sita to Shri Ram." Of course, I do not care for what people may say but I am not merely a king; I am an Emperor. It is absolutely improper for a king to be disgraced thus. Therefore I will manage the situation in such a way that Ram and Lakshman will enter Lanka. As soon as they enter, I will surrender Sita to them. Of course, this is the best thing to do now and the only way to regain the honour and prestige, I have lost so far. This is the only golden opportunity to me. There is no other way."

This was the first time that Ravan entertained the thought of sending back Sita to Shri Ram. His infatuation for Sita had already disappeared. At once, he returned from the *Devaraman* garden. He gave orders to his commanders to make preparations for the war and then proceeded to Mandodari's chamber.

Ravan revealed to Mandodari his innate thoughts and feelings. He discarded all his infatuation for Sita. Mandodari was delighted to hear this. Her love and adoration for Ravan surged out in waves. Ravan and Mandodari spent the night in joy and elation.

## LXXXIII

### THE SLAYING OF RAVAN

Ravan woke up early in the morning and came out of his sleeping chamber. He stood at the window of his magnificent palace. For a few moments, he kept watching Lanka which was vast, prosperous, splendid and the very embodiment of power and pomp. The topless towers, the skyhigh buildings, the magnificent mansions, the glorious gardens and the amusement houses which even the god of love would envy and the sublime temples of Lanka stood before him. All these things had been created by him. He had built them using all his intelligence, skill and wealth. Ravan was lost in watching the magnificent things he had created but he never thought that that was the last time that he would be watching the city of Lanka thus. The idea that he might be defeated and killed never entered his thoughts. He had lost all fear of defeat and death because he had attained one thousand supernatural powers and now he had attained the *Bahurupini* power also. Above all, he possessed the *Sudarshan chakra*, the supreme weapon of a Prativasudev. Until that day, he had been confident of killing Ram and Lakshman and that was his only objective in the war but he had discarded that plan also after that encounter with Sita in the Devaraman Garden. Now, his plan was to defeat Ram and Lakshman, to get them into Lanka and to return Sita to Shri Ram. This was his present plan. He had lost all infatuation for Sita because she was unyielding.

After the routine activities of the day, he began making grand preparations for the war. Soldiers, elephants, horses and chariots had already occupied their appointed positions in the battle-field. On that day, Ravan was staking all the powers of his empire. That day's war was to be final and decisive.

Ravan got ready to set off to the battle-field accompanied by countless mighty heroes. Mandodari decked his forehead with the mark of victory. She performed *Aarthi* to him. Just then, the gold cup containing *kumkum* fell off her gold plate but Ravan did not care for it. In fact, he did not pay any attention to it. He ascended his chariot and ordered his charioteer to drive him to the battle-field. Just then the court-priest said :

“Dear Emperor ! Do not be in a hurry. There have been no auspicious omens. On the contrary, we have witnessed only inauspicious omens.”

“Revered Sir ! You know I am Ravan. I do not care for omens. The valiant never fear bad omens. Their outstanding heroism itself is a good omen. Charioteer ! Drive on !”

“No, dear Lord ! This war will not bring any benefit to the Rakshasa dynasty. It will not bring any benefit to Lanka and its royal family. Please pause a little. The cries and lamentations of women are in the air. It is not at all proper to proceed to the battle-field at such a time as this.”

“I do not care for omens. Charioteer ! Drive on !”

Ravan thundered out. The Charioteer drove the chariot. The Court-priest looked gloomily towards Mandodari and heaved a deep sigh. Mandodari shook with a mortal dread. Her heart began to palpitate. Her right eye-lid shook. She was filled with horror and dread.

“Revered Queen ! What is the use of standing mute and motionless ? Try to console yourself. Try to give your agitation and anger and forget yourself in spiritual austerities. Destiny makes men blind to the future. All this is the mockery of destiny. Today’s war will not bring us joy but what can we do ? We are after all clay-dolls, dancing to the tunes of karmas on the stage of life ? Revered Queen ! Go to your chamber and engage yourself in auspicious contemplations so that it may bring some felicity to the Emperor.”

Mandodari returned to her palace accompanied by the other Queens of Ravan. She took a bath and then went into the temple of Lord Shantinath to pray.

The day was about to break.

The armies on both sides were engaged in assuming their appointed positions. The Raksahsa armies were elated when Ravan entered the battle-field. The cries of victory issued by them reverberated in the skies. A fresh enthusiasm and confidence appeared in them. The whole universe shook with the cries and the counter-cries of the armies.

The soldiers of Shri Ram's army were in a mood of fresh elation and enthusiasm. Lakshman stood in front of his armies burning with anger. Shri Ram stood beside him holding in his hand *the plough*, a weapon of extraordinary efficacy. Hanuman, Bhamandal and Angadh were supervising the movements of the army. At the rear, Sugriv, Nal and Prasannakirthi stood with their armies. Vibhishan stood on one side of Lakshman and was giving directions to the armies. All were waiting for the day-break. Just then, the eastern horizon grew red. Birds began to twitter in the skies. The stir of life appeared everywhere.

Soon, the sun-god of the million radiant rays emerged from the east seated in his splendid chariot drawn by seven heavenly horses.

The day dawned.

A terrible war broke out between the two armies. Lakshman began the war by sending heavy showers of arrows against Ravan. But Lakshman's arrows flew swishing by Ravan's ears. Ravan was greatly amazed at Lakshman's extraordinary military skill and heroism and he began to fight against Lakshman.

The supreme commander Yamadand using all his powers was trying to confound the enemy armies. He was absorbed in fighting against Sugriv, Nal, Neel and Prasannakirthi. At once, he defeated Nal and Neel and was endeavouring to defeat Prasannakirthi. Sugriv gave a sign to Prasannakirthi. At once,

Prasannakirthi took up Nai and Neel and proceeded towards the camp.

Sugriv challenged Yamadand to fight with him and there took place a terrible fight between them. Sometimes, Yamadand's extraordinary military skill and abilities reminded him of Indrajit and sometimes it reminded him of Kumbhakarna's abilities. For a moment, Sugriv felt confounded and shaken. He made a decision and according to it, stopping that kind of fight against Yamadand, he began to fight against him using his mace and killed him. In the centre of the battle-field, Lakshman and Ravan were engaged in a terrible fight. Neither was inferior to the other. All the armies kept watching the fight standing mute and motionless like pictures. It seemed that the day's defeat or victory lay in the hands of Lakshman and Ravan. When Ravan found that Lakshman's attacks were severe he decided to use the *Bahurupini* power and he at once recited the relevant *mantra*. In consequence, millions of Ravans appeared all over the battle-field. Seeing everywhere rising floods of Ravans assuming terrible and dreadful shapes, Lakshman felt greatly worried. Ravan began to fight with his countless forms. It was impossible for Lakshman to identify the real Ravan among those rising millions. Therefore he shot arrows of supernatural efficacy in all directions and destroyed many forms of Ravan. Lakshman began to display his extraordinary courage and heroism. He became absorbed in fighting against the millions of Ravans while each arrow released by him destroyed one Ravan.

Ravan watched with amazement Lakshman's dance of destruction. In fact, he was stupefied by Lakshman's heroism. He had never dreamt that Lakshman would fight thus. When he found that the *Bahurupinividya* was ineffective against Lakshman, he ultimately decided to use his *Sudarshanchakra* (the divine wheel). It was a supremely radiant wheel.

It was the only weapon that could surely destroy the enemy.

Ravan had not used that weapon until that day and in fact there was no occasion to use it earlier. But on that day all his

supernatural powers and militaric abilities totally failed against Lakshman. When all his powers thus failed, he at once thought of the *Sudarshanchakra*; and recited the relevant *mantra*. At once, the *Chakra* with a million splendours appeared in Ravan's right hand. Ravan released the *Chakra* directing it at Lakshman. The wheel went through the sky sending out rays of dazzling splendour.

But Ravan's hopes were shattered. The *wheel* approached Lakshman. performed circumambulations around him; and placed itself in Lakshman's right hand. It did no harm to Lakshman.

Ravan's radiant face lost its splendour and became bleak and blighted.

He began to think.

"At last, the prediction made once by a Muni has come true. The words of Vibhishan and others have come true. Oh! How cruel Destiny is!"

As Ravan was thus caught in the whirlpool of anguish and distress, Vibhishan addressed him and said. "Dear brother! I again appeal to you. I again entreat you to give up your arrogance and obstinacy. I appeal to you to descend from the elephant of egoism and to think calmly about the situation. Even now it is not too late to mend matters. If you desire to escape death, at once send back Sita honourably to Shri Ram. Discard your obstinacy. Still there is time. Otherwise, total destruction is certain."

On hearing the words of Vibhishan, Ravan exploded like a volcano. "O you treacherous fellow! Do you think that I am a coward like you? Do you think that I will betray my race and empire and become a slave at the feet of the enemy like you? Even now Ravan, the emperor of Lanka is alive and is in full possession of tremendous powers. I can destroy the enemies along with the *Chakra* with one deadly stroke of my fist."



Even before Ravan could say anything more Lakshman sent the *Sudarshanchakra* directing it towards Ravan. It went speeding through the sky like a flash of lightning with a blinding radiance and tore off the armoured chest of Ravan and the supreme hero of the Rakshasa dynasty, the greatest militaric genius of the Rakshasa line collapsed to the ground like an uprooted tree.

It was the eleventh day (*Ekadashi*) of the bleak fortnight (*Krishnapaksha*) of Vaishak.

The sun-god disappeared behind the western mountains.

Ravan, the heroic Rakshasa emperor was slain and his soul went to the fourth hell.

Countless gods and goddesses gathered in the sky in elation and jubilation. They showered divine flowers over Lakshman. Their cries of victory reverberated through the three skies. The armies of Shri Ram swayed in elation. All the Vanara warriors began dancing in elation and their cries of victory reverberated in the skies.

The silence of the burial ground pervaded the Rakshasa armies. Everywhere there arose floods of sorrow and stupefaction. A tremendous commotion arose in Lanka. The Rakshasa warriors stood petrified with stupefaction. The tears flowed from their eyes like floods.

At this point, Vibhishan stood on a magnificent gold chariot and said addressing the Rakshasa armies in an elevated and dignified voice, "O you mighty heroes and warriors of Lanka ! Discard your worries and fears. Seek the refuge of Shri Ram and Lakshman. Now, Shri Ram is our lord and refuge. Therefore, seek his refuge and obtain his compassion and grace."

And the millions of Rakshasa warriors proceeded towards Shri Ram and Lakshman; approached them, bowed to them in veneration and surrendered their weapons at their feet. Then, Lakshman moved a few paces forward and said in a lofty voice. "Dear heroes ! The war has come to an end. You fought for

your lord with indisputable ability and loyalty. Your loyalty and dedication are indeed commendable. Shri Ram and I are not the enemies of Lanka but only friends. We are your well-wishers. We wish for your prosperity and felicity.”

The cries of elation and jubilation issued by the Rakshasa warriors reverberated in the skies.

Vibhishan was looking at Ravan's dead body with fixed eyes. With great difficulty he could restrain his tears only for a few moments and then his eyes welled up with tears and he was overwhelmed with grief on account of the death of his dear brother. At once, he leaped down from his chariot and ran to the place where Ravan's dead body lay. He began to lament loudly, “O dear brother! Dear Ravan!” He wept like a child sitting on the ground in soul-stirring anguish.

The news of Ravan's death spread like wildfire in Lanka. All were stupefied to hear this. The queens in the harem were thunder-struck by the news. They began to lament loudly. Queen Mandodari and the other queens rushed out of the harem and ran wailing to the battle-field. Mandodari swooned when she saw the dead body of Ravan covered with blood. She fell upon Ravan's dead body. The other queens and attendants collapsed to the ground unconscious shocked and grieved by the sight. The citizens of Lanka began to weep like orphaned children on hearing the news of Ravan's death. They came out like clouds of locusts to pay their last respects to their mighty emperor. The battle-field which was dreadful sometime ago was now filled with heart-rending lamentations. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Sugriv, Bhamandal, Hanuman, Nal, Neel, Angadh and thousands of other warriors of Shri Ram's army stood in deep grief watching the heart-rending spectacle. They remained silent with overflowing sympathy for Vibhishan, Mandodari and others who were steeped in terrible grief.

Vibhishan's continuous sobbings filled the atmosphere with grief. All of a sudden, he took out his dagger and tried to stab himself. As soon as he lifted his hand, Shri Ram rushed forward and seized the dagger from his hand. He embraced Vibhishan and tried to console him.

“Dear Vibhishan ! Do not forget that this is the great hero. Ravan the Emperor of Rakshasas whose fame as a mighty hero has spread even to the heavenly world. He has attained a heroic death in carrying out his duty as an Emperor with dedication. Therefore, he deserves the highest honour and fame. His military genius; his love for his subjects; his political wisdom and his incomparable heroism will be a source of inspiration to all future generations. And his name will be remembered forever in this world. Therefore, do not stain his radiant honour by mourning his death thus. At once, carry out his obsequies in accordance with your tradition and royal prestige. Let all pay tributes to him. That is our duty. We should all pay tributes to him and desire peace for his soul.”

And then turning towards Sugriv, Shri Ram said :

“Dear Sugriv ! Please go at once and release from captivity. Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, Meghavahan and others and bring them here with honour.”

“As commanded by my lord !” and Sugriv proceeded towards the tents where Indrajit and others were held captive.

The ministers of Lanka made the necessary arrangements for Ravan's obsequies. A funeral pyre of extraordinary sandalwood was prepared. Many fragrant substances like camphor and musk were brought.

Kumbhakarna ran towards Ravan's dead body lamenting loudly. Indrajit and Meghavahan fell at the feet of Ravan and began weeping like helpless children. Shri Ram said to Kumbhakarna consoling him :

“O you hero ! Let there be no lamentations when a mighty hero has attained a heroic death. Please proceed to carry out the obsequies.”

Shri Ram embraced Indrajit and Meghavahan and bathed them with tears of compassion.

“Dear children ! I can understand your grief but please stop your lamentations. Ravan, the Rakshasa emperor by his

invincible might brought heaven to earth. Today leaving that heaven and that splendour here in this world, he has gone to the other world. Now this Lanka which is prosperous and splendid is yours. You will be the successors to the throne of Lanka. Try to attain the great abilities which your father possessed. Endeavour to keep up the lofty traditions of Ravan. Now try to have patience and carry out your duties. Bhagwan Rishabhdev will always bless you with peace, prosperity and felicity.”

Shri Ram wiped the tears of Indrajit and Meghavahan. He tried to console and comfort them in their bereavement. In a short time, the funeral pyre of sandal wood was ready. The body of Ravan was washed with fragrant water. Excellent garments were used to cover it. It was decorated with various kinds of flowers; and was placed on the funeral pyre. The Court-priest began to recite the *Mantras*. An ocean of sorrow rolled over the area overwhelming all. Indrajit performed three circumambulations around the pyre; and set fire to the pyre. Within a few moments, the mortal remains of Ravan were consumed by the flaming pyre.

Mandodari loudly lamented and fell on the ground unconscious. Heart-rending lamentations arose on all sides. Tears flooded from the eyes of thousands of soldiers, citizens, relatives and friends. All were steeped in an ocean of grief, gloom and anguish.

The flames of the pyre shot to the skies. The body of Ravan who had established his supremacy over the whole world by virtue of his abilities and supernatural powers; who had spread the splendour of the fame of the Rakshasa dynasty throughout the universe; and who was the greatest man of the age, was consumed by the flames.

Shri Ram proceeded to the *Padmasarovar* with all his friends and relatives to take a bath. He shed tears and paid his last respects to Ravan, the mighty emperor of Lanka. Kumbhakarna, Vibhishan, Indrajit, Meghavahan, Mandodari and others also bathed in the lake and offered their last respects to Ravan, following Shri Ram; and then all gathered before Shri Ram.

Addressing the grief-stricken Royal family of Lanka Shri Ram said :

“Dear friends ! Stop grieving. Give up all your agitations and anxieties. Resume your rule over Lanka; and secure prosperity, peace and felicity for the people. We do not want your empire or wealth. Our only auspicious aspiration is your progress, and felicity.”

Kumbhakarna and the others shed tears on hearing his compassionate and auspicious words. The members of the Royal family of Lanka and the ministers were amazed and comforted by the elevating words of Shri Ram. No one had dreamt of this possibility. Therefore, all were greatly moved by the words of Shri Ram. There was silence for a long time. There was absolute silence everywhere. Then, Indrajit said breaking the silence :

“O you supreme of heroes ! Now, we do not want either our vast empire or our extraordinary wealth and splendour. We are not interested in empire, power or splendour or sensual enjoyments. We are indeed sick of these things. The death of our revered father and the fall of Lanka are enough to give us the necessary enlightenment. We have lost all attachment for these things. The events that occurred have bestowed upon us the right vision. Until now, we were mistaking destruction for progress. We mistook transitory things for imperishable things. We mistook traitors for loyal friends. Now, we have realised all our blunders. We have realised that all our former opinions are wrong and untrue. Therefore, O you greatest of men ! Now we do not want to spend the remainder of our lives depending on these transitory and destructive worldly joys and pleasures. We have decided to pursue the path of salvation which will bring us the highest kind of felicity. We will receive initiation into the Samyamdharm and we will endeavour to destroy our karmas.”

Shri Ram and Lakshman were delighted and amazed by Indrajit's words of wisdom. An extraordinary affection arose in their hearts for Indrajit.

“Dear child, Indrajit! What do you mean? Do you mean you will renounce this samsar and receive initiation into the *Sadhudharma*? Why should you do so? We do not desire the empire of Lanka. Therefore, you should rule over Lanka and spend your life in carrying out your duty towards your people. Our heartfelt aspiration for you is that all of you should live in prosperity and felicity. When that is so, your plan does not sound proper.” Shri Ram said in a voice shaken with emotion looking towards Indrajit.

“O you revered one! Even after conquering Lanka you are discarding all your power over Lanka and this shows your greatness but the empire of Lanka has given us this reward of our father’s death. Now that empire is undoubtedly stained. We don’t desire it. Now we want to pursue the path that leads us to the empire of salvation which will bring us eternal and sublime felicity.”

“But will it not be a reproach on your part? Will not the splendid tradition of the Rakshasa dynasty be stained? Common people will say that you became sadhus after being defeated in the war; that you are cowards who have neglected your duty towards your people. If you are really interested in *Samyam-dharma*, you may undertake it in your old age. This is not the time for it.”

“Oh you great hero! Now, we do not fear any disgrace. Why should we fear any disgrace now? Is our name and fame still unstained even after the Rakshasa emperor abducted a woman? Will not our name and fame become more resplendent if we adopt the path of *samyam*? I believe that we should adopt the *Samyamdharma* as an atonement for the sin committed by our father.”

After that, Shri Ram did not say anything. He fell into deep thought, after hearing Indrajit’s absolutely logical argument.

Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, Meghavahan, Mandodari and others were engaged in conversing with one another. The citizens of Lanka were steeped in deep grief on account of the death of their mighty and beloved emperor.

## LXXXIV

### THE REUNION WITH SITA

Even before the flames of Ravan's funeral pyre had subsided; even before the tears in the eyes of Mandodari and the others dried up, a large number of gods and goddesses came down from heaven to the famous Kusumayudh garden in Lanka and were making arrangements for a magnificent celebration. The great muni Aprameyabal had attained *Kevaljnan* and the heavenly beings had gathered to celebrate that event. The streets and bazaars of Lanka were brimming with the sounds of auspicious musical instruments relating to the celebration. Early in the morning, Shri Ram received news about the attainment of *kevaljnan* by the Muni. So, he proceeded to the Kusumayudh garden accompanied by Lakshman, Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and others. All were in great grief and anguish. When they arrived at the garden, they saw the great Muni seated on a golden lotus, delivering a discourse. Shri Ram politely saluted the muni and sat in front of him. The spiritual discourse that the muni was delivering filled the hearts of the heavenly beings with an inexpressible elation. Their hearts bloomed into bliss. The human beings who heard the discourse swayed with delight. The atmosphere was filled with the spirit of self-restraint and spiritual elevation.

The discourse ended. There was absolute serenity everywhere. The members of the congregation who were spell-bound by the discourse swayed in delight as they thought of his utterances. Just then, Indrajit and Meghavahan stood up. They saluted the feet of the great muni and said humbly.

“Revered lord! We have lost all interest in life. We no more desire the bondage of samsar. We have decided to adopt

the path of *sadhudharma*, but before we become initiated into the *sadhudharma*, we desire to know something about our earlier lives. You are a *Kevaljnani*. You know the past, the present and the future. You know the inmost thoughts and feelings of all *Jivas* of all times and climes and of all their lives. Therefore, if you will be so gracious as to enlighten us on our *poorva-janmas*, our spirit of renunciation will grow stronger and our long-cherished desire also will be fulfilled."

Silence reigned supreme in the congregation. Even the heavenly beings were eager to hear the stories of the earlier lives of Ravana's sons. After a little silence, the great muni began his narration in a serious and dignified voice.

"In ancient times, two brothers lived in the city of Kaushambi. They were in great poverty and adversity. One was called Pratam and the other was called Paschim. Once a great muni by name Bhavadatta happened to visit the city. The people of the city went to hear his discourses. His discourses were like a boat that could take human souls across the ocean of *samsar*. Everyone who heard the discourses felt that his life had attained real fulfilment. The brothers Pratam and Paschim also were influenced by the discourses and their sensual passions subsided. In consequence, the two brothers sought refuge at the feet of the great muni and renounced the *samsar*. The two brothers became Sadhus and began travelling on foot with their gurudev from place to place spreading their gurudev's sublime message.

They pursued the path of austerity, renunciation, meditation and enlightenment and were absorbed in their endeavour to attain spiritual elevation. After a long time they by chance visited Kaushambi. At that time, in the city the people were celebrating the spring festival. The citizens, the members of the royal family and all the others joined together in celebrating the festival forgetting all differences and disparities among them. The two brothers arranged for the stay of the muni in a cottage in a garden outside the city.

By chance king Nandighosh and his supremely beautiful queen Indumati happened to visit the garden. Even the king



and the queen joined the jubilations of the festival forgetting themselves. Their games and sports which inspired sensual passions were seen by muni Paschim and then something that should not have happened, happened. Muni Paschim began to watch the games and sports with fascination. He thought, "I wish that I too participated in those delightful games and sports and enjoyed myself." Within a few moments, Muni Paschim's mind was caught in the snares of sensuality.

The mind of Paschim began ranging unimpeded. "This kind of delight can never be attained in the life of a Sadhu. I have deceived myself in taking to the path of Samyam (self-restraint). But if I give up the path of *Sadhudharma* and become a householder, even then I may not enjoy such royal splendour. How can I secure such a beautiful wife as that queen? Yes! From my study of the shastras, I have understood also the secret that by means of the efficacy of spiritual austerities, I can fulfil my desires in my next life, but this requires a strong determination. I will have to sacrifice my spiritual excellence in exchange for sensual pleasures but I will have to make that sacrifice if my desire should be fulfilled. There is no other way. I will make the sacrifice. Staking all my spiritual excellence. I hereby desire that after my death I should be born as the son of this royal couple. Thus I can enjoy boundless sensual pleasures in my next life. My dry and thirsty life will attain satisfaction and enjoyment thus."

One day, Paschim Muni revealed to Pratham Muni his plan.

A strong desire can never remain concealed.

Hearing the words of Paschim Muni Pratham Muni was stupefied. He felt deeply shocked at what he heard. Greatly amazed and shocked, he said, "O Muni! Do you realise what you are saying? How can a muni say such things? Do you desire to sacrifice all your spiritual excellence for the sake of the pleasures of worldly life? Do you want to use your spiritual excellence by means of which you can destroy Karmas to get worldly enjoyments? Dear brother! How could such an ignoble desire arise in your heart? The enlightened people say

that worldly enjoyments bring about spiritual ruin. When that is so, how could you desire such enjoyments? How could such a desire appear in your mind?"

Paschim muni sat silent. He did not say anything in reply to what Pratham muni said. He was unable to give any reply. His eyes were fixed on the ground before him. The expression on his face showed that his determination could not be changed. Pratham muni again said affectionately.

"It is a fact that your sensual desires can be fulfilled by the efficacy of long years of spiritual endeavours. But have you realized that those delights are transitory? Do you think that those sensual enjoyments will be permanent? No, dear brother, no. They are transient and they are illusory. All the pleasures of the samsar are transient and perishable. Those worldly and sensual pleasures which are fraught with pain and agony will only bring ruin, total spiritual ruin. That will be the only fruit of worldly pleasures. Then why do you knowingly fall into the flames of sensuality and get burnt by them? Please listen to me a little. I am your brother; and your well-wisher. I entreat you to follow the path of spiritual elevation which you have chosen and to carry out with absolute concentration and dedication, the austerities that will bring you spiritual elevation. Why do you want to lose all your spiritual attainments for the sake of those transient pleasures?"

"What you say is absolutely true but I am unable to understand why I am attracted by those sensual pleasures. This desire for sensual pleasures arose in me when I saw the royal couple engaged in those sports and pleasures". Muni Paschim said with amazement.

"It is likely that the sight of those sports and pleasures inspired in you this desire; but we should keep off such despicable desires by exercising our knowledge and wisdom. We are pursuing the path of *Sadhudharma* only to restrain and discard such passions; and so it is absolutely essential that we should discard our worldly desires. Our first and foremost duty is to conquer the sensual cravings that have been with us for ages;

and it is only to carry out that great duty that we have become *Shramans*. The very meaning of *Shramandharma* is that we should fight against our ignoble desires whenever they arise in us. Yes! Sometimes ignoble desires arise even in our minds; and perplex us. But just because they do so, we need not yield to them. We should struggle against them; and conquer them. I am always by your side; and you need not fear anything. Do not be shaken by them." Pratham muni said in his attempt to persuade Muni Paschim to give up his desire for sensual pleasures.

The face of Paschim Muni showed his feelings of shame, agitation and excitement. His wavering thoughts showed themselves through his eyes. A tremendous conflict arose in his mind between his love of *Moksha* and his *sensual cravings*. His mind was caught in a whirlpool of conflicting thoughts and feelings. Therefore, though every word, uttered by Pratham Muni was true and profoundly meaningful, his advice could not reach the depths of his consciousness. The love of the felicity of *Moksha* had grown weak in his mind. He was completely caught in the snares of *Samsar* and sensual cravings.

In consequence, Pratham Muni informed the other Munis in his company, of the desire and determination of Paschim Muni. A commotion arose among the Munis. Those Munis, in their turn, surrounded Muni Paschim and tried to persuade him to discard his desire. Muni Paschim kept silently listening to their advice and persuasion; and when they paused, he said in a firm voice.

"Oh you great Munis! You are trying to persuade me to discard my desire for worldly delights and to exercise self-restraint. I have fully understood your ideas. I chose the path of *Sadhudharma* only because I deemed worldly pleasures futile and perishable. But man's propensities are changeable. I do not now possess the strength to conquer my sensual desires. I am unable to restrain them. So, whatever you may say, I cannot alter my determination. It is firm like a rock. Your persuasions can't shake it. Kindly pardon me and allow me to proceed on the path which now I have chosen."

And Paschim Muni went away from there.

After his death, he was born as the son of the King Nandighosh and Queen Indumati of Kaushambi. He was named Rathivardhan.

When Rathivardhan grew up to be a young man his parents celebrated his marriage with an extraordinary beautiful princess and he spent his life always engaged in sports of love in the company of his wife and the other damsels of bewitching beauty.

Muni Pratham, spending his life in austere spiritual activities reached the fifth heaven after his death and was born there as a heavenly being. Like other heavenly beings he too possessed *Avadhijan* (extrasensory perception). Exercising his *Avadhijan* he perceived Muni Paschim now leading his life as the prince of Kaushambi.

Pratham Muni's affection for Muni Paschim as a brother remained unaffected though Paschim had paid no heed to his well-meant advice and had entered the *samsar*. The river of affection for his brother kept flowing through Pratham's heart like a constant stream without a fall. In other words his love for his brother had not decreased. Impelled by this love for his brother, even in his life as a heavenly being Muni Pratham exercised his extrasensory perception to see where his brother was and in what condition he was.

When Pratham thus visualized his brother Paschim steeped in the *samsar* and enjoying worldly pleasures, he felt greatly shocked and pained. He thought that if Paschim thus continued to live a worldly life enjoying sensual pleasures, after his death he would certainly go to hell and his spiritual ruin would be certain. Therefore he thought that he should somehow caution him and awaken him into an awareness of the dangers attending upon a life of sensuality.

Of course, even heavenly beings indulge in sensual pleasures but those human beings who take birth as heavenly beings after having led a life of austerity and severity would live in

heaven, in the midst of sensual delights with absolute detachment and awareness, untouched by their influence.

That is why the heavenly being came down to earth in the form of a Muni.

Pratham went to the court of Rativardan. Prince Rativardhan stood up respectfully on seeing the Muni and received him with great veneration. He entreated the Muni to be seated and the prince himself sat at the Muni's feet.

The Muni blessed the prince saying "Dharamlabh" (May you attain spiritual prosperity); and preached a sermon to him. Moreover he informed Prince Rativardhan of the fact that in his earlier life he was Muni Paschim and that he himself was Pratham Muni in his earlier life. Prince Rativardhan on hearing the words of the Muniraj easily remembered his earlier Janma. Pratham who was now a heavenly being felt greatly happy. He said in elation.

"Dear brother! Even now you can mend matters. If we can rectify our blunders, they will be no more blunders. The day dawns when we wake up. Dear Child! This world is a vanity — fair abounding in foul sights, disgusting and transient pleasures. Therefore discard this worldly life which is sinful and resume again the path of *Sadhudharma*".

In consequence prince Rativardhan lost all attachment for samsar and its transient pleasures. He informed his mother Indumathi of his decision to renounce the samsar. His mother was greatly shocked and pained to hear this. She had not even dreamt that such a thing would come about. She at once became greatly agitated and profoundly grieved. But when Rativardhan narrated to her the story of his *poorvajanma* she gladly acceded to his plan to pursue the path of *Sadhudharma*.

Rativardhan became initiated into the *Samyamdharm*.

After his death his soul reached the fifth heaven.

The two brothers lived in the heavenly world until the span of their heavenly life ended and then after completing their

heavenly existence they were born in the city of Vibudhanagar in the kingdom of Mahavideh. Both were born as princes of the kingdom. When they entered the phase of youth, they became shramans and in course of time, they died and reached the twelfth heaven.

After having spent the span of their life there, the two brothers were born as the sons of Dashmukh Ravan, the *Prativasudev*. They were named Indrajit and Meghavahan”.

Indrajit and Meghavahan heard the story of their early lives and in consequence, their spirit of renunciation became stronger. Moreover, they learnt from the *Kevaljnani Aprameyabal* that their mother Queen Mandodari was none other than Queen Indumati. The story narrated by the revered Gurudev amazed and delighted the members of the congregation. Their hearts began floating on the rising waves of jubilation.

In consequence, the two princes Indrajit and Meghavahan declared in the presence of all their determination to become initiated into the *Charitradharma*. Kumbhakarna also declared his determination to become a sadhu. At the same time, Queen Mandodari and the other Queens of Ravan declared their determination to become *Sadhvis* and pursue the path of spiritual elevation. The declaration made by the members of the Royal family filled the hearts of the citizens of Lanka with the contradictory feelings of elation and depression, joy and sorrow.

They seemed to be mourning and rejoicing at once for the same reason for joy was overborne by mourning and mourning was cast out by joy. They rejoiced and grieved at once for the same reason. The citizens of Lanka had been deeply grieved by the tragic death of their mighty Emperor Ravan. Yet the presence of Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, Meghavahan and Mandodari was a blessing to them but their declarations made the people feel that they were like aspiring birds despairing because of the deprivation of their feathers.

Thousands of men and women who were present in the congregation of the Mahamuni Aprameyabal entreated with tearful eyes, Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, Meghavahan and the other

great men and women not to take to *Sadhudharma*. They said, "Kindly do not receive the *deeksha* now. Please do not think of it now because you are the only prop to us in this calamitous situation caused by the death of our Emperor Ravan. You are our only hope and stay in this ocean of engulfing sorrow; and the presence of the members of the Royal family would give us confidence and courage in our distress." But the members of the royal family were determined to pursue the path of *Sadhudharma*. The entreaties made by the people failed to shake their determination because they had no interest in amusements, enjoyments, pomp and splendour. They thought worldly life was futile and pointless.

The great heroes of the Rakshasa dynasty who sometime ago fought against external enemies now became shramans to carry out a fight against the inner enemies. The prince and the queens of Lanka who till the previous day lived a life of enjoyments and splendour now became averse to them and began pursuing the path of *Sadhudharma*. The beautiful damsels of the harem, who used to spend their days and nights in dances and delights and sensual pleasures now discarded their attachments for such a life and became pilgrims on the path that leads to enlightenment and salvation. They became sadhvis.

It is not humanly possible to know or predict when the human heart changes and under what circumstances the change occurs. Those who were sinners yesterday may become holy men today and those who are holy men today may become sinners tomorrow.

Shri Ram humbly saluted the feet of the new munis. Lakshman, Sugriv, Nal, Neel, Hanuman and Vibhishan also bowed to their feet with devotion. Then turning towards Shri Ram, Vibhishan said :

"O you, revered hero ! Now you kindly enter Lanka and meet Sita and bring rain to the drying roots of her life."

Vibhishan sent for the commander of the armies and ordered him to see that Lanka is magnificently and colourfully decorated. Accordingly, the city of Lanka was made colourful.

Large crowds of citizens thronged the streets to have a glimpse of Shri Ram and Lakshman. There seemed to be an ocean of people standing on the sides of the roads to have a sight of Shri Ram and Lakshman. Shri Ram and Lakshman entered Lanka seated on the elephant Bhuvanankar, which was Ravan's cherished possession. Behind them Vibhishan and Sugriv rode on elephants. The four Commanders Hanuman, Prasannakirti, Nal and Neel drove behind them in chariots. Countless other Vanara warriors and others followed them in chariots, horses and on foot.

The citizens of Lanka were eager to see Shri Ram, Lakshman and the Vanara army which had won such a tremendous victory. At the same time they were also experiencing grief because their mighty and beloved emperor, Lankesh Ravan, Queen Mandodari, Prince Indrajit, Kumbhakarna, the mighty, Meghavahan, the valiant were not there in the procession. The palace, the harem and the royal chambers were desolate and bleak to look at. There was silence everywhere. The people were experiencing the mixed feelings of grief and elation, and their tears of joy were tinged with sorrow. The people stood mute and still.

The Vidyadhars tried to make the atmosphere cheerful by playing on divine musical instruments. The Kinnaris (demigoddesses) began dancing. The cries of victory issued by people reverberated in the highest skies. Shri Ram entered Lanka in all grandeur and *eclat*.

Shri Ram did not want to go into the magnificent palace of Lanka; on the otherhand, he wanted to go to the Devaraman garden. There in the Devaraman garden, Sita was spending her time in bitter grief and anguish on account of the separation from Shri Ram. She had dedicated her heart and soul to Shri Ram. Shri Ram had to wage a tremendous war to safeguard her chastity and nobility as a wife.

Sita sat in the Devaraman garden situated on the Pushpagiri, expecting the arrival of Shri Ram and looking for him with unshaking eyes. Shri Ram was equally eager to see Sita and to cheer her up.



After arriving at the Pushphagiri hill, Shri Ram alighted from the elephant Bhuvanankar. Shri Ram accompanied by Lakshman and others began climbing the hill. Actually Sita was now standing at the gate of the garden looking for Shri Ram, the lord of her heart. Shri Ram saw her from a distance. He stopped for a few moments; looked at her and then proceeded speedily towards her. Is it possible even for the greatest of poets to describe this reunion effectively? Shri Hemachandra Soorishwarji has described this reunion of Shri Ram and Sita in a single sloka.

“Deeming Sita his other life, Shri Ram took her into his lap and embraced her.”

Shri Ram and Sita felt as if their souls beckoned each other and joined together like swans and began swimming on the waves, of joy and elation while honey seemed to spring from their hearts as if from heavens and made their lives sweet and blissful.

Indeed, the union of such a couple after a long period of separation, suffering, privation and deprivation defies description and baffles analysis. Even the greatest poets may not find adequate words to describe it. They may be baffled by the sight which can make anyone tongue-tied. It is difficult to describe the supreme joy that Sita must have experienced at that time. It is equally difficult to describe Shri Ram's joy and elation. In the same manner, it is difficult to describe the emotions of joy and jubilation that had arisen in the hearts of the beholders there. Their silence was more than tears and their tears were but their hearts overflowing with the feeling of ineffable bliss.

At once, the heavenly beings like Gandharvas began playing on divine musical instruments. All the heavenly beings declared in a resounding voice.

‘Victory to great Sita, the very image of sublime virtues.’

Lakshman shed tears of joy. He ran forward towards Sita; fell at her feet and bathed them with his tears. He had seen only Sita's feet in his life. He had not even once looked at her. He had always worshipped her feet.

“Dear brother! May you live long! May you be always felicitious. My heartiest blessings are always with you.” Sita placed her hand over Lakshman’s head affectionately. Bhamandal went forward and saluted Sita. She blessed Bhamandal with overflowing affection.

Then Sugriv saluted her and said in a humble manner .

“Revered mother! Sugriv bows to you with veneration.”

“I am Vibhishan, the younger brother of Ravan. Dear mother! I bow to you,” said Vibhishan.

After that, Hanuman, Angadh, Prasannakirthi, Nal, Neel and others and all the heroes and warriors approached Sita and saluted her feet. Sita blessed everyone of them heartily and made polite enquiries about their welfare.

Sita’s face bloomed into bliss like a night-lotus which blooms gleefully at the sight of the full moon.

Vibhishan saluted Shri Ram and said “O you greatest of men! Be so gracious as to hallow the palace of Lanka taking Sita with you.”

Shri Ram and Sita sat on the Bhuvanankar. The Vidyadhars issued cries of victory. The cries of jubilation reverberated throughout Lanka. Vibhishan driving in his chariot led the procession towards the palace. The procession proceeded towards the palace. Sugriv and the other Vanara heroes followed Shri Ram.

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## SIX YEARS IN LANKA

Shri Ram entered the magnificent palace of Lanka with Sita.

They went straight to the temple of Lord Shantinath located, in the palace. The temple was vast and resplendent. The temple had one thousand pillars all studded with extraordinary precious stones. It seemed to be a dream come true. It was remarkable for its extraordinary architectural and sculptural beauty and graces. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman experienced supreme serenity and felicity. Sita impelled by her devotion desired to worship the lord. Vibhishan at once ordered his men to bring the necessary auspicious substances for the worship of the lord.

Meanwhile, Shri Ram and the others went to the lake nearby; bathed in it; put on holy garments and returned to the temple.

Then with overflowing devotion all worshipped the lord and glorified him.

After the worship was over, Vibhishan entreated Shri Ram enthusiastically;

“Dear lord! There is a small temple in the palace of your devotee, Vibhishan also. The temple is beautiful though small. I entreat you to worship the lord in that temple also.”

Shri Ram accepted Vibhishan’s invitation and proceeded to his palace accompanied by all.

Vibhishan's palace was as magnificent as Ravan's palace. It seemed to rival Ravan's palace in splendour. Shri Ram went into the temple accompanied by others and worshipped the lord. Then they all had their food. On that day, Shri Ram, Sita, Lakshman and all the Vanara kings and heroes were Vibhishan's guests, and he deemed himself fortunate in being their host.

After food all rested for a while and then spent sometime in genial and amusing conversation, and then Vibhishan took them all to his court.

He entreated Shri Ram to be seated on the Royal throne of Lanka which shone radiant with the splendour of a million gems and he himself sat at the feet of Shri Ram. When all were seated, Vibhishan stood up and said :

“O you world-conqueror! O you greatest of men!

The Rakshasdwep which constitutes half the land of Bharat, its prosperity and splendour, its measureless treasures of magnificent precious stones, its vast treasures of gold and silver, its millions of elephants and horses are yours. We place them at your feet. Kindly accept these and bless us. You are the supreme lord of all these things and I am but a humble servant at your feet. I am always ready to carry out your commands. Now we would like to celebrate your coronation as the Emperor of Lanka and thus be blessed by your grace. Kindly rule over Lanka and hallow the empire. O you compassionate one! Be so gracious as to grant this request of your humble servant.”

“O you great man! Have you forgotten that already I have crowned you king of Lanka ? I think, you have forgotten that on account of your extraordinary affection and devotion for me but Ram never forgets his promises.” Shri Ram said in a dignified and resounding voice. Silence reigned supreme in the court. All began to look at one another with wonder and joy and eagerness. Sometime passed thus. Just then, Shri Ram made a sign to Sugriv with his hand. Sugriv at once, made arrangements for the coronation of Vibhishan. He descended from the throne; placed Vibhishan on the throne and in the presence of all crown-

ed him emperor of Lanka. The cries of victory and jubilation issued by the people reverberated in the skies.

Then, all the people of Lanka realised that Shri Ram had fought the war not with any political ambitions; not to display his extraordinary powers but that he had fought against a great injustice done to a woman of extraordinary nobility.

Shri Ram continued to stay in Ravan's palace. Vibhishan assumed powers and began administering the empire with ability and nobility.

Sometime passed thus. Once Shri Ram sent for Sugriv and said.

“After having left Ayodhya, while we were travelling through forests, at various places. we met many princes and damsels and promised to marry them. Therefore, now you invite them and their relatives to Lanka so that we may keep up the promise of marrying them.” Sugriv at once sent Vidyadhar messengers to bring those damsels and their relatives to Lanka. The messengers went travelling through the sky. Of all the kings who had to be invited thus, King Simhodar's name was specially mentioned. The Vidyadhar messengers visited those places and returned to Lanka soon with those princesses and their relatives. Shri Ram and Lakshman married the princesses in accordance with their promises. (According to the *Ramayana* written by Valmiki and the *Ramacharitmamas* written by Tulasidas, Shri Ram had only one wife namely Sita but in the *Ramayana* written by Sri Hemachandrasoori, Shri Ram had many wives). The marriages were celebrated in Lanka with all grandeur and *eclat*. The citizens of Lanka carried out celebrations and jubiliations to express their joy.

Shri Ram and Lakshman remained in Lanka for six years, thus leading a life of worldly enjoyments. When human beings are in a state of joy, they lose all count of time. Time flies on its speedy wings at such a time. The same thing happened there. Lanka became Ayodhya to please Shri Ram. Lanka seemed to be Ayodhya in the eyes of Shri Ram. For a time, he forgot all

about Ayodhya but Ayodhya did not forget Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman. All the people of Ayodhya kept thinking of them.

Vibhishan, the emperor of Lanka and Sugriv, the king of Vanaras were always rendering service to Shri Ram.

Indrajit and Meghavahan were fighting against their inner enemies as shramans. Of course, they were defeated by Shri Ram and Lakshman but they were victorious against their inner enemies. They faced no defeat in that battle. By means of their extraordinary spiritual austerities, they destroyed their karmas and became Vitrag Sarvajnas. They attained supreme enlightenment and they conquered their inner enemies totally. They attained Nirvan in the Vindhya hills. Since then, the place became a famous pilgrimage called Megharatha. Countless sinners attained spiritual elevation by the very touch of that holy land.

Narad!

The divine sage, Narad, who always keeps wandering through the fourteen worlds and the eternal bachelor once happened to visit Ayodhya.

He went straight to the palace of Ayodhya. When he saw the situation there, he was filled with grief and agitation. The people of Ayodhya were not happy or cheerful. The palace was filled with grief and gloom. His heart palpitated with grief when he saw the Queens Kausalya and Sumitra. The very sight of their anguish filled his heart with grief. The tears were flowing from their eyes ceaselessly. Their bodies had withered and they seemed to be mere skeletons covered with skin.

The queens received the divine sage with due honour and requested him to be seated.

Narad sat on a dignified seat; and said in amazement.

“Noble women! Why do you look so gloomy and grief-stricken?”

“Divine sage! Our sons Ram and Lakshman went to the forests taking Sita with them and there Sita was abducted by

Ravan. He carried her away to Lanka. Ram and Lakshman set off in search of Sita and reached Lanka. They fought a terrible war against Ravan. Ravan released a divine weapon of extraordinary efficacy against Lakshman. Lakshman fell down unconscious hit by it. Vishalya was taken from here to help Lakshman to regain his life. We know the story only upto that point. We do not know whether our dear son Lakshman has recovered his life or not. We do not know what happened to Sita and how the war against Ravan ended. We are worried over all these things. Kausalya said this with tears, and her voice was choked with grief. She cried in grief. "Dear Lakshman!" Sumitra also sobbed and wept. Even Narad was moved to tears by their grief. He could not bear the sight of the grief of the queens of Ayodhya. He said in a grief-stricken tone: "O you noble woman! Stop grieving. Have some patience. What is the use of weeping thus? Try to restrain your grief. I will at once go to Lanka and I will come back here with your sons."

Accordingly, Narad set off through the skies. On the way, he learnt that Ram and Lakshman were in Lanka. At once he began flying towards Lanka. After having reached Lanka, he stood before the main gate of Lanka.

Soon after hearing that the divine sage Narad had arrived at Lanka, Shri Ram went out to receive him personally. He received the divine sage with due reverence and then asked him. "Divine sage! What may be the purpose of your gracious visit?"

Narad was silent. He said nothing but he kept looking at Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita with fixed eyes. He was boiling with anger. Yet no untoward feeling appeared on his face. He began to think. "Oh! what a mockery of fate! In Ayodhya, the mothers are experiencing anguish on account of the separation from their sons. They have become mere skeletons. They are like withered leaves. Their faces have grown bleak and blighted. They have no peace of mind. They are grieving without caring for food or sleep but here in Lanka what do I see! I do not see a trace of sorrow on the faces of these sons. They do not at all seem to be grieved by the separation from their mothers.

O life! O samsar! Your ways indeed are mysterious and baffling!"

Shri Ram said to the divine sage, "O you greatest of sages! What are you thinking of so deeply? My...."

Narad interrupted Shri Ram and said in a severe voice, "O king! I have come here straight from Ayodhya. I am unable to describe the sight of anguish, I saw there. I find no words to describe that sight. Your mothers are steeped in grief and anguish. I was unable to bear with the sight of the anguish of Kausalya and Sumitra. I felt that I had not seen such a sight before. Living here in the prosperous and magnificent city of Lanka built by the Prativasudev, Ravan and enjoying the service and devotion of Vibhishan and Sugriv, you have forgotten your mothers. This is indeed amazing." Narad's voice resounded everywhere. It flowed like a stream. Shri Ram and Lakshman kept hearing the words of Narad in silence and stupefaction. They did not repudiate Narad's words. In fact, they became speechless and silent. The tears flowed from Sita's eyes endlessly.

"You are so deeply immersed, in your enjoyments that you have lost all count of time but for Kausalya and Sumitra, every moment is like a mountain to cross. Every moment is like a year for them. When I saw those mothers lamenting over the separation from their sons, repeatedly saying, "O child Ram! O child Lakshman!" my heart melted away and I came running to Lanka so that I might take you to Ayodhya".

At once, Shri Ram began to weep like a child. His voice was choked with grief. He said with great difficulty restraining his overflowing sorrow: "O divine sage! Enough, I am unable to hear this account of the grief of my mothers. We have indeed committed an unparadonable blunder. We had indeed forgotten all about our mothers but we will not repeat this blunder. Now, without a moment's delay, we shall proceed to Ayodhya.

Lakshman! Bring Vibhishan at once."

Within a few moments, Vibhishan appeared before Shri Ram.



He bowed to Shri Ram folding his hands and said :

“What are your commands, my lord ?”

“Dear king ! We have committed a great blunder which we should not have committed. Completely overwhelmed with your devotion and affection, we forgot our mothers and their feelings and we have remained here for six years without caring to realise their feelings. Now without a moment's delay we have to proceed to Ayodhya and we should meet our mothers as soon as possible and seek their pardon for our unpardonable blunder.”

Vibhishan's eyes welled up with tears. He could not think of Lanka without Shri Ram. He began to weep like a child. He could not say anything since his voice was choked with grief. He could only say, “O you compassionate one !”

“O you emperor, we have to go to Ayodhya and meet our mothers before they die of grief. Kindly agree to our desire of going to Lanka at once.”

Vibhishan fell into deep thought.

Then he said in a humble manner :

“Dear lord ! Kindly stay here for sixteen days. Meanwhile, I will send our greatest architects and sculptors who will by their skill make Ayodhya, a heavenly city.”

Shri Ram turned his eyes towards Narad. Narad said expressing his opinion.

“Well. Oh king ! you must reach Ayodhya on the sixteenth day from today. But I will go to Ayodhya today; and will inform your mothers and Bharat of your arrival so that their sorrow may abate;”

Vibhishan treated Narad with veneration and devotion. Narad who was immensely pleased with the hospitality extended to him; bestowed his blessings on the king of Lanka and on the citizens of Lanka; and proceeded towards Ayodhya. Thou-

sands of architects, sculptors and skilled builders went to Ayodhya accompanying Narad. They all went travelling through the sky.

The news spread in Lanka that on the sixteenth day from that day. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman would leave Lanka for Ayodhya accompanied by their friends.

On hearing this news the people of Lanka were greatly agitated and grieved. They began thronging the palace of Vibhishan. They begged with tearful eyes; "Oh Lord of Lanka ! Kindly persuade Shri Ram not to go to Ayodhya. Kindly see that at any rate, he remains here. If Shri Ram is not here; Lanka will be desolate and helpless."

Hearing the entreaties of the people, Vibhishan's eyes welled up with tears. Their hearts grew heavy with grief. He found it impossible to console the people. He remained silent. So, the crowds proceeded towards Shri Ram's palace. The loud cries and the commotion that arose from the crowds disturbed Shri Ram's meditation. He went to the window of his palace to see what was happening. The people humbly appealed to Shri Ram. "Dear Lord ! Kindly do not go to Ayodhya. If you go away, Lanka will be orphaned." Shri Ram watched the crowds arriving endlessly like sea-waves. All were weeping bitterly. Some could not even weep. All were shedding tears.

Shri Ram saw them; and was himself sad. Restraining his sorrow a little, he said in a dignified voice;

"Beloved citizens of Lanka ! Bound by your bounteous love and affection, I have stayed here for six years and to me these six years have been like six hours but for our mothers and the others in Ayodhya, these six years have been like six millenia. I do not know what terrible anguish my mothers and my younger brothers are experiencing on account of their separation from us. They are finding it difficult to live without us. Spending every moment in our absence is more painful than death to them. Therefore kindly permit us to meet them and to end the long separation from them. We can never forget in

our lives Lanka, Vibhishan and you. the beloved citizens of Lanka. We will always remember your devotion, benevolence, amity and hospitality.”

Sixteen days passed easily. The architects, the sculptors and the others who had gone to Lanka returned. The day for Shri Ram's departure neared. Vibhishan ordered his men to get ready the *Pushpak Viman* for Shri Ram and his companions. Unknown to Shri Ram. he placed in the *Pushpak*, large treasures of precious stones, pearls, and gold. On the appointed day, Shri Ram set off to Ayodhya in the *Pushpak Viman* accompanied by Lakshman, Sita and others.



## LXXXVI

### IN THE PALACE OF AYODHYA

The architects, the sculptors and the artisans of Lanka sent by Vibhishan had decorated and rebuilt the city of Ayodhya in such a way that the city with its topleless towers, magnificent mansions, resplendent palaces, radiant roads and festooned alleys and the gardens which smiled with sinuous streams, fragrant flowers and lakes of pellucid waters looked fascinating like a celestial city. After a long time the city of Ayodhya had lost its look of desolation and gloom and had put on a look of joy and jubilation. The fragrant breezes that were blowing over the city seemed to be bringing the message of the arrival of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman. The citizens of Ayodhya knew that Ravan had carried away Sita in a deceptive manner; and that Shri Ram and Lakshman had killed him in the war and had regained Sita. Therefore, the joy of the people knew no bounds.

The common people of the city had grown almost mad with the desire of having a glimpse of Shri Ram. Not only that; they were also eager to hear from Shri Ram himself the stories of his travels through the forests with Sita and Lakshman. They wanted to hear from him all about the fabulous splendour of Lanka. They desired to hear from him the thrilling story of the war against Ravan. They were also eager to see the famous *Pushpak Viman* of Ravan by which Shri Ram and others were travelling to Ayodhya. They had heard many amazing stories about the *Pushpak Viman*. Now they were happy that they would have the golden opportunity of seeing it. So, the minds of the citizens of Ayodhya ranged endlessly towards the horizons of joy and jubilation imagining countless glorious things.

The women of Ayodhya were eager to meet and greet Sita and to receive her with affection and honour. All the women of

the city had made splendid preparations to receive that noble lady.

Of course, Queen Kausalya and Queen Sumitra lived in the palace but inwardly they were like dwellers in a forest. Some years ago, King Dasarath had adopted the path of *Sadhudharma*. Mother Kausalya was always steeped in grief over her separation from Shri Ram and Lakshman. Sometimes, she spent whole days and nights in that agitation. Her hair had grown grey prematurely on account of her intense anguish over her separation from her husband, her sons and her only daughter-in-law, Sita. Her white and bright face and grown bleak and blighted. Her face revealed signs of premature old age. In fact, Sumitra's company enabled her to continue to live. Otherwise, she should have died heart-broken. Yet she had lost all interest in life. She was living a mechanical life.

And Bharath! Bharath was leading a life of absolute detachment from the samsar. He had no attachment either for power or prosperity or for any object. Though he was the king of the country he was a *Rajarishi* ruling over the country with absolute detachment. He was a *Rajarishi*, a saintly king. He was residing in Ayodhya against his will bound by his sense of duty and dedication. "When will my noble brother return? When can I go away into the mountains seeking my spiritual elevation, leaving the responsibility of ruling over the country to my revered brother, Shri Ram? When can I go away and live in some lonely place, in some place where I can enjoy solitude and where I can carry out my spiritual endeavours unimpeded? Bharath was always thinking of these things. He was leading a life of absolute renunciation. He felt that, repeatedly, mountains, peaks, caves and valleys kept calling him. "The forest and solitudes are calling me. I must follow the path which my father adopted." Such was Bharath's aspiration. He was totally detached. He began experiencing delight from the time he heard about the prospect of the return of his revered brother. He was experiencing delight not only because of the prospect of his brother's return, but also because after his brother's return, he could freely pursue the path of *Sadhudharma*. Every morning regularly he used to visit his mothers, Kausalya and

Sumitra and whenever he met them, they used to ask him when Shri Ram and Lakshman would be returning. Bharath used to keep them informed of all matters. But on that day when he went to meet Kausalya, she bathed him with the waters of affection and passed her hand over him tenderly. She said in an affectionate manner : "Dear son ! I think Shri Ram is arriving tomorrow. Am I right ?"

"Yes revered mother ! Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita will arrive at Ayodhya tomorrow."

"Are they coming here by Ravan's *Pushpak Viman* ?"

"Yes, mother ! They will come to Ayodhya by *Pushpak Viman*."

"I think Lakshman and Sita also will return with Ram. . . . Oh ! how many years since I saw Sita !" Kausalya's eyes welled up with tears.

"And mother ! Even my brother Shri Ram will be meeting you tomorrow after many years of separation. Lakshman will meet you and bathe your feet with tears."

"True ! My son Lakshman is indeed great. He cannot bear with the sorrow of others. He is indeed affectionate and tender-hearted."

Meanwhile, Sumitra and Kaikayi came into Kausalya's chamber.

"Dear son Bharath ! Our Chief Minister sent us a message that Ram will be arriving tomorrow with Sita and Lakshman."

"Dear mother ! That is true. They are coming tomorrow." Bharath said looking towards Kaikayi. Kausalya was lost in some reminiscences of the past. Her face grew sublime like an ocean.

"Bharath ! It was a good thing that Lakshman accompanied Ram; otherwise what would have happened to Ram when Ravan committed the enormity of abducting Sita ? He would have had to fight against Ravan alone ?"

“Dear mother! We cannot forget that it was Lakshman who killed Ravan in the battle.”

“Dear son! My son Lakshman can kill not only a hero like Ravan but also Indra the king of gods. He is a mighty hero. I have known him from childhood. Haven’t I?”

The three mothers looked cheerful because of the prospect of the return of Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita. A little later, Shatrughna and his mother entered the chamber. When they came and sat near Bharath, he said, “Dear brother! Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita are coming tomorrow. I think you have made all arrangements to extend a magnificent welcome to them. I think you have also got palaces decorated so that they can reside in those palaces without any discomfort.”

“Yes! I made all those arrangements. I think you have informed our Chief Minister to get a proclamation made with drum-beats regarding the arrival of Shri Ram and others.”

“The Chief Minister has ordered the officers to make the proclamation. Already, officers have gone to make the proclamation at all the important places in the city. The people of the city are in a mood of overflowing joy and jubilation. The city has been colourfully decorated with arches and festoons. Every mansion in Ayodhya has been made fascinating. The streets and the roads of the city have been cleaned and sprinkled with fragrant and cool water.”

Bharath felt happy to hear all this from Shatrughna. His face became radiant with joy. He was silent for a while and then remembering something suddenly, he said,

“Dear brother Shatrughna! You know that Vibhishan, the king of Lanka; Sugriv, the king of Vanaras; Hanuman and other great warriors are also accompanying Shri Ram. I hope you have made arrangements for their stay.”

“Dear brother! You need not worry about those things. The Chief Minister is personally making those arrangements. Moreover, our guests will stay in the magnificent palaces built anew by the architects and sculptors of Lanka.”

“Dear son Bharath! Who is Vibhishan?” Queen Kausalya said with a little eagerness.

“Mother! Have you not heard about Vibhishan? He is the younger brother of Ravan but he is totally different from Ravan. Though he is a Rakshasa, he is absolutely noble. When Ravan took Sita by force to Lanka, it was Vibhishan who first opposed it vehemently and tried his best to persuade Ravan to restore Sita to Shri Ram. When Ravan did not pay heed to his advice Vibhishan left Lanka with his followers and surrendered himself to Shri Ram.”

“He is indeed noble.”

“And the other honoured guest of ours is Sugriv, the king of Vanaras. It is impossible to describe in words the service that he rendered to Shri Ram. It was he who made arrangements to search for Sita. Dear mother! Whatever we say in his praise is too little.”

“Dear son! You spoke of Hanuman, the son of Anjanadevi. Is he also coming?” Kaikayi said joining the conversation.

“Hanuman’s greatness is above praise. He is indeed mighty. His devotion to Shri Ram is tremendous. His intelligence and greatness were too great even for Ravan.”

“When we hear all this from Ram, Lakshman and Sita, it will give us great delight”, said Sumitra.

“I think you are mistaken. Ram will never speak of his achievements. Only Lakshman will tell us everything”. Kausalya said.

“May I mention another point, dear mother?”

“Yes, go on.”

“Along with Sita, my other sisters-in-law also will be there”.

“Indeed!” The four mothers said together in surprise.



“Yes mothers ! It is a fact. Wherever Shri Ram and Lakshman went, they met several princesses and promised to marry them. Now they have married those princesses.”

“But you never told us about all this earlier.”, said Sumitra.

“How could he tell us about all those things ? Women are like cobras in his eyes. My son, Bharath is the very embodiment of the spirit of renunciation.” Kausalya said humorously.

Bharath was silent. But, Kaikayi could not be silent. She said in a grief-stricken voice. “Bharath has had no peace of mind since the Emperor Dasarath adopted the path of *Samyam-dharma*. The desire to follow the same path has been growing stronger and stronger in Bharath’s mind. He always remains detached from wealth and enjoyments. He does not care for worldly pleasures. He does not take interest in amusements, games and sports. Sensual desires can never enter his mind. He spends all his time in carrying out his administrative duties and spends his spare time in meditation and in the worship of the Paramatma. Sometimes, he stands at the window of his palace for hours together looking at the limitless sky with penetrating eyes as if to explore the mysteries beyond. Sometimes, when I wake up at midnight, I see him carrying out meditation seated in the lotus-posture. Of course, I do not say anything to him because I do not want to wound his feelings. So, I always try to suppress my feelings. I know for certain that he too will one day adopt the path chosen by his father. When I think of this I begin to shudder with grief and fear.” Kaikayi’s voice was choked with grief. Her eyes welled up with tears and she kept sobbing for a long time. When her heart grew a little light, she said again. “But dear son ! I will not place any impediments on your way. I will not impede your endeavours to pursue the path of salvation. I am fully aware of your anguish. I can even hear the very voice of your heart which keeps crying for a life of spirituality.”

Kaikayi wept bitterly. Sumitra embraced her and tried to console her and to cheer her up. Kausalya took Bharath into her lap and said in a serious voice :

“Dear son, Bharath ! Don’t be impatient. Everything will be all right. Now you go and make the necessary arrangements for tomorrow’s event.”

Bharath and Shatrughna saluted them and went away.

Kaikayi continued to weep. Her sorrow was boundless. Kausalya took her near her and said affectionately;

“Dear Kaikayi ! What is the use of weeping thus ? What has to happen will happen. No one can prevent it. What is destined will occur. Try to have patience. Try to have a little courage. Do not worry about Bharath’s words. Every word uttered by Bharath is unique. His greatness is incomparable. Bharath is so great that he can lead a life of detachment in a palace. Indeed we have affection and attachment for him but he has no attachment for us. He sees only sorrow in the worldly things in which we see joy. We do not have any strong desire to attain *moksha* but Bharath is different from us. He is impatient to pursue the path of salvation. He has been ruling over the country only to carry out the commands of his father. He has been quietly carrying out the administration. Is this a small achievement ?”

Kaikayi kept listening to Kausalya’s words with her eyes fixed on the ground. She had thought deeply about Bharath’s innate thoughts and feelings as well as his external actions. She had also discussed the matter with Bharat several times. She had discussed matters relating to worldliness and renunciation but she had heard the secret relating to Bharath’s innate thoughts for the first time from Kausalya. From what Kausalya said, she understood how much Kausalya loved Bharath. Kausalya’s words impelled her to realise and visualize Bharath’s innate thoughts and feelings. Kausalya’s words also contained the suggestion that she should not place any impediments on Bharath’s way. She looked straight at Kausalya. Kausalya was looking through the window at the blue sky with fixed eyes. Kaikayi kept looking at Kausalya’s withered face. How long had Kausalya managed to live inspite of her separation from her husband, her son and her daughter-in-law ? How did she man-

age to bear with her grief? Kaikayi kept thinking of Kausalya's condition. Just then Kausalya said.

“Dear Kaikayi! I have always visualized Ram in Bharath. I also visualized Lakshman in him. I have been feeling happy because Bharath has been there with us. Can you ever realise how deeply I love Bharath?”

Countless questions arising in Kaikayi's heart seemed to have found their answer. She felt as if all her problems had been solved.

When Kausalya can realise Ram in Bharath why should I not visualise Bharath in Ram? Surely I can,” thought Kaikayi. Now no one could prevent Bharath from becoming a Sadhu. He would surely renounce all attachments and bondages and would adopt *Sadhudharma*. Kaikayi understood the truth. She knew that Bharath was waiting for the arrival of Shri Ram and that soon after Shri Ram's arrival, he would become a Sadhu.

“But will Ram treat me with affection after so many years of separation? I was the cause for his going away to forests. But Ram is not the kind of man that would entertain any ill-feeling towards others; nor would he entertain any animosity against others but then there is Lakshman. He is the very embodiment of anger and his tendency is always to take revenge against those who have offended him.” Kaikayi shuddered with fear.

“Lakshman may condemn me and that may change Ram's attitude towards me. When such a thing comes about, how can I visualise Bharath in Ram? Ah! How deeply does Bharath love Kausalya? What a great devotion, he has for her! And, Sitā that tender lady had to go to the forests on account of me. She may not have any affection or regard for me. So, I cannot hope to receive from her any affectionate treatment.”

Kaikayi was caught in a whirlpool of agitated thoughts. She felt stupefied by her thoughts. Countless doubts and fears arose in her mind. Just then some leading women of the city came in. Kausalya stepped forward and received them with a smiling face.

"Dear Queen! Tomorrow Shri Ramachandra, Lakshman and Sita are arriving. The whole city is in a state of jubilation. All are swaying with delight and elation. Every house and every religious centre in the city has been fascinatingly decorated. The citizens of Ayodhya are impatiently awaiting the arrival of Shri Ram". These words of the women filled Kausalya with great joy. One leading woman of the city said;

"Dear Queen! We are going to have a sight of Shri Ram after many years. Whenever I think of you and whenever I meet you I naturally think of Shri Ram."

"But I remember Ram every moment," said Kausalya as the tears trickled from her eyes.

"Dear Queen! Do not give way to grief. The days of adversity have come to an end. Within a short time the day of felicity is going to dawn. Its only a matter of a few hours; only one night and tomorrow you will meet your son. Tomorrow, we are going to see Shri Ram. Of course many years have passed. I do not know what adversities and calamities Sita had to experience during these years. This world abounds in sorrow. Wherever we cast our eyes, we see nothing but the flames of sorrow consuming everyone. The sports of destiny are indeed inscrutable. They are limitless."

Kausalya heaved a long sigh and continued to be silent.

"Dear Queen! All our agitations and sorrows will end when we see Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita tomorrow."

"Dear sister! What you say is true!"

At this point, an attendant came and invited them to have their food. The queens bade good-bye to the women and after they went away, the queens went in. The joy and elation of Kausalya and Sumitra knew no bounds. Their hearts swayed with delight. Queen Suprabha also kept floating on the waves of joy but only Kaikayi had fallen into a strange conflict. Her thoughts took strange turns. If she felt happy one moment, the next moment she felt depressed. She had great affection for

Shri Ram. There was no dislike or contempt in her attitude towards Shri Ram. Again and again, she shed tears regretting her past action and she was filled with some nameless fear. Of course, she had heartfelt affection for Ram but the prospect of the separation from Bharath filled her with anguish. Her affection for Bharath was such that she could not bear with a separation from him. She knew Bharath's nature very well. It was certain that Bharath would renounce samsar and would pursue the path of spiritual elevation. It was certain that as soon as Shri Ram arrived at Ayodhya, Bharath would renounce everything and would become a Sadhu. When she thought of these things, Kaikayi shuddered with fear and anguish. She had no power to prevent Bharath from becoming a Sadhu. Yes, there was one ray of hope still left. If Shri Ram insisted upon Bharath's remaining in the samsar for sometime, he would certainly obey Shri Ram. He might even remain a householder. This thought gave Kaikayi some relief. At once, her face lost some of its bleakness. She thought, "I will speak to Shri Ram. I will request him to prevail upon Bharath to remain a householder. Bharath will surely respect Shri Ram's words. He reveres Shri Ram greatly, as much as he reveres his father. In fact, he has a greater regard for Shri Ram than for his father; therefore, Bharath will never slight Shri Ram's words." Kaikayi felt happy thinking that she had found the right solution to her problem, and then giving up all her worries, she took her food and went straight to Bharath.

"Dear son! Have you made all arrangements? Of course, the sculptors and architects of Lanka have made Ayodhya magnificent."

"Yes, mother! All arrangements have been completed. We have made thorough arrangements to receive Shri Ram and others. I have done all that is necessary. Whatever, I do for him, is but little. I will feel blessed when I see Shri Ram tomorrow, and my life will attain fulfilment!"

Bharath said looking in the direction of Lanka.

"Dear Bharath! Ram had to experience countless adversities on account of me. He had to endure many calamities.

Will Ram pardon me ? Ram is the very embodiment of all virtues. His affection and kindness are boundless. He is gentle and forgiving. I will beg for his forgiveness."

Bharath was silently listening to Kaikayi. He said nothing. He thought it was unnecessary to say anything. He did not attach much importance to this matter.

After having been silent for a while, Kaikayi, said changing the topic of the conversation;

"At what time will they arrive tomorrow ?"

"They will be here in the morning."

"Where will the fabled *Pushpak* land ?

"The *Pushpak* will land outside the Eastern gate of the city. Arrangements have been made for the landing of the *Pushpak* there."

Just at that point, the Chief Minister came to meet Bharath. He saluted Kaikayi and Bharath; and sat in a seat of state.

"Dear Emperor ! The people in the city of Ayodhya and in the other places around are in a state of great joy and jubilation. They are all looking eagerly and joyfully for the arrival of Shri Ram and others. It is as if floods of joy are flowing over the whole area. I have come from the Eastern gate of the city. The people of the city are expressing their joy and jubilation in various ways. They are making extraordinary arrangements to receive them."

The Chief Minister looked tired and worn. His face was covered with the drops of perspiration. Pausing a little, he said;

"Tomorrow will become a red-letter day in the history of Ayodhya. It will have to be written in gold letters. But my dear King ! Somehow, I am feeling unhappy. The absence of one great man at this time of joy and jubilation is causing me grief. Our joy would have known no bounds if king Dasarath were with us."

The Chief Minister's eyes welled up with tears.

"Dear Chief Minister! What is the use of thinking of that matter now? Tomorrow, Shri Ram will arrive accompanied by Vibhishan, Sugriv and Hanuman. I hope you have made all arrangements to receive them."

"Dear king. All the necessary arrangements have been made. They will be surely pleased with the kind of reception that we are going to extend to them."

After having discussed some other matters of moment with Bharath, the Chief Minister took leave of him, and went away. Kaikayi also went to her palace. Queen Kausalya was personally supervising the arrangements that were being made in the palaces meant for Shri Ram and Lakshman. She, in fact, joined the attendants in decorating those palaces. Many princesses whom Ram and Lakshman had married were also coming to Ayodhya. Queen Sumitra and Queen Suprabha were personally supervising the arrangements and decorations that were being made in the palaces meant for those princesses. The princesses were going to become the Queens of Ayodhya. The Queens Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha were immensely happy about it. Their joy knew no bounds. They could not contain themselves as they thought of this prospect.

The midnight passed. The bell rang to indicate that the midnight had passed. Yet, no one could think of sleeping. They were not in a mood to sleep. The citizens of Ayodhya were lost in a mood of elation and jubilation.

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## LXXXVII

### THE LAST NIGHT AT LANKA

“My lord ! I think we will be in Ayodhya tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, dear ! We are going to be blessed by the sight of mother Aparajita — Kausalya tomorrow morning. The people of Ayodhya will be eagerly awaiting our arrival. Our four mothers and Bharath would be awaiting our arrival with boundless enthusiasm and elation.”

At once, Sita became greatly overwhelmed with joy.

“Bharath ! He must be feeling like a fish out of water. He must have experienced great anguish in our absence. Indeed, he is a great man.” Shri Ram said looking over the city of Lanka through the window with a feeling of affection. The city of Lanka was immersed in deep sleep. Only the sky-high towers and palaces of Lanka could be seen shining resplendent in the light of the lamps burning over them. There was silence everywhere, except for the noise of the foot-steps of the guards going up and down the streets and of the occasional barking of dogs. Everywhere silence and stillness reigned supreme.

It was past midnight. Sita could not get sleep at all. She lay restless on her bed thinking of various things. Though she tried her best, she could not get a wink of sleep. She sat up on her bed. She increased the flame of the lamp and made it burn brighter. That was to be her last night at Lanka. They were leaving Lanka the next morning for Ayodhya. Countless pictures of the life of Lanka flashed before her mental eyes one after another.. Many pictures of the past



flashed before her and disappeared. She left her chamber and went to Shri Ram's chamber. He too had not been able to get sleep that night.

"Narad told us that mother Aparajita and mother Sumitra never wear fine dress; never meet anyone and that they are always grief-stricken; and that they keep weeping over the misfortune that has befallen them. They must be experiencing inordinate grief!" Sita's tender heart seemed to break on account of grief. She too wept like a helpless child.

"Narad said the same thing about mother Kaikayi also. Kaikayi has great affection for us. She never thought that Bharath would refuse the kingship and that for that reason, we would go to the forests. If she had even an inkling of those consequences, she would not have asked for the throne of Ayodhya. Well! What is the use of thinking of those things now? Those things now have become the painful dreams of the past. We are going to meet them tomorrow." Shri Ram looked towards Sita. His face was filled with great joy on account of the anticipation of going to Ayodhya. He said in a soft voice.

"Dear Queen! Our four mothers, Bharath and Shatrughna will be awake now in the expectation of meeting us. They too will be joyously anticipating our arrival. They too will be dreaming the sweet dreams of meeting us again."

"And yes! They would also be eager to know all about our life in forests."

"More than this they will be eager to meet us."

"Really?"

"Am I not right?"

"You are indeed right. You are always right!"

"Since Vibhishan sent the architects and sculptors to decorate Ayodhya and since Narad would have informed our people at Ayodhya of our arrival at Ayodhya, the whole city of Ayodhya would be talking of nothing except the news of our arriving at Ayodhya. Even common people will be talking of only this!"

“The joy and jubilation of the people of Ayodhya would be boundless.”

“Moreover they would be eager to see Vibhishan, the king of Lanka, Sugriv, the Vanara king, Hanuman, the mighty, Bhamandal, the brave and others.”

Sita was lost in sweet reveries regarding Ayodhya and the prospect of their visiting Ayodhya. Generally past experiences fascinate human beings and human beings also take delight in reminiscences. In fact, they even take delight in remembering their past unhappy experiences because this very past was once the present and in it they would have faced many unhappy experiences and agitations. Therefore, they feel a little relieved and even cheered by such reminiscences. In the same manner, human beings in their present adversity think of the prospect of a future time of happiness. These reminiscences and these contemplations of the future may not last long; may be transient and fleeting. Yet they constitute an essential part of human psychology. If the contemplations or reminiscences last longer or if they relate to unhappy events or sad aspects, they bring about distress and anguish.”

“And, yes. Narad must have informed the mothers also of this matter : “Sita has undergone a great change during these years.” As they thought of this, Sita’s white and bright face became flushed and red and soft smiles appeared on Shri Ram’s face.

“Really, when our mothers Aparajita and Sumitra see their new daughters-in-law, they will be greatly delighted.” Sita said in a soft and tender voice.

Shri Ram was silent for a while and said :

“But dear Sita ! They will also ask you countless questions about your abduction by Ravan and about the adversities you experienced in the forests and in Lanka.”

“Our mothers will also ask you to tell them how Ravan was killed in the battle-field.”

“Probably, they will not ask me about it and they may ask Lakshman to tell them about it. Not only this; they will be eager to know all about our life in the forests.”

Sita looked out through the window. Shri Ram closed his eyes and fell into deep thought. Even now a question began cropping up in Sita’s mind repeatedly, confounding her. She wondered whether she could ask him anything about that matter. She could not ask any question about it in spite of all her eagerness to know everything about it.

When she married Shri Ram, it was evident to her that she would become the future queen of Ayodhya but events came about in such a way that this expectation of hers did not come true. Her desire to become the queen of Ayodhya was still a dream. An unrealisable dream. But after Ravan was slain in the battle-field, this question arose in her mind again and again. She thought, “After we reach Ayodhya, Shri Ram will be crowned king of the country but will Bharath give up the throne? Of course, he has no desire for kingship or the throne. After the death of Ravan, Vibhishan also was unwilling to accept the kingship of Lanka and my lord prevailed upon him to accept the kingship of Lanka. My lord did not desire the kingship of Lanka. Probably, he does not desire kingship at all.”

This doubt kept worrying her. Shri Ram opened his eyes; looked towards Sita and said :

“Dear Sita ! You seem to be thinking of something deeply. Let me know what it is.”

“Dear Lord ! I am thinking of your spirit of detachment and disinterestedness.”

“I do not understand you.”

“My lord ! You do not seem to have any desire for kingship.”

“Well ! Who told you so ?”

“No one need tell me about it. It is well-known that you do not like power and prosperity. The life you are leading is it-

self a proof of this truth. How could Bharath become the king of Ayodhya ? You forced him to accept the kingship of Ayodhya. Even Vibhishan desired that you should become the emperor of Lanka but you did not accept the kingship of Lanka and crowned Vibhishan, king of Lanka.”

“Whatever has been done is right. Do you mean that I was not right in acting thus in those situations ? Don't you like the way I conducted myself in those situations ?”

“As my lord likes. What I like or dislike is not important. I desire only your love and compassion. Your love and compassion can give me heavenly felicity. Yet, I cannot help wondering at your unexampled spirit of detachment.”

“Dear Sita ! Is there any great benefit in becoming a king? Vibhishan and Bharath may be kings but they will carry out my commands always. Their administration of their kingdoms will be directly controlled by my commands. They will do nothing without my approval and consent. One should become a king only to secure welfare and prosperity to people. Is that not so ? An excellent administration is possible even if I am not the king. Narad said, “Ayodhya is prosperous under the rule of Bharath. He is always engaged in rendering service to the people and the people of Ayodhya are happy under his rule. He is the very embodiment of the spirit of detachment. When such a king is ruling over the country, where is the need for my becoming the king of the country ?”

Sita was speechless. She heard all this with stupefaction. Her worst fears came true. She fully realised that even after returning to Ayodhya her lord would not accept the kingship of Ayodhya.

But Sita was the very embodiment of lofty virtues. She was the very image of excellence. She did not really desire the status of a queen. She was greatly overwhelmed by the splendour of Shri Ram's ideals, his abounding humanity, his sublime thoughts and his elevated personality.

“My Lord ! I bow in veneration to your sublime ideals but will Bharath remain the king of Ayodhya even after our going

back to Ayodhya? Ah! Yes! You decided to leave Ayodhya and to live in forests only to see that Bharath was crowned the king of the country.”

“My dear Sita! You are right in entertaining this doubt but I will speak to Bharath. He will never disobey me. Otherwise, such thoughts about the future may be entertained.”

“My dear lord! What you say is right. It is true that even in absent-mindedness, Bharath will not disobey your words. Bharath has unexampled affection and regard for you. But we should not forget that there can be two consequences of that affection. One is that impelled by his affection for you, he may insist upon your accepting the kingship, and the other is he may carry out your orders with absolute dedication.”

Sita opened her heart to Shri Ram because she had found an opportunity to speak out her mind freely. After their return to Ayodhya, she might not find time for it.

The night had almost ended. Sita bowed to Shri Ram and returned to her chamber.

Vishalya's thoughts, agitations, and aspirations were totally different from those of Sita. Just as Sita was sleepless on that night which was to be their last night in Lanka, Vishalya also was sleepless because the goddess of sleep was playing hide-and-peek with her. Therefore in a mood of agitation, she too went to Lakshman's chamber that night. On seeing Vishalya, Lakshman sat up on his bed. He increased the flame of the light and sat on his bed.

There was silence in the room. After being silent for a while, Vishalya said :

“I wonder why I have not been able to sleep this night.”

“What wonder is there in it? I too have not been able to get a wink of sleep this night.” Lakshman said at once.

“I think this night you are thinking of Ayodhya.”

“You are right. Countless thoughts have been arising regarding Ayodhya. I am thinking of my mothers, my brother, Bharath, my father and many other things.”

“Similar thoughts have been arising in my mind also. Of course, we are going to Ayodhya this morning yet these thoughts are still worrying me. That is why, I have come to you. Are the mothers Sumitra and Aparajita as affectionate and kind as Sita?”

“Yes, dear one! The affection, the kindness, the love and the tenderness of our mothers are indescribable. Mother Kaikayi and mother Suprabha are equally affectionate. I am sure, you will be greatly overwhelmed by their affection.”

In there any woman who will rest contented with her husband's love? She also needs the affection and love of every member of the family in which she has to live. Even there if one can get the affection of one's mother-in-law, one's life would be heavenly. Of course, the love of one's husband is of primary importance. It is absolutely essential to happiness. Now, Vishalya had to go and join the vast family of Ayodhya. She had to establish affectionate and cordial relations with her mothers-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. Therefore, Vishalya's thoughts relating to this matter were natural and relevant. She had already established such a relationship with Sita, but now she had to establish cordial relations with others in the family. She had not yet seen them and so she had no idea of their propensities, likes and dislikes. She had seen in Sita not the love of a sister-in-law but that of a mother. She felt happy and satisfied only after hearing from Lakshman that her four mothers-in-law were affectionate and kind.

Another problem was worrying her: “Will my lord Lakshman always remain detached from kingship? Now, Bharath is the king of Ayodhya but after our going to Ayodhya, Shri Ram will assume kingship. What about my lord Lakshman?” Her greatest problem was that she could not mention that point to Lakshman easily but since she was a woman of intelligence and wisdom, she asked him the question.

“My lord, now Bharath is the king of Ayodhya. Is he not ?”

“Yes.”

“And after we reach Ayodhya, he will not retain the kingship even for a moment. He will surely discard kingship. Even this is true. Is it not ?”

“Yes.”

“And I think Lord Shri Ram will assume the kingship of Ayodhya.”

“I cannot say anything about it now. I am not sure of it. It is likely that Shri Ram will insist on Bharath’s continuance on the throne.”

“If Bharath does not agree to it what will happen ?”

“In that case Shri Ram himself has to ascend the throne. There can be no other way.”

“And you ?”

Vishalya failed to complete her sentence on account of hesitation.

“Me? I will always be a humble and dedicated servant at the feet of Shri Ram. His grace is all that I seek. The only aim of my life is to render service to him; to carry out his commands and to follow him at every step.” Lakshman said looking straight at Vishalya. He was silent for a while and then realising the thoughts and feelings of Vishalya, he said in a serious and dignified voice :

“My life has no other aim. I have no other ideal. Shri Ram will always take care of us. We need not worry about anything. I never desired Kingship in the past; nor will I desire it in the future. That desire can never arise in my mind. My greatest delight is to render service to him and to remain at his feet. You too must discard all your other desires and follow me in my path. You should not agitate yourself with other desires and ambitions. A peaceful mind is the proof of prosperity in life.”

Actually, Lakshman's felicity and serenity were rooted in this spirit of detachment and dedication. He desired to remain throughout his life Shri Ram's humble servant, carrying out his commands with an absolute spirit of devotion. The situation would have changed completely if he had desired kingship. Shri Ram and Lakshman would not have been such a pair; they would not have been so united and affectionate towards each other as they were. He would not have been able to render such dedicated service to Shri Ram and Sita if he had even the slightest desire for kingship, power or prosperity. When a man thinks only of attaining his selfish ends, he would not care to think of the welfare of the members of his family; he would not revere his ancestors; he would not care for the welfare of his country and of the human society at large; he would be always engaged in fulfilling his selfish ends. Such a man would totally ignore the welfare of his family and society, and would slight his *Dharma*.

Lakshman never in his life complained against the misfortunes that arose in his life. He never cared for his own selfish progress or happiness. That was why he was always in a state of absolute serenity. He revealed to Vishalya his attitude to life, his spirit of selflessness and absolute detachment. He made her realise his lofty ideals. In order to help others, he had suffered much in his life. He had experienced countless agitations and agonies; but those agitations and agonies could not really disturb his equanimity and serenity since they had been experienced for others. He was totally devoid of selfish aspirations or desires.

Lakshman's equanimity and spirit of dedication were based on a lofty truth; and that was his unexampled love and devotion for Shri Ram and Sita.

In the war against Ravan, Lakshman fell down unconscious when he was attacked by Ravan with his divine weapon, *Amoghavijaya*. There seemed to be no hope of Lakshman's revival. At that time, Shri Ram experienced inordinate anguish and wept like a child; and decided to end his life by falling into the flames of Lakshman's funeral pyre. When Lakshman came



to know of all this, his love for Shri Ram grew a thousandfold. His heart overflowed with affection and devotion for Shri Ram.

Lakshman had narrated all this to Vishalya. She had fully shared and approved of his thoughts and feelings. Would she now insist upon his accepting her suggestion? No. She never thought of doing so.

The discussion she had with Lakshman gave Vishalya, great joy. The day was about to dawn; and the time was fast approaching for their journey to Ayodhya. The bell rang from the magnificent palace of Lanka to indicate that the night had ended.

The day dawned. The goddess of the dawn appeared in the eastern horizon in all her grace and beauty. The radiant goddess came dancing from the east and led with her the flowery morning. The stir of activity appeared everywhere. The citizens of Lanka, the great heroes of the Rakshasa line, the courtiers, the ministers, the officers and the members of the Royal family gathered at the palace to bid good-bye to Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman; their honoured and beloved guests. There seemed to be an ocean of human beings rolling in front of the palace.

The *Pushpak Viman* was ready for its flight. At an auspicious time, Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman ascended the *Pushpak* accompanied by their friends. At once, the *Pushpak* rose into the sky; and began to fly towards Ayodhya. The people of Lanka bade farewell to Shri Ram and others with tearful eyes. The cries of victory issued by them began to reverberate in the skies. Gods and goddesses blew on heavenly conch-shells, at the time of their departure.

Sita's face was radiant with joy and elation since she had been released from captivity. Her joy knew no bounds. She felt as though mighty waves of joy were rising in her heart. We do not come across in any *grantha* a true description of her joy and jubilation; nor has any writer endeavoured to describe in words and to give it a local habitation and a name. And where is any need for it? It is a thing to be felt and realized; not to be read in a book.

## LXXXVIII

### THE REUNION WITH RELATIVES

A happy reunion after a long and painful separation.

The story of a reunion after a long separation !

The reunion of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman with their relatives was going to take place soon that day. The brothers were going to meet brothers; the sons were going to be reunited with their mothers and the people of Ayodhya were going to see their king after a long separation. What an extraordinary kind of reunion ! The very thought of it fills with joy and jubilation even the hearts of those who merely imagine it. The waves of joy, jubilation and expectation rose not only in the hearts of Bharat, Shatrughna or Kausalya and Sumitra but also in the hearts of Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita who were travelling towards Ayodhya. The same kind of wave of joy and jubilation was arising even in the heart of Kaikayi. The citizens of Ayodhya who had grown almost mad with their desire to see Shri Ram had decorated the mansions and the streets of the city in a fascinating manner with arches, festoons of green leaves and garlands of fragrant flowers.

How deeply Shri Ram and Lakshman were yearning to have a glimpse of their mothers and to touch their holy feet ? No one can realise this except those who have the loftiest kind of devotion and affection for their mother. Who can ever measure and describe the feelings of Bharat at this juncture ? It is not an exaggeration to say that not only Shri Ram and Lakshman or Bharath and Shatrughna but the entire city of Ayodhya was brimming with joy at the prospect of a happy reunion after a long separation. It was as though joy had assumed a visible

form and had taken its seat in the gardens, streets and mansions of Ayodhya.

A vast mass of people had gathered outside the city of Ayodhya. The swaying masses resembled the rolling waves of a vast ocean. In the midst of them all, Bharath and Shatrughna were proceeding slowly on elephants in the direction of the place where the *Pushpak* would land. The courtiers and the ministers of Ayodhya also followed Bharath and Shatrughna.

Just then, the sun arose in the east. His radiant rays brightened the whole world and made it look golden in its splendour. The sky was reverberating with the melodious cries of millions of birds. All were living in an ideal world of ineffable bliss forgetting their earthly existence. The common people who had heard many fabulous stories about the miraculous *Pushpak Viman* were eagerly awaiting its arrival. They felt that the very sight of such a *Pushpak Viman* would bring the highest fulfilment to their lives. Just at this moment, all noticed a radiant speck on the horizon and within the twinkling of an eye it grew large and appeared vast and resplendent. It was coming towards Ayodhya. The people forgetting themselves issued loud cries of victory glorifying Shri Ram and their infatuated cries of victory echoed in the skies. As the *Pushpak* came nearer and nearer, it descended lower and lower towards the earth. Watching through the window of the *Pushpak* the vast masses of people who had gathered outside Ayodhya, Sita said with elation.

“Dear Lord! Kindly see those large masses of people waiting eagerly for our arrival! See how full of joy and enthusiasm they are! And in front of them all are standing your two brothers Bharath and Shatrughna to receive you.”

Sita was overwhelmed with elation. She shed tears of joy. She was supremely happy because she was going to meet her relatives and friends. The tall elephants glanced towards the sky and stopped. Bharath and Shatrughna got ready to alight from their elephants. Just then, Shri Ram gave his command.

“Land the *Pushpak Viman* a little away from the elephants.” The pilot who was driving the *Pushpak* carried out Shri Ram’s command. The *Pushpak* came circling towards the earth slowly and landed. Thousands of soldiers encircled the area. They found it necessary to check the crowds who were rushing forth like tidal waves. As soon as the *Pushpak* landed, Shri Ram and Lakshman leaped to the ground from the *Pushpak*. Bharath and Shatrughna ran forth and fell at the feet of Shri Ram. The tears of joy were streaming from their eyes. Shri Ram lifted Bharath holding his shoulders and embraced him. Again and again he kissed Bharath’s forehead and wiped the tears in Bharath’s eyes with his upper-cloth. Shatrughna bathed Shri Ram’s feet with tears. Shri Ram embraced Shatrughna also with overflowing affection. Then Bharath and Shatrughna saluted the feet of Lakshman. Lakshman embraced Bharath and Shatrughna with his strong arms.

No one found words to speak out their feelings. All were silent. If they wanted to speak out anything, their hearts and eyes revealed their feelings and thoughts. They seemed to be conversing with their eyes. The reunion took place in silence and the reception also took place in silence. The vast masses of people experienced inordinate joy when they saw the sight of the reunion of the brothers. Sita wiped her tears with the edge of her sari.

Shri Ram accompanied by his three brothers and Sita sat again in the *Pushpak*. He ordered that the *Pushpak* should fly into the city of Ayodhya and land at the gate of the palace. The cries of joy and jubilation issued by the people reverberated in the horizons. Melodious tunes emanating from musical instruments and bands of pipers and drummers filled the air. The *Pushpak* entered Ayodhya. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman saw their native city after a long time. They were overwhelmed with delight at the sight of their native city of Ayodhya. The city of Ayodhya magnificently decorated seemed to be extending a hearty welcome to Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman.

The women and maidens who stood in thousands on the balconies of palatial mansions flung fragrant flowers and holy

grain over Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman and performed an auspicious *aarathi* to them. At the same time, they stood speechless watching the sight of the return of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman to Ayodhya. In softly uttered accents, they extended a hearty welcome to them. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman waved their hands to greet them and to accept their greetings.

But they were eager to meet their mothers. Their mothers also were eagerly awaiting their arrival. Oh! The reunion that takes place after a long and impatient waiting is indeed thrilling. It is indeed felicitous and it is indeed delightful. The *Pushpak* landed in the vast courtyard of the palace. Shri Ram, Sita, Lakshman and others alighted from the *Pushpak* and proceeded towards the palace of queen Aparajita.

As soon as they entered the palace Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita fell at the feet of mother Aparajita and bathed them with tears. Queen Aparajita bestowed her heartiest blessings upon them. Shri Ram looked into the face of his mother. Her face which was wrinkled and skinny looked withered like a dry leaf, prematurely old. She seemed to be a mere skeleton covered with skin. She had not put on any colourful garments or ornaments. Though she was the queen of a vast and mighty kingdom there was no sign in her face or in her movements, of royal splendour or the pride of power and authority. Her eyes looked gloomy and sunken and her voice was choked with emotions. Shri Ram placed his head on her feet again and again and bathed them with his tears. Having been silent for a while, he turned towards his other mothers Sumitra, Kaikayi and Suprabha and saluted their feet. They too, overwhelmed with emotions, bestowed their bounteous blessings upon them. The four brothers then sat near queen Aparajita.

Then, Sita, Vishalya and the other daughters-in-law bowed to the feet of Aparajita, Sumitra, Kaikayi and Suprabha. Queen Aparajita took Sita and Vishalya into her lap and fondled them with an inexpressible affection. She embraced them and blessed them.

The members of the royal family at Ayodhya were seeing Vishalya and the other princes now for the first time. The

princesses were greatly overwhelmed with joy at the sight of the incomparable splendour of Ayodhya, the affection and love of the members of the royal family and of the people of the city. They were amazed at the extraordinary affection shown by their mothers-in-law. They were deeply moved by the affection shown by their mothers-in-law.

Queen Aparajita's heart overflowed with affection for Lakshman. Of course, he was the son of Sumitra but Shri Ram and Lakshman were like her two eyes. The princesses sat at the feet of their mothers-in-law and Lakshman sat beside Queen Aparajita. He took her hand into his and kept looking at her eyes.

"Mother dear !" Lakshman said affectionately...

"Dear Child !" Lakshman placed his head upon Queen Aparajita's lap and began weeping like a child. The tears streamed down the cheeks of Queen Aparajita. She kept stroking the head of Lakshman with overflowing affection. Lakshman looking towards his mother, Aparajita said :

ममं वदति शिशुम्

"Mother ! How withered your face is ! How grief-stricken your face is ! Indeed, you have grown old prematurely."

"Dear son ! The days of my adversity have ended. I am supremely happy that all of you have returned to Ayodhya. The day of our happiness has dawned. This joy will surely rejuvenate me and make me young again. Your presence fills me with an indescribable joy. I feel as if you are born today; and my heart overflows with affection for you. I feel a fresh spring of joy has been surging in my heart."

"Mother ! On account of grief you have become a mere skeleton. We had almost forgotten you !" And Lakshman began to weep like a child.

"Dear son ! What a thing to say ! In the forests, you had to experience adversities at every step. You had to wander amidst pathless forests ! You had to wander without food or water for days on end. You had no shelter except the shadows of trees.

You had no place to recline or rest in those wild forests. You had to keep wandering endlessly. Yes, dear sons ! It is true that Ram and Sita could bear with all their adversities cheerfully only because of the service you rendered to them and the devotion you showed them. Though mountains of calamities fell on them, they remained calm and unshaken like rocks, whereas I lived in a palace surrounded by all comforts. I had all comforts and amenities. I lacked nothing. What worry did I have ? What grief did I experience ? Nothing, I tell you, it was nothing compared to what you suffered.” said Aparajita wiping Lakshman’s tears with the edge of her sari.

“True mother ! During our stay in the forests, while we were wandering through wild forests and even while we were fighting a terrible war, I did not think of you or my father, because Shri Ram was always by my side taking care of me showering his affection and compassion upon me; and Sita was an image of yourself always. She did not treat me like a sister-in-law. She treated me as a mother treats her son. I always saw you in Sita.”

Hearing Lakshman praising her, Sita felt a little shy and turned her face towards Sumitra. Then, she placed her head in Sumitra’s lap. Sumitra took her up and embraced her and blessed her with heartfelt affection.

“Mother ! A little carelessness on our part brought about a terrible calamity in Sita’s life but by the efficacy of your blessings and by the good wishes of our friends and relatives, we destroyed the enemy and now we have returned to Ayodhya.”

Sita was saying something in whispers to Sumitra. “My lord, Shri Ram and my dear brother-in-law, Lakshman had to face countless disasters on my account. They had to face terrible calamities. These things would not have occurred if I had not gone to the forests with them.” Sumitra interrupted her and said.

“Don’t say such inauspicious things. My sons Ram and Lakshman are invincible heroes and for your sake, they do not hesitate even to give up their lives and it is their duty.”

At this point, the old Chief Minister entered and made an entreaty to Shri Ram.

“Dear Prince ! The citizens of Ayodhya are standing in the courtyard to have a glimpse of your radiant face. Therefore kindly stand at the window so that they may see you and honour you.” Shri Ram bowed to his mothers and went out. Bharath followed him like a humble servant. On seeing Shri Ram, the people issued cries of joy and jubilation which reverberated in the skies. Some lifted their hands to salute him. Some bowed their heads and all glorified him. Shri Ram folded his hands and saluted the vast masses with heartfelt regard. The masses rolled in joy like the waves of an ocean at the sight of the full moon.

Then Shri Ram accompanied by Bharath returned to his mother’s palace. Aparajita who was in a mood of great delight was engaged in a jovial conversation with Lakshman, Sita and Vishalya. On seeing Bharath and Shri Ram, Sumitra said,

“Today the four brothers must have their food with their four mothers”. Sumitra’s suggestion was happily accepted by all, but Shri Ram’s face was a little depressed and gloomy. Shatrughna noticed it and said,

“Revered brother ! You look depressed. What are you thinking of ? Are you thinking of any serious matter ?”

“Yes dear Shatrughna ! Today our revered father is not with us. This thought made me sad.” Shri Ram’s voice was choked with grief. His eyes welled up with tears. There was silence in the atmosphere. Gloom appeared on the face of everyone. Emperor Dasharath had renounced the samsar and had become a sadhu soon after Shri Ram’s departure to forests.

Kausalya restrained her grief and said, “Come on ! Let us have food.”



## BHARATH'S DETACHMENT

A grand celebration began in the temples of Ayodhya. The gardens, the play-grounds and the streets of Ayodhya were filled with people who were carrying out colourful celebrations and jubilations to express their joy. All the leading members and officers of the various cities, towns and villages of the kingdom of Ayodhya came to meet Shri Ram. At the same time, the leading women of the city came in large numbers to have a sight of Sita, to meet her and to greet her. All were steeped in a stupor of joy.

The whole atmosphere of Ayodhya was filled with joy and jubilation but among all those thousands, there was one who was totally different from all the others. His mind was totally detached from all the others. His contemplations, his reflections and his mental churnings seemed to be out to create something new. He was watching all these celebrations and jubilations with a feeling of absolute detachment. Of course, he was carrying out his duties with a high sense of responsibility, but he did not have any feeling of pride or self-importance.

And that man was none other than Bharath, the lofty.

The supreme emperor of Ayodhya! Shri Ram's darling brother.

Two days had passed after Shri Ram's arrival at Ayodhya. The evening was enveloping the city on the second day. Bharath stood mute at the window of his balcony. Though his eyes were closed, his inner eyes ranged to the farthest horizons. His soul was yearning for the attainment of the supreme truth and for the attainment of the supreme enlightenment. He sat silent on

his seat of state and fell into deep thought. As he sat there, he lost all count of time. The evening grew completely dark. Darkness veiled the city. The atmosphere became resplendent with the light of thousands of lamps burning in the towers of the city. An attendant approached him and said in a humble voice;

“May his excellence be victorious! Dear lord! The Chief Minister desires to meet you.”

“Let him come in.”

Within a short time, the old Chief Minister entered Bharath's palace with slow and measured steps. He sat in a seat of state, after saluting Bharath. Having rested a while, he said in a soft voice.

“Dear emperor! The entire city of Ayodhya has been swaying in joy and jubilation. Everyone in the city is experiencing boundless joy.”

Bharath looked seriously towards the Chief Minister. He could see in his radiant eyes, a feeling of serenity and cheerfulness. “What you say is true, dear Chief Minister. The return of Shri Ram has filled the hearts of the people with joy and elation.”

The palaces of the queens are overflowing with waves of joy after many years of desolation. I was supremely happy when I saw the queens in that state of joy and jubilation. All these years, I was a witness to their unbearable grief and anguish.”

“Actually, mothers have regained a new life and dear Chief Minister now I am also relieved of my burden. I am now feeling absolutely relieved and peaceful.” And suddenly he became absent-minded. Sometime passed thus and then as if shocked by something, Bharath said, “Dear Chief Minister! May I mention a point?”

“Surely you may, dear king!”

“Dear Chief Minister! Kindly stop calling me king and Emperor. Now the emperor is Shri Ram and I am his humble servant.”

The Chief Minister did not say anything. He sat silent and thoughtful. He was deeply moved by the words of Bharath. Bharath's spirit of detachment, nobility and tenderness filled the Chief Minister with great joy. He said, “Blessed is the kingdom of Ayodhya. Blessed is the royal dynasty of Ayodhya and blessed are the princes of Ayodhya who are unique and unexampled in the whole world.”

“Dear Chief Minister! Are you also lost in thought? Ah! What is there to think about so deeply now? When my dear brother Shri Ram whom I revere as much as I revere my father is in Ayodhya, how can I continue to be the king of the country? From tomorrow onwards, you will have to carry out the commands of Shri Ram. I have ceased to be the king of the country.”

“Dear lord! What you say is right. Shri Ram has not yet recovered from weariness. People have been thronging the palace to meet him and to have a glimpse of his radiant face. He does not find time to eat food. When that is so. . . .”

“It does not matter. For the time being, I will carry out the administration; not as the emperor of the country but as a humble servant of Shri Ram. I will carry out my brother's commands.”

All of a sudden, Bharath's face became bleak. His accents grew dull. His voice was choked with emotion. The Chief Minister was shocked to notice all this.

Bharath's eyes were closed. His face revealed his mental agitation. The old Chief Minister rose to his feet. He embraced Bharath. He felt that Bharath's body had grown warm. He stroked Bharath with his tender hands and tried to cheer him up. “Dear king! I am unable to bear to see the sight of your agitation.” The Chief Minister's eyes welled up with tears. His voice shook with an overpowering emotion.

A little later, Bharath opened his eyes. He kept looking towards the sky with fixed eyes. After having recovered his mental peace a little, he turned towards the Chief Minister and said.

“Dear Chief Minister ! Please sit down.”

The Chief Minister did not say anything. He sat silent and Bharath said in a serious voice.

“Now, I do not want to remain in the samsar. I do not like the bondages of wealth, power and royal splendour. I always hear my father's voice calling me. Dear Chief Minister! I am surely going to follow the path chosen by my father. I will follow my father's foot-steps and attain spiritual elevation.”

The Chief Minister's eyes grew moist. He became grief-stricken. His face was clouded with sorrow. The Chief Minister loved Bharath not merely as the king of Ayodhya; but as the dear son of King Dasarath and as the very embodiment of lofty virtues. He was fully familiar with Bharath's spirit of detachment though Bharath was a king, inwardly he was a *Yogi*. Though he lived in a magnificent palace and though he lived in the midst of imperial splendour he remained totally detached. The Chief Minister had known Bharath from his childhood; and had closely observed his thoughts, feelings and propensities. After Shri Ram's departure to the forests, he had not heard at any time Bharath speak of his desire to renounce the samsar; nor had Bharath given expression to his spirit of renunciation. But on that day, Bharath was giving a clear and emphatic expression to his spirit of renunciation. So, the Chief Minister shuddered with fear on hearing Bharath's words.

“Dear king ! Will you kindly grant an entreaty of mine ? Please do not speak of this point at any time, in Shri Ram's presence. Don't you know the nature of your brother, Shri Ram ? If he hears this from you, his heart will break with grief. The jubilations will turn into lamentations; and a commotion will arise throughout Ayodhya.”

Bharath was silent. He had nothing to say at that time. But when the heart and mind of man become united, he can

conceal nothing from others. When the intellect and the emotion fuse into one, they cannot remain strangers to each other. The innate thoughts of a man cannot remain ignorant of one another. Bharath had great regard for the Chief Minister but more than that he loved him as his father; therefore, he could not conceal his thoughts from him.

“Dear Chief Minister ! Even if I accept your suggestion and refrain from speaking out my mind now, my feelings cannot be concealed from him for ever. Whenever I may tell my brother about my spirit of renunciation, he will surely experience great grief and anguish because he has great affection for me. Affection and attachment always bring anguish. They always steep human beings in grief. It is only the bondage of attachments that compels the soul to remain in the samsar. I have no attachment for any person or object in the samsar. When that is so what is the use of my remaining in the samsar ? All these years I have been the king of Ayodhya and have been remaining in the samsar, only because of my obedience to the commands of Shri Ram. Otherwise, I would have followed the path of *Sadhu-dharma* chosen by my father and I would have been carrying out endeavours to attain spiritual perfection.”

The Chief Minister was listening, with a bowed head, to the words of Bharath which revealed his overmastering spirit of renunciation. During the past two days, Bharath had not sat calmly in the company of Shri Ram and Lakshman; and had not carried out with them any discussion or consultation. How could he have such peace of mind ? How could he meet them and have a calm and leisurely conversation ? Large crowds of people kept coming to meet and greet Shri Ram and Lakshman. Shri Ram was engaged always in meeting visitors; in receiving them; in conversing with them and in receiving their compliments and tributes. Lakshman also was not free. The four mothers always surrounded him and he had to narrate to them stories relating to the life he, Shri Ram and Sita had led in forests. Shri Ram never thought that Bharath was thus yearning for a life of spiritual endeavours and that he was determined to become a *Sadhu*. Amidst all those celebrations and jubila-

tions, there was only one who knew what Bharath was thinking of, and that was Kaikayi. She was fully familiar with the thoughts and feelings of Bharath; yet she kept silently watching everything. Even her inner soul was yearning for a life of spiritual endeavours.

The first phase of the night had passed. There was silence everywhere. Breaking the silence, Bharath said, "Dear Chief Minister! Now you kindly go home and take rest. The second phase of the night has begun. To-morrow, we shall talk about these matters."

"Dear lord! You too take rest. For some days past, you have been working restlessly."

"Rest? . . . . Rest for me? . . . . I have not known rest and peace for countless *Janmas*. When I think of my countless wanderings through the *samsar* a shudder runs through me, filling me with fear to the brims of my being; and the desire for deliverance rises like a tidal wave overwhelming all other considerations. Dear Chief Minister, can there be any rest or peace except in *Moksha*? Where can we experience peace and felicity except in spiritual perfection?"

Suddenly, Bharath became silent. The Chief Minister was thinking of something deeply. Just then, an attendant came and announced. "Dear lord! *Aryaputra* Shri Ram is coming to meet you."

Bharath, at once, got up; and hurried to the door, of his chamber. The Chief Minister also followed him in silence. Shri Ram arrived at the door of the chamber. Bharath went forward; and saluted his feet. The Chief Minister bowed to Shri Ram. Shri Ram embraced Bharath; and entered the chamber. The Chief Minister bowed to them; and sought their leave to return home. Shri Ram sat on a seat of State. Bharath sat at his feet on the ground.

"Dear brother! You have come at such a late hour as this!"

"I did not see you throughout the day. I was not able to see you. You were not also to be seen; so I have come to see you."

“Revered brother ! If you had sent me word I would myself have called upon you. A command would have been enough.”

“Such formalities would have taken time.”

Shri Ram took Bharath into his lap and stroked his head with affection. His heart overflowed with affection for Bharath.

“Bharath ! How are you ?”

“Revered brother ! I have seen you. I have attained the loftiest kind of joy by saluting your feet. The very sight of your sublime feet has freed me from all agitations and agonies.”

“I felt supremely happy and pleased when I heard from the people that you ruled over the country with nobility, ability and equanimity. I was overwhelmed with delight when I heard our people admire your unexampled virtues. Indeed, you have earned the love and adoration of people. Dear brother ! You have won a permanent place in their hearts.”

“Revered brother ! All this is the result of the blessings of Lord Arihant. But what am I but a mean mortal; a child crying in the night for the light. Moreover, all that is the result of the grace of our revered father and of your benign blessings. And I do not deserve any praise.”

Shri Ram was silently looking towards the sky as if he was trying to probe the mysteries beyond the visible frame of things. The polite words of Bharath moved him greatly.

“Dear brother ! I revere you as my father. In order to fulfil our father's promise you went to the forests and experienced countless adversities and calamities. You fought a terrible war against Ravan and faced many perils and disasters and you endured all those disasters with bewildering, super-human patience and serenity. Compared to all those things what I have done is nothing. When I heard from Bhamandal the story of your life in the forests, my heart was torn with grief. Verily, the story of all the sorrows you endured in the forests filled me with grief. I was stupefied to hear all those things. When you were experiencing all those calamities, I was living in a palace

surrounded by countless comforts and luxuries. When you were experiencing anguish, I was here enjoying peace and prosperity. You had to wander through wild forests and you had to spend time in caves and mountains. What other adversity can we ever think of?" Saying this Bharath began to weep, like a child.

Bharath could not contain his overpowering grief. His patience had broken its bounds. He continued to weep like a helpless child. His voice was choked with tears. Shri Ram said trying to console him;

"Dear brother! Were you really in a palace surrounded by royal splendour? You physically lived in Ayodhya; but your heart and soul were always with us sharing all our hardships and agonies. Your body remained here; but your heart and soul followed us in our wanderings through the forests."

Then the two brothers were silent for a while. It is hard to say how long they kept conversing with each other in the mysterious language of muted silence. Bharath's anxious soul seemed to be begging for peace supreme.

"Revered brother! Now, kindly release me from your command; and take over the responsibility of the administration of the kingdom."

"Do not say such inauspicious things. You must continue to rule over our kingdom."

"Revered brother! That is impossible. Now, I can only be your humble servant. Kindly release me from bondage."

"Bharath! You have been witnessing how Lakshman and I have been flooded with visitors. Yes. I will be ruling over the kingdom through you. I am in you; and Lakshman is in you; and so when you are seated on the royal throne, it is as good as our sitting on it. When you are ruling over our country, it is as good as our ruling over the country. Please do not take up this matter again."



It was past midnight. Silence and stillness reigned supreme everywhere. Bharath accompanied Shri Ram upto his chamber. Then he offered a prayer to his gods, and went to bed; but he could not get a wink of sleep. It was as if the goddess of sleep had turned hostile towards him.

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## ATTACHMENT AND DETACHMENT

The celebrations and jubilations were over. The crowds of visitors began to abate. The people of Ayodhya became again immersed in their routine activities. The administration was being carried out by Bharath. Peace, prosperity and felicity prevailed everywhere. But Bharath was impatiently looking for a suitable time when he could openly declare his decision to renounce the *samsar*. Till now, he had not been able to reveal this decision of his to Shri Ram. One day, hardening his heart a little, he approached Shri Ram with the desire of placing his decision before him.

At that time, Shri Ram sat conversing with Lakshman. They were conversing about a serious and important matter. Just then, Bharath entered. Shri Ram, a little surprised by Bharath's unexpected visit, said looking straight at him.

"Come in, dear Bharath! We were talking about you. Our people have achieved great prosperity and progress under your able rule. The people of our kingdom have achieved extraordinary progress on account of your guidance and direction. They have achieved great progress."

"Dear brother, Bharath! What our brother Shri Ram has said is absolutely true. The ministers and the people of Ayodhya are full of admiration for your ability and vision," said Lakshman endorsing Shri Ram's opinion.

But Bharath! He stood silent, with his head bowed in deep veneration. His eyes were fixed on the ground. It was evident that he was lost in some deep thought and that he was trying hard to say something relating to his innermost thoughts. He

found it difficult to give expression to his agitation, anguish and his innermost thoughts. It was also clear that he was experiencing some deep conflict.

Shri Ram rather shocked by his muted silence and grief-stricken face, said,

“Dear Bharath ! I hope you are well. I hope nothing is the matter. Has any inauspicious thing occurred ? Why are you so gloomy and grief-stricken ? Why is your face so bleak and blighted ?

“Oh you revered one ! The happiness of the body is transient. Joy and sorrow constitute a conflict. When I contemplate on the cosmos, life appears unreal like a dream.”

When Bharath began to speak, Shri Ram and Lakshman heard his words with a natural shock; and kept looking at him with amazement. They soon realized the meaning of his words; Bharath said in a humble voice.

“Revered brother ! Kindly remember that day on which our father called us to his side; and informed us of his decision to renounce the *samsar*. At that time, I too expressed my desire to become a *Sadhu* and to renounce worldly life. But owing to my misfortune, I could not follow our father on the path chosen by him. I could not renounce the *samsar* at that time since I had to carry out your command. I could not oppose your command; and your command compelled me to remain in the palace surrounded by royal splendour. I have been taking care of the throne and its imperial honour. I have been functioning only as your humble servant carrying out your commands. But now I am feeling restless. The bounds of my patience have given way. Now, my soul is desiring deeply . . . . . yearning for deliverance from these bondages.”

Shri Ram heard Bharath's words calmly with closed eyes. Lakshman was trying to realize the inner meaning of every word uttered by Bharath. Bharath placed his head on Shri Ram's feet; and said :

“Oh you adorable one! Kindly permit me to become a *Shraman*; to become a *Muni* and to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. I desire to discard this power and royal splendour and to spend my days in forests, in mountain-caves and in valleys and to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. Kindly permit me to engage myself in spiritual austerities and to attain felicity in this life and in the other world.”

“Dear Lord! The time has come for my relinquishing my responsibilities as the king of Ayodhya. I do not want to delay even a moment, I do not have any attachment for worldly life. In fact, worldly life fills me with agitation and fear. Kindly, release me from these agitations and bondages.”

The tears flowed from Shri Ram's eyes, naturally. His heart was filled with grief. Placing his hand over Bharath's head, he said :

“Dear brother! Why do you speak of these inauspicious things? We came to Ayodhya only because we were drawn here by the bondage of your affection for us. You are all in all, for us. We shudder at the very thought of your leaving Ayodhya. Your inauspicious words break our hearts. All this belongs to you. We too belong to you. Therefore, realise your duty and continue to rule over our Kingdom. Please continue to rule over the kingdom and stop speaking of renunciation.”

Lakshman's heart was filled with grief when he heard the words of Bharath. But he found it difficult to say anything since his voice was choked with grief. His voice was muted by grief and shock. He was dumb-struck. Shri Ram's words had no effect on Bharath. He remained firm in his resolution. Now came upon him, his deep yearning for the sweet, solemn tryst that the spirit keeps. He remained stolid like a rock, in his determination. After sometime, he said;

“Revered brother! I have placed before you my innate aspiration. You are venerable like my father; and at all times, it is my foremost duty to obey you. Be gracious and do not place any impediments on my path. This is my humble appeal to you.”

“Bharath ! Do not be in a hurry. There is still time for such a thing. Please think well about the matter. Realize your duty. If you leave Ayodhya and go away from us, how can we bear with the separation from you ? How can Lakshman, our mothers and the people of Ayodhya bear with the separation from you ? Please imagine how deeply they would be grieved. Dear brother ! Do not think of going away leaving us in grief and anguish. You always remain with us and continue to carry out my orders as you have been doing all these days.”

But Bharath was not prepared to budge even an inch. He remained firm. His determination was adamant. For some-time, he kept looking into the sky; and then said :

“Revered brother ! I have been thinking deeply about this matter for many days. I have contemplated on these things deeply. I thought deeply about the various *janmas* of my past. I thought deeply about the present, the past and the future. I have realized that every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning. Now, I entreat you to release me from these bondages. I am now absolutely incapable of carrying out your commands. Kindly pardon me. Kindly pardon my rudeness and impertinence. Kindly pardon my unrestrained utterances. Kindly pardon my insolence; and permit me to follow the path of spiritual elevation shown by the Paramatma and chosen by our father. My life can attain fulfilment only if I follow that path.”

“Bharath ! Give up your obstinacy. If you do not like to carry out the administration, you need not shoulder that burden. We will carry out the administration; but never speak of leaving us.”

Bharath fell into deep thought. He began to think. “My brother will not give his consent to my entreaty. Hence, I will have to remain in the *samsar* though my heart will not be in it. Instead of this, if he...” and at once, Bharath stood up. He saluted the feet of Shri Ram, bowed to Lakshman and before they could think of anything he went away. Lakshman realized Bharath’s thoughts and feelings. He, at once stoop up; and held Bharath in his embrace.

“Bharath ! I will not allow you to go away from us. Is it proper on your part to go away thus without the consent of our brother, Shri Ram who is as venerable as our father ?” He could say this with great difficulty; and then his face turned bleak. His heart was filled with grief; and his eyes welled up with tears.

The attendants standing behind the doors overheard this conversation that took place among the three brothers. All were shocked to hear about Bharath's determination to renounce the *samsar*. Their anguish knew no bounds. They at once ran to Sita. At that time, Sita was in her palace, in the company of Vishalya and the other queens.

“Dear Queen ! King Bharath has suddenly declared his determination to renounce the *samsar*. Our noble lord Shri Ram tried his best to dissuade him from carrying out his determination. Lakshman also tried his best to change Bharath's mind but king Bharath is adamant and unyielding. He is determined to carry out his decision.” The attendants could say only so much. Their voices were choked with grief. Sita was stunned to hear this. The other queens were stupefied and looked like stone-images muted with shock and grief as if thunder-struck by the news. The atmosphere which was cheerful and jubilant a little while ago became gloomy and sorrowful. All were overwhelmed with grief.

“Are you really speaking the truth ? Is Bharath determined to become a Shraman ?” Sita shuddered with grief and agitation.

“Yes, dear Queen ! He was about to set off but Lakshman held him with his strong arms and prevented him from going away.” Shri Ram sat in stupefied silence, overwhelmed with grief. Lakshman stood like a stone-image, petrified by Bharath's determination.

In consequence, Sita, Vishalya and the other queens at once hurried to Shri Ram's chamber. Silence reigned supreme in the chamber. Shri Ram and Lakshman were standing silent. The queens surrounded Bharath. They showed their determination to prevent him from becoming a *Shraman*.

“Dear Bharath ! If you desire to become a *Shraman*, and if you are determined to pursue the path of *Charitradharma*, you must surely carry out your determination but before doing so, you must comply with an entreaty of ours. Ah ! You should not try to fool us. Will you grant one wish of ours ?” Vishalya said looking seriously towards Bharath. But Bharath did not take much time to look through the words of his sisters-in-law. He could realise that they were adopting some clever plan. So, he stood silent without giving any reply. He did not even look towards them; he merely stood with a bowed head.

“Bharath ! You may take recourse to silence but we will not allow you to move a step from here until you agree to grant our wish. Even if the sun rises in the west, we will not allow you to move an inch. Our wish is that you must play water-sports with us once. That is all, we wish. Won't you give us that joy ?” Vishalya said holding Bharath's hand and shaking him violently. Suddenly, there appeared smiles on Bharath's face. His sisters-in-law deemed this his consent and felt elated by their tremendous victory.

Bharath decided to take part in water-sports with his sisters-in-law and leaped into a lake of pellucid waters. His sisters-in-law had impelled him to play water-sports with them. Shri Ram and Lakshman felt relieved. They gave up their worry. They thought : “After sometime, Bharath will surely forget his desire to become a *Shraman*.” But Bharath had carried out the administration of the country and had lived in a palace surrounded by royal splendour for several years untouched by them. He had remained totally detached. Power, prosperity and splendour had not fascinated him. Would such a man develop attachment for *samsar* merely by participating in water-sports ? Vishalya and the other queens were greatly delighted and played water-sports with Bharath. They also employed some clever devices to inspire in his heart sensual feelings and to remove from his mind, his desire to become a *Sadhu*.

The water-sports were over. Bharath came out of the lake and stood on the bank.

But he was even now the image of detachment. His determination remained unshaken. The clever guiles adopted by his sisters-in-law had totally failed.

Meanwhile, a tragic event occurred in the palace. The mighty elephant *Bhuvanankar* which Shri Ram had brought with him, from Lanka, had suddenly grown inebriate; had broken loose and was creating a terrible commotion and disturbance. A mighty commotion appeared throughout the city. The intoxicated elephant dashed down to pieces whatever, it found on the way and with a dreadful speed, it ran up to the banks of the lake.

Bharath was standing on the bank. He noticed the elephant, which was rushing up furiously. The elephant also saw him and then a miracle occurred. As if mesmerised by some mysterious force the elephant stood still and calm paralysed by a force beyond its might. Its intoxication disappeared.

"Bhuvanankar broke loose and has run towards the lake!" Hearing this news, Shri Ram and Lakshman ran after the elephant and when they saw the sight on the bank of the lake they stood stupefied. They were unable to understand how the elephant could thus become calm and tame at the very sight of Bharath.

Shri Ram, Lakshman and Bharath returned to the palace. The news that Bharath was determined to renounce the *samsara* and that the very sight of Bharath had rendered an intoxicated elephant calm and tame spread like wildfire throughout Ayodhya.

As soon as the princes entered the palace the guard who was taking care of the garden outside the city brought some auspicious news. Bharath's heart bloomed into bliss on hearing the news.



## XCI

### THE CIRCUITOUS WANDERINGS THROUGH COUNTLESS JANMAS

“My Lord! A great muni of outstanding spiritual attainments has arrived in our garden.” The guard said in a humble voice bowing his head to Shri Ram. Shri Ram was greatly delighted to hear this news. He gave a precious gift to the guard and proceeded to the garden accompanied by all the members of the royal family.

The members of the royal family were greatly delighted when they saw the *Kevaljnani*, Deshabhushan muni and Kulu-bhushan muni. All saluted the feet of the munis and sat before them on the ground with overflowing devotion.

After the discourse ended, Shri Ram said, “O you enlightened one! I am eager to know a point. May I tell you what I desire to know? May I ask for a clarification of a doubt I have in my mind.”

“Dear king! You may surely tell me what you desire to know. You may ask your question. I will try to answer it.”

“Oh you enlightened one! My elephant *Bhuvanankar* became intoxicated, broke loose and began dashing down everything. Terrified by the violence and the destruction it was causing, the people of Ayodhya ran helter-skelter, imploring succour. They ran about crying. “Oh! Save us from the fury of the elephant! Protect us!” Nobody could stop it or control it. The *mahouts* moved heaven and earth to restrain it, but all their efforts failed. But the same elephant which was thus rushing about in mad fury dashing down everything, became calm and

tame as soon as it saw Bharath. Its intoxication disappeared in a moment. Revered lord! I have not been able to realize the mystery behind this amazing event. How did the elephant become calm so suddenly on seeing Bharath? This question has been puzzling my mind. How did the elephant become calm on seeing Bharath. Is there any relationship of an earlier *janma* between the two?"

The muni was silent for a while; and then he began to narrate a story in order to answer Shri Ram's question. "When the originator of the Dharma, Bhagwan Rishabhdev renounced the *samsar*; and became a *Shraman*, four thousand other kings also renounced the *samsar* and became *Shramans* following his example; and they began to travel on foot with the Lord.

The Bhagwan had been carrying out a vow of silence. The common people did not have a mind to render help to others. No one was willing to give anything. The Bhagwan was the first *Bikshu* (mendicant) in the world. For a year, he could get no *Biksha* (food) but he did not mind it. The four thousand other mendicants who were with him began to experience inordinate agitation and grief for not having been able to secure food. The result was that the four thousand mendicants left the company of the Bhagwan; and went away into the forests on the banks of the Ganga; and they began to live there. They ate the fruits available in the forests; and spent their time in reciting the name of the Bhagwan. The wheel of time was thus revolving.

There were two princes among them by name Chandroday; and Suryoday. In course of time, they died. They kept wandering through the mazes of the cycle of birth and death. After his death, Chandroday was born in Gajpur as the son of Harimati, the king of Gajpur; and Queen Chandralekha. He was named Kulankar. Suryoday also was born in Gajpur. He was born in a brahmin family. His father was Vishwabhuti. He was named Shrutirati.

In course of time, the prince became the king of the country; and the brahmin boy became the court-priest. There naturally

arose an intimate friendship between the two. They had been brothers in their earlier *janma*.

This event occurred one day. King Kulankar was proceeding to the *ashram* of a sage. On the way, he happened to meet a Muni by name Abhinandan who possessed *Avadhijan* (or extrasensory perception). He, addressing the king, said in a serious voice;

“Oh king! You are now going to the *ashram* of a Yogi who has been carrying out the ritual of *Panchagni*. There is a collection of fire-wood in his *ashram* meant to be used for sacrificial burning. In that lot, there is a large log of wood, in which a snake is dwelling. That snake is none other than your late grand-father, King Kshemankar. You split that; and save the life of that snake.”

The king was greatly agitated on hearing the holy words of the Muni. He, at once, hurried to the *ashram*. He saw there a heap of dry sticks collected to be used for the sacrifice of *Panchagni*. A Yogi was absorbed in carrying out the ritual of *Panchagni*. A large log of wood also lay there. The other *Tapasis* of the *ashram* came forward and received the king, cordially; and offered him a seat. The king took his seat; and asked the *Tapasis* to split the log carefully and to save the life of the snake that dwelt in it. The *Tapasis* were greatly astonished to hear this. At once, they carefully split the log of wood; and a large snake crept out of it.

This incident produced a deep impression on the mind of the king. He began to think. “If the great Muni had not revealed to me the secret of the presence of my grand-father in the log, in the form of a cobra, a great calamity would have occurred. It would have been burnt in the sacrificial fires. How all seeing the Muni is! What an extraordinary kind of power of *seeing* does the Muni possess! He possesses a divine sight. He could see the cobra in the log from there! How ignorant these *Tapasis* are!” The king lost all his attachments for the *samsar*. He developed a spirit of renunciation. He at once, went to Muni Abhinandan with the determination of receiving the *Deeksha* of the *Samyamdharm*.

The news of the king's decision to become a *Shrāman* spread like wildfire everywhere. Everyone who heard of it was stupefied. When Shrutirati heard about it, he, at once, went to the king; and said;

"Dear king! This life is not meant to be lost thus in the pursuit of *Charitradharma*. Moreover, this is not also in conformity with the *Vaidikdharma*. Therefore, do not be in a haste. Do not be impatient. If you are so greatly bent upon adopting the *Sadhudharma*, you may do so in your old age. Shrutirati's advice shook the king's determination. He fell into a strange conflict. "Now, what is to be done?" The king fell into a deep dilemma.

Another unhappy event also occurred at the same time. The Queen had become intimate with a priest in the court and when the two lovers came to know that the king had decided to renounce the *samsar* and to adopt the *Sadhudharma* they felt greatly delighted. Their elation knew no bounds because they could carry on their amorous activities, unimpeded. But Shrutirati's persuasions had shaken the king's determination to follow the path of the *Samyamdharmā*. When the Queen Shridhama came to know of it a serious fear began preying upon her mind. "Has the king come to know of my illicit intimacy with the priest?"

Therefore, as soon as she got an opportunity to meet her lover privately, she said to him in secret: "Dear, I fear; no, I am sure that the king has somehow come to know of our intimacy. Therefore even before he plans to kill us or to punish us openly, I will manage to make an end of him. Why should I not do so?"

Accordingly, she one day mixed a dreadful kind of poison with the food that was served to her husband. The king, totally unaware of this heinous action of the queen, ate the poisoned food and died. Sometime later, Shrutimati also died.

Thus, the two brothers kept wandering through the circuitous mazes of the *samsar*, passing through the confounding cycle of births and deaths.

In one *janma* the two brothers were born in the city of Rajgrihi as twins to a Brahmin-couple named Kapil and Savithri. One was named Vinod and the other, Raman.

In course of time, the two brothers reached the phase of youth. Raman went out wandering with a hungry heart seeking knowledge; and after having attained his objective of acquiring scholarship, he returned home many years later; but when he reached his native city of Rajgrihi it was evening. Therefore, thinking it inauspicious to enter the city at such a time, he went to a temple to take rest for the night.

Vinod was Raman's twin brother. Vinod's wife was Shakha. She had developed intimacy with a Brahmin by name Datta. The two lovers used to spend some nights in that very temple secretly, as decided upon by them mutually. On that night also, Shakha came to the temple to meet her lover. When, on that night Shakha left the house, unexpectedly Vinod's sleep was disturbed by a rattling sound. At once, he got up and noticed his wife stealthily creeping out of the house. Unable to understand why she was thus going away stealthily, he took up his sword and followed her into the temple.

On that night, on account of some unexpected circumstances her lover Datta had not been able to come to that temple. Thinking that Raman who lay their resting was her lover, she woke him up. The temple was pitch-dark inside. Nothing was visible in the darkness. Therefore, thinking that Raman who lay there was her lover, Shakha woke him up and embraced him passionately. Just at that point, Vinod came there infuriated. At once blinded by anger he cut off the head of Raman. Shakha, at once took up Raman's sword and cut off the head of her husband, Vinod. Thus, having murdered her husband, greatly terrified by the occurrence, Shakha ran away into a forest. Vinod and Raman happened to die at the same time.

Thus the two brothers went on taking birth and dying and thus passed through various *Janmas*.

After many *janmas*, Vinod was again born as a human being. He was born as the son of a wealthy merchant and he was

named Dhan. In the same manner Raman also having wandered through the wilderness of birth and death was born as a human being. He too was born in the family of the merchant Dhan and was named Bhushan. In one of their earlier lives, they were brothers; in one they were friends and in this *janma* they were father and son.

The merchant, Dhan possessed enormous wealth; and Bhushan was his only son. In consequence, he was brought up with great love and affection. The father had inordinate affection for his son and the son also had extraordinary love and regard for his father. The merchant Dhan selected thirty two damsels of outstanding beauty, virtues and purity for his son. They were incomparable in beauty of form and in beauty of character. Each seemed to excel the others in nature and features. Bhushan, as desired by his father married the thirty two damsels.

One night, Bhushan, after having spent a long time in amorous sports with his wives, went to sleep. It was the last phase of the night. There was silence everywhere. The whole city was enveloped in darkness but for the gleaming light of the street lights. There was no noise except that of the heavy footsteps of the guards going up and down the streets slowly. Suddenly, Bhushan's sleep was disturbed. At a place, situated at a great distance from the city a great muni by name Shridhar had attained *Kevaljnan*. On account of that reason, a large number of heavenly beings had come down to earth to celebrate the event of the attainment of *Kevaljnan* by the muni. Bhushan's sleep was disturbed by the noise of their celebrations and jubiliations. At once, he woke up his wives and told them to get ready for a travel. Then he and his wives set off to participate in the magnificent celebrations. While he was thus proceeding to meet the great muni, with his heart and mind brimming with lofty contemplations, on the way, he was bitten by a terrible cobra. Bitten by the cobra Bhushan at once collapsed to the ground and died. His wives shocked by the disaster began to lament loudly. The lamentations of the women and their attendants were heart-rending. Two of the attendants ran home and brought the merchant Dhan to that place. The merchant

Dhan was shocked and grief-stricken when he saw Bhushan thus lying on the ground and began to weep like a helpless child. Doctors and magicians were brought to free Bhushan of the effects of the mortal venom. Though the doctors and magicians tried all their methods, Bhushan could not recover his consciousness. He did not regain his life. All the efforts made by Dhan were in vain.

It is said that the man who dies while carrying out a noble task and while engaged in sublime contemplations attains spiritual elevation and that he attains a sublime state of existence. This happened in the case of Bhushan. After his death Bhushan was born as a human being. He was born as the son of king Achal and Queen Harini of Ratnapur. He was named Priyadarshan. He easily became the apple of everyone's eyes but there appeared the spirit of renunciation in Priyadarshan even at his birth. Therefore he had no attachment for royal splendour, wealth or worldly prosperities. Day by day, he felt magnetically drawn towards spiritual austerities. In course of time when he stepped on the threshold of youth there arose in his heart a desire to pursue the path of *Charitradharma*. On account of the impulsion of his inherited spiritual excellence he informed his father and mother of his desire but on account of their affection for him they did not give their consent to his desire to become a Sadhu. On the contrary, they celebrated his marriage with three thousand princesses. On account of the compulsion of his father and mother, he married and fell into the bondage of worldly existence but his soul was always alert and awake. He led the life of a householder for sixty four thousand years during which period he carried out various kinds of external and internal austerities and then died in the state of *samadhi* (a state of spiritual ecstasy) and was born as a heavenly being in the *Brahmadevalok*.

The merchant Dhan continued to lament over his bereavement for years and then passed away. After his death he passed through many *janmas* and then was born in one *janma* in a brahmin family in a city called Potanpur. He was named Mridumathi. When he grew up to be a young man he became haughty, insolent and wicked. In consequence, his father turned him out

of his house and he began to wander about aimlessly. At any rate, in course of time he attained mastery over all arts and accomplishments. That first rate villain. . . . wicked fellow. . . returned home after a long time.

Mridumathi became an invincible gambler in Potanpur. Earning a lot by gambling he amassed a large fortune and began to live in splendour. But since he earned lots of money by wicked means he fell an easy victim to many vices. He became infatuated with a prostitute of Potanpur and began spending his days and nights in her brothel. For a long time he continued to enjoy sensual delights in her company but by some good fortune his soul woke up and he became spiritually aware and began to contemplate on the soul. The contemplations relating to the world and the other world brought about an awakening in him. His soul became brightened by the blissful light of his spiritual contemplations. Just as a snake discards its slough he discarded his sensuality and became an austere Shraman; died in Samadhi and attained birth as a heavenly being in the Brahmadevalok.

After completing the span of his life in the *Brahmadevalok*, he took birth as a mighty elephant on the Vaithadhya mountain. Dear Ram ! That elephant is the Bhuvanankar.

And Priyadarshan, after ending his existence in the Brahmadevalok was born as your brother Bharath in the Ikshvaku dynasty."

Shri Ram's eagerness ended when he heard this story narrated by the great muni. Bharath's spiritual contentment knew no bounds. After he heard the story of his earlier lives, his spirit of renunciation began surging in his heart like a mighty fountain. He at once got up from his place and prostrated to the feet of Deshabhushan muni. Overwhelmed with emotion, he said, "Revered Lord ! Be so gracious as to help me cross the ocean of samsar. Kindly lift me out of the morass of worldly life. I do not desire to remain in the cycle of birth and death and I do not have any attachments for the objects of samsar."

Shri Ram's eyes naturally welled up with tears. Sita, Vishalya and the other princesses were filled with grief. Their



sighs and sobs filled the atmosphere. Shri Ram embraced Bharath and said in a voice choked with emotion.

“Dear Bharath! Now, I do not want to place any impediments on your path. I give my heartiest consent to your desire of pursuing the path of *Samyamdharmā*. I do not want to compel you to remain in the confounding bondages of worldly attachments and transient pleasures. I am unable to see your sorrow. Now, discard all worries and make the necessary preparations to proceed on the path chosen by you. Moreover, I entreat the great and enlightened Acharyadev to remain at Ayodhya until the ceremony of your initiation into the *Sadhudharma* is completed.”

After having rendered due honour and service to the great muni, Shri Ram returned home with the members of the royal family. Then he met Mother Aparajita and informed her of Bharath's determination to pursue the *Charitradharma*. On hearing this, Queen Aparajita felt thunder-struck. She sat petrified like a stone-image. With great difficulty, she restrained her overpowering emotions of grief and anguish and said in a shivering voice :

“Dear child Bharath! How can I give my consent to your becoming a Sadhu? But at the same time, I do not also like to place any impediments on the path of *moksha* you have chosen to pursue. May you live long! My heartiest aspiration is that your pursuit of the *Charitradharma* must be unimpeded and unaffected!”

And Queen Aparajita's grief flowed out in the form of ceaseless streams of tears. Shri Ram sobbed and sighed like a child. Just then Kaikayi, Sumitra and Suprabha came there. They came to know that Bharath was taking to the life of a Shraman.

### TOWARDS THE PATH OF SAMYAM

Shri Ram had already given orders to the Chief Minister to make the necessary arrangements for the initiation ceremony. Invitations were sent to Vibhishan, Sugriv, Viradh, Bhamandal, Nal, Neel, Ratnajati and Hanuman to attend the initiation ceremony. Invitations were also sent to all the kings and potentates whom Shri Ram had met during his wanderings in the forest.

The night had already enveloped the earth. Darkness had spread everywhere. Silence and stillness reigned supreme in the atmosphere. The silent and desolate streets of Ayodhya looked bleak, despite the gleaming light of the street lights. Though the night had far advanced, the people of the city could not get sleep. No one in the city could get a wink of sleep. The same was the situation in the royal family, in the palace. Though it was midnight all were awake. No trace of joy was visible anywhere.

The palace of Queen Kaikayi was of course, resplendent with the lights of the lamps decked with precious stones. Kaikayi sat on her cot which sparkled with the radiance of countless gems studded to it. Bharath sat on a throne just opposite to her. For several hours, the mother and the son were engaged in a serious conversation. After having secured the consent of Shri Ram and Queen Aparajita to pursue the path of *Charitradharma*, he had found it essential to secure his mother's consent. Kaikayi was experiencing at the same time, the contrary and conflicting emotions of distress and delight. She was listening to Bharath with a serene mind but now and then overcome with her affection for him, she became agitated. She said :

“Dear Bharath! If you adopt the path of *Charitradharma*, I too will follow you on that path.” Kaikayi made this unexpected declaration in the course of the conversation.

“What do you say mother? Do you mean that you too will follow the path of *Charitradharma*? Do you really mean it?” At once, Bharath stood up from his seat. His face looked radiant with joy and elation.

“Really, Bharath, I will adopt the *Charitradharma*. Do you think that I am uttering a lie, you mad fellow? Why should I remain in *samsar* after you become a *Shraman*? What other attachment do I have in this world? When on that day, years ago, you decided to become a *Shraman* and to follow the path chosen by your father, I prevented you from doing so. Why did I do so? I did so because of my attachment for you. Without you, nothing in this world can fascinate me. Royal power, royal splendour, wealth and prosperity do not fascinate me. All these are vain and futile in your absence. In your absence, I cannot take delight in any of these things. Now since you are becoming a *shraman*, I do not want to remain in *samsar*. I am determined to follow you on the path of *Samyam*. This is my firm and unshakeable determination. Now, the *Charitradharma* is the only way for me. No power on earth can change my determination. I too will become a *Sadhvi* and by breaking off the external and internal bondages, I too will endeavour to attain the ineffable felicity of salvation.”

Bharath kept listening attentively to the unexpected but adamant determination of Kaikayi. He pondered deeply over the causes that had impelled her to take that decision and upon the philosophy of life that had inspired in her that astounding spirit of renunciation. Kaikayi stood up; walked to and fro for a while and then standing at a window kept watching the sky with probing eyes that seemed to penetrate the inmost mysteries of the infinite world beyond the visible frame of this world. Bharath also stood silent and still near Kaikayi. The sky was clear. Countless stars twinkled in the sky. Silence prevailed everywhere. There was no noise anywhere. Kaikayi turned her eyes towards Bharath and said :

"Your revered father has crossed the farthest horizons of the perceptible universe and has attained the *Siddhashila* situated on the fourteenth Rajlok. Now, he is absolutely free from all kinds of agony and anguish, from all physical, psychological and inherited ailments and he is absolutely free from the cycle of birth and death. His soul has become immersed in the sublime radiance of the supreme light-giver. The splendour of his soul has become a part of the supreme splendour. He has become a part of that loveliness which he once adored. Dear son ! This is my only aim in life. This is my supreme objective!"

She paused for a while. She kept looking at the blue sky for a while and then holding Bharath's hands, she said :

"Dear son ! I am fully aware of the blunder I committed in compelling you to remain in this unreal and illusory world. I know that I caused great grief to you. At that time, I was unwise and thoughtless. I placed impediments on your path on account of my attachment and infatuation. If I had this spiritual awareness and awakening at that time I would not have prevented you from becoming a Sadhu. I would have gladly agreed to it and I too would have become a Sadhvi, but it was my misfortune.' It was on account of my evil *karmas* that I acted thus at that time. I knew very well that after Shri Ram went away to the forests and after you ascended the throne as the king of Ayodhya, you began despising me. You showed contempt for me and you kept shunning me. But I have also found that you are an ideal son and as a son you have been respecting me and always you have been carrying out my orders with a genuine feeling of filial devotion. But please realise this truth also. My conscience never forgave me. I have always been feeling guilty of my action. Well, what is the use of remembering the past ? Now you need not have any hesitation or conflict. You may become a Sadhu breaking off all bondages and for your sake I will break off my bondages also. Not only this; when the people of Ayodhya come to know of my decision to become a Sadhvi, the stain sticking to my name will be washed clean. Now they have been reproaching me but after I become a Sadhvi I will be free from all blame. Actually, I was respon-

sible for Shri Ram's departure to the forest and naturally the citizens of Ayodhya have been grieved and there was nothing wrong in their blaming me."

Thus, a deep kind of metaphysical and philosophical churning went on in Kaikayi's mind for a long time. It was nearly 2 O'clock in the night. But she had not felt like sleeping. She was only feeling restless and emotionally disturbed. Bharath also calmly listened to the words uttered by his mother who was broken-hearted. Yet, he was in a mood of joy and elation because his mother also was determined to adopt the path of *Sadhudharma*. It is natural that a son who was totally detached should be delighted at the prospect of his mother's adoption, of the path of *Sadhudharma*.

"Dear mother! Your decision to become a Sadhvi fills me with real delight. Your decision is absolutely proper and appropriate. I feel that mighty waves of esteem and love for you are rising in my heart. Moreover, when the members of the royal family and the citizens of Ayodhya come to know of your decision, they too will be astonished and delighted and will surely congratulate you on the magnificent decision you have taken. They will also feel supremely blessed to hear this happy news."

Bharath slowly rose to his feet. He bowed to his mother's feet and proceeded slowly to his palace.

Countless kings, subordinate kings and friends of the royal throne of Ayodhya arrived at Ayodhya to be present at the ceremony of Bharath's initiation into the *Sadhudharma*. The plains around the city of Ayodhya were teeming with countless elephants, horses and guests. Their colourful chariots stood in long lines. Celebrations and rituals were being carried out in all the Jin temple in the city of Ayodhya in accordance with the scriptural prescriptions. Bharath woke up before dawn and the very first thing that he did was to give generous gifts of money, food and clothes to the poor and the destitute. The roads, the streets, the alleys and lanes in Ayodhya were decorated with eye-catching festoons of fragrant flowers and green.

glistening leaves. The rest-houses, the schools and the public buildings in the city were decorated in a colourful and fascinating manner. Magnificent arches had been constructed at every important point on the roads and the roads and streets were sprinkled with cool water rendered fragrant by sandal paste and musk and other perfumes that rendered the whole atmosphere auspicious and spiritually elating. Countless rest-houses had been provided with all comforts and luxuries for the sake of guests who had arrived at Ayodhya.

Bharath met Shri Ram and informed him of his mother's decision to become a Sadhvi. Something that was considered undesirable had turned into an auspicious event. The ways of fate are indeed mysterious and mystifying. Kaikayi's decision to become a Sadhvi stupefied Shri Ram who stood petrified like a stone-image unable to give vent to his surging thoughts and feelings. And then after having composed himself a little Shri Ram said in a broken voice.

“What do you say Bharath? Do you mean that mother Kaikayi has also decided to renounce the samsar? Is she also adopting the path of *Charitradharma*?”

“Yes, revered brother! She is determined to become a Sadhvi. Her determination is unshakeable.”

At once, Shri Ram proceeded hurriedly towards the palace of mother Kaikayi. He entered her chamber; saluted her and sat at her feet. After being silent for a few moments, he said in a serious voice, “Dear mother; Is it a fact that you have decided to adopt the *Charitradharma*? I heard about your decision only a little while ago from Bharath.”

“Dear son! What Bharath has told you is true. I have decided to adopt the *Charitradharma* and I have decided to spend the remainder of my life in the company of Bharath as a Sadhvi carrying out internal and external austerities and endeavouring to attain spiritual elevation.” Kaikayi said with a serene and smiling face.

“Dear mother ! May I know the cause for your sudden decision ?”

“Dear son ! My decision is not a sudden one. Of course, my declaration has been a little sudden and unexpected. But actually I decided long ago that when Bharath adopts the *Sadhudharma* I too should join him as a *Sadhvi*. I have been contemplating on this plan for years. Indeed, my son ! I have no attachment at all for wealth, prosperity, royal splendour and worldly enjoyments. I am absolutely devoid of worldly desires, worldly attachments and worldly infatuations. Bharath and I can attain serenity and felicity only by following the holy foot-prints of your revered father and that is the only path that can lead us to spiritual elevation.”

Shri Ram listened calmly to the words of Kaikayi who was now the very embodiment of the spirit of refrainment and renunciation. Unknown to himself, his eyes welled up with tears. He thought within himself, “Mother Kaikayi is going to become a *Sadhvi*. . . Brother Bharath is adopting the *Sadhudharma* and . . .” Shri Ram’s heart was grieved at the thought of the separation from his brother. He kept looking towards Kaikayi with his bleak and blighted face. Kaikayi embraced Shri Ram affectionately and wiped his tears with the edge of her sari. With her heart overflowing with motherly affection for Shri Ram, she passed her hand softly over his head and said in a soft, serene and firm voice :

“Dear son ! Your filial love and devotion is world-famous. Your devotion for your mothers is exemplary, unique and unexampled. Dear son ! I am speaking the truth. It will remain a beacon light to human beings groping through the dark alleys of despair in the wilderness of samsar. Your filial love is sublime and it can lift mortals to the level of immortality and divinity. Dear child ! I am grieved deeply at the thought of my not having done anything to please you in my life; to bring some joy to your loving heart. But I succeeded only in causing agitation and anguish to your sweet and loving heart. It is this thought that has been causing indescribable anguish to me.”

“No, mother ! No. Do not say so. I never thought at any time that you caused distress to me. That thought never passed through my mind. The image of your holy feet is enshrined in my heart, enthroned for ever to be worshipped with the ever-fresh flowers of devotion and affection. In fact, you always bestowed upon me your benign blessings and your extraordinary affection. I have not tasted anything but sweet affection from you. You have always been bestowing upon me the blessed gifts of boundless affection, blissful amity and extraordinary cordiality.”

“Dear Ram, you say all this because you are noble. It is your nobility that makes you say so. It was on account of this extraordinary affection you have for me that you never cared for the unbearable hardships of life in forests. Blinded by your affection for me you never saw my selfishness. You never entertained any selfish desires. You never thought of your own comforts or delights. You always thought of others’ welfare, others’ joys and others’ pleasures and you mutely endured countless sufferings and calamities. This is indeed splendid on your part. There can be no greater splendour than this in human nature. Dear child, my heartiest aspiration for you is that you must live in felicity and that you must attain progress and prosperity.”

Shri Ram saluted the feet of Kaikayi; and slowly proceeded to his palace. His bright and radiant face had grown bleak and blighted. He was agitated by the decision of Bharath and Kaikayi to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. Sita also was in great grief. She had inordinate affection for her brother-in-law, Bharath. Hence she was greatly sad and grieved. The two did not say out anything. There was silence in the chamber because neither could find words to speak out. They were silent even during their dinner. After taking his food, Shri Ram went to meet his mother, Queen Aparajita. She had also come to know of Kaikayi’s decision. She had just then returned from a visit to Kaikayi. Kaikayi’s determination was unshakeable. She was not prepared to change her decision at all. The news of her



decision spread throughout Ayodhya like wildfire. Everyone who heard about it felt shocked and grieved.

Kausalya said looking towards Shri Ram.

“Dear son ! I have just now returned from Kaikayi’s palace. She has made a firm determination to renounce worldly life. She has found release from the bondage of samsar and she is indeed blessed.”

“Mother ! You too do not take such a decision. I feel grief-stricken when I think of a separation from those who are dear and near to me. Mother ! The truth is that even when I was away in the forests. I did not experience such anguish on account of the separation from Bharath and mother, Kaikayi. But to-day I am experiencing such anguish as cannot be expressed in words. To-day, I am steeped in deep grief. I am speaking the truth.”

“Dear son ! Do not give way to grief. Please try to restrain your anguish. Try to console yourself and the people of Ayodhya. The path chosen by Bharath and Kaikayi is indeed sublime. No one who does not possess extraordinary mental and spiritual strength can choose that path. Your father set a great example to all of us by adopting that path. Only by pursuing that path can we attain spiritual elevation. What benefit is there in the life of a householder ? This life is transitory; these worldly pleasures are transient; and all worldly delights bring only pain and anguish. The path of *Moksha* shown by Bhagwan Munisuvrat swami is the only path to genuine and lasting felicity. Indeed, Kaikayi and Bharath have set a lofty example to all of us.”

Shri Ram kept looking at Queen Aparajita with fixed eyes. He kept listening to her enlightened and lofty utterances silently, and attentively. He silently approved of the truth of his mother’s words. He said nothing. Just then, Sumitra came in; and looking at Shri Ram and Aparajita, said;

“Dear sister-in-law. Have you heard this news ?”

“What is it?” Kausalya asked with evident eagerness. Shri Ram looked towards Sumitra.

“I heard that all the kings who are our allies and friends and all the subordinate kings have called upon Bharath. We do not know what kind of discussions took place between Bharath and those kings but it seems that those kings numbering one thousand have decided to follow Bharath on the path of *Charitradharma*!”

“What are you saying Sumitra! Can this be true? How did you come to know of it?” Queen Aparajita suddenly stood up and held Sumitra’s hands in amazement.

“Lakshman himself told me about it.”

“Then, it must be true! But where is Lakshman?”

“He is sitting in his chamber with his eyes closed. He seems to be greatly depressed and gloomy. He said, “I wonder what has happened to these people! They are all bent upon becoming Sadhus. I wonder why they have taken this decision.” How could I answer his questions? I said that everyone does what is deemed best by him.”

“That is right. Those who do not find serenity and felicity in this samsar will naturally desire to renounce it. All of us think that this worldly life is felicitous. But the amazing thing is that not only Bharath but one thousand other kings have decided to adopt *Sadhudharma*.”

“All this is the result of Bharath’s cordiality and friendliness. Probably he has captivated them by his gentleness and amity. He has been ruling over the country with ability, nobility and amity. That is why all the subordinate kings have decided to adopt the *Charitradharma* with him. Moreover, there may be at the background their relationships of earlier janmas,” said Shri Ram.

The news of the event of the initiation into the *Sadhudharma* of Bharath, Kaikayi and one thousand kings was proclaimed not only in Ayodhya but all over Bharath. Large

masses of people from all over the country thronged the city of Ayodhya. Men of eminence like Vibhishan, Sugriv, Hanuman, Nal, Neel, and Bhamandal came to Ayodhya in large numbers. Everyone was talking about self-sacrifice, renunciation, and the principles of the *Charitradharma*; and all were admiring and glorifying those who were adopting the *Sadhudharma*. In every nook and corner of the city, people were talking about these things. The atmosphere of the city was reverberating with the auspicious noises of celebrations and jubilations. The affluent people were giving generous gifts of food, clothes and money to the poor and the destitute. All were engaged in spiritual austerities and activities. The worship of the Lord was going on in temples. The entire atmosphere of the city had assumed a tone of sublimity. In all important centres of the city, excellent food was served to guests with affection and regard. Auspicious sights abounded everywhere.

The great Muni, Deshbhushan was staying in the garden outside the city of Ayodhya. He was the most prominent personality in the initiation ceremony of Bharath because it was he who gave the *Deeksha* to Bharath. Bharath was absorbed in listening to the words of the spiritual head, seated humbly at his feet.

At last, the day of the initiation ceremony arrived.

The necessary arrangements were made for the ceremony. Bharath, Kaikayi and one thousand kings got ready to set off to the garden.

Shri Ram embraced Bharath and Bharath was trying to take leave of his elder brother. Bharath stood clasped in the arms of Shri Ram. The tears flowed ceaselessly from Shri Ram's eyes and bathed Bharath's head. Sita stood by the side of Shri Ram holding in her hands a gold plate which contained such auspicious substances as *Kumkum* and coconuts, fruits and flowers. Vishalya and the other princesses were steeped in grief and anguish.

All of a sudden, Bharath remembered something. This idea which flashed to him at that moment brightened his face.

He went near Shri Ram and said in a low tone.

“Dear brother! Shall we see, the *Bhuvanankar* before I leave. I do not know when I can see it again.”

And Bharath accompanied by Shri Ram proceeded to the stables where the mighty elephant was tethered. No sooner had the *Bhuvanankar* seen Bharath than it lifted its trunk high into the air and trumpeted in glee and elation. Naturally, the elephant on seeing Bharath, remembered its previous *janmas* and recognised its brother in Bharath. Bharath approached it and said in a voice shaken with emotion.

“Dear *Bhuvanankar*! Today I am renouncing the *samsar* and am adopting the path of *Sadhudharma*. I will endeavour to destroy my *Karmas* and to attain the supreme state. If possible you too follow the same path. Of course, I know that in your present state of existence you cannot adopt the *Sadhudharma*. But you can even as an elephant carry out some internal spiritual austerities such as meditation and contemplation on the soul. I am sure you can do this.” In reply to what Bharath said the elephant bowed its head, bent its trunk and showed that it had agreed to abide by his advice. Bharath overcome with affection stroked its back and passed his hand gently over its trunk.

Then Shri Ram returned accompanied by Bharath. On the eve of Bharath's departure from there. Sita marked on his forehead the *tilak*. Bharath took leave of his relatives and friends and set off. The masses issued cries of victory which reverberated in the highest skies. They cried, “May the saintly king Bharath live long! May king Bharath be victorious!” These cries of victory resounded in the farthest horizons.

The people of Ayodhya issued similar cries of joy and jubilation praising *Kaikayi's* decision.

The auspicious spiritual procession reached the garden.

The great Muni, *Deshbushan* recited the relevant *mantras* and gave the *deeksha* to *Kaikayi*, Bharath and the one thousand kings.

The holy *mantras* that were being recited by the muni resounded in the atmosphere. Serenity reigned supreme. The words of the Gurudev impelled everyone to become immersed in profound spiritual contemplations.

The initiation ceremony was over. Shri Ram saluted the feet of Muni Bharath and other munis and returned to his palace.

The Mahamuni Deshbushan set off on his *Padyatra* (travelling on foot) accompanied by the newly initiated Munis.

Bharath carried out austere spiritual activities as a muni for a long time and attained *Moksha*, destroying all his karmas. Sadhvi Kaikayi also carried out austere spiritual endeavours and attained *Moksha*. In the same manner the other kings who had become Munis also attained the supreme state. The Bhuvana-lankar also fasted unto death and after its death it took birth as a heavenly being, in the fifth heaven.



## XCIH

# THE CONQUEST OF MATHURA BY SHATRUGHNA

The Imperial Court of Shri Ram was packed to its capacity with the members of the Royal family, the ministers, the high officials of the state, subordinate kings and prominent citizens. The whole atmosphere was reverberating with their joyous cries and jublations. Waves of joy flooded the court. Meanwhile, Shri Ram's mind becalmed upon the sea of thought, still unattained the land it sought, lay waiting for auspicious gales. Lakshman and Shatrughna stood humbly on either side of Shri Ram while Vibhishan, Sugriv, Hanuman, Prince Angadh and other guests sat in seats of state. Bhamandal and the other kings also were present. The Vidyadhar kings, the Kinnar kings and the Gandharva kings were also seated in seats of state. The old Chief Minister of Ayodhya spoke humbly.

"The royal throne of Ayodhya is deprived of its lustre because of King Bharath's renunciation. Therefore, on behalf of the people of Ayodhya and also on behalf of all of you, I entreat Shri Ram to bestow his compassion upon us and to ascend the throne of Ayodhya; and to take up the reins of administration. This has been the tradition of the Ikshwaku dynasty; and I entreat Shri Ram to act according to it; and to continue it."

"Lakshman is *Vasudev*! (the greatest military hero of the age). He should be installed on the throne; and crowned King of Ayodhya." Shri Ram said in a resounding voice. All who had gathered there issued cries of jubilation approving of Shri Ram's opinion. At once, magnificent arrangements were made for the coronation of Lakshman as the king of Ayodhya. It was also unanimously decided that Shri Ram should be installed on the

throne of *Baldev* (Friend, philosopher and guide to Vasudev). On hearing the news, the people of Ayodhya swayed in joy and jubilation.

Later, on an auspicious day, in the presence of all the kings, princes and the others, Lakshman was installed on the throne of *Vasudev* and Shri Ram was crowned *Baldev*. Their coronations took place with all grandeur and eclat.

The brothers Shri Ram and Lakshman were the eighth *Baldev* and *Vasudev* of Bharath.

The next day, the court gathered, in the vast and splendid hall of the palace. Shri Ram and Lakshman were seated on their magnificent thrones. On that august occasion, Shri Ram explained to his people his policies, relating to his administration. He also explained the codes of conduct relating to the king and to the subjects. He delivered a long speech explaining the laws, rules and regulations of the administration. Further, he explained to the court the various arrangements made for the safety and security of the kingdom; and the measures that would be adopted to secure progress and prosperity in the kingdom. At the same time, he handed over to the subordinate kings and potentates the responsibility of ruling over their respective areas. Vibhishan was proclaimed the king of the Rakshadweep.

The responsibility of ruling over the Vanardweep was placed on the shoulders of King Sugriv.

The responsibility of ruling over Pathal Lanka was given to Viradh.

The responsibility of ruling over the kingdoms of Rikshapur, Sripur and Hanupur was given to Nil, Hanuman and Pratisurya. Ratnajati and Bhamandal were crowned kings respectively of Devopagitnagar; and Ratanupurnagar situated on the Vaithadhya, mountains. In the same manner, the responsibility of ruling over various dependent states and subordinate kingdoms was placed on the shoulders of capable potentates and princes. Then, turning towards Shatrughna, Shri Ram said;

“Dear Shatrughna !”

At once, Shatrughna stood up. He bowed to Shri Ram; and came towards him a few paces. Shri Ram said stroking his head for any kingdom.”

“Dear brother ! What do you desire to do ? Which area do you like to rule over ? I will give you whichever area you like.”

For a few moments, Shatrughna was absorbed in thought. Shri Ram said again affectionately.

“Why are you silent ? Speak out your mind. You may ask for any kingdom.”

“Dear brother ! Kindly give me Mathura,” Shatrughna said humbly. after thinking a little.

“Mathura ! This is absolutely impossible. It is simply not possible. Don't you know that the king of Mathura, King Madhu possesses a divine weapon by name *Shul* (a trident) of tremendous power. His friend of an earlier janma, Chamarendra gave him that weapon. Its power is such that it destroys anyone against whom it is released. It is an infallible weapon and when once it is released. it will not return without destroying the enemy. It has miraculous powers.” Shri Ram said glancing towards Lakshman. Lakshman was deeply absorbed in thought.

Madhu had not attended the coronation ceremony. He was not prepared to accept the supremacy of Ayodhya. So, Shri Ram did not like to provoke Madhu but since Shatrughna had expressed the desire of capturing and ruling over Mathura, Shri Ram had to think of it seriously.

“Revered brother ! You know very well whose brother I am. I am the brother of the mighty heroes Shri Ram and Lakshman who by virtue of their extraordinary abilities captured the Rakshasdwep and destroyed Ravan who was reputed to be a world-conqueror. Therefore, dear brother ! Kindly grant me Mathura. I am ready to face and rout king Madhu.”



Since Shatrughna was insisting on his desire of capturing Mathura, Shri Ram gave his consent to his fighting against King Madhu. Moreover, he explained to Shatrughna some principles relating to war and militaric strategy. He also gave Shatrughna some powerful weapons like *Aparajit*. He sent the able commander Kritantvadan to assist him in the war.

Shatrughna bowed to the feet of Lakshman; and sought his blessings on the eve of his departure. Lakshman gave him such efficacious weapons as the *Shilimukh*, the *Agnimukh*, and the *Arnavavart*.

After the court was dismissed, Shatrughna went to obtain the blessings of his mothers. His mothers bestowed upon him their heartiest blessings. Shatrughna was eager to set off on his campaign. This was going to be the first war in his life. This was a unique opportunity for him to display his militaric genius and skill because he had to fight against Madhu who was valiant and haughty.

The preparations for the campaign were completed. The commander Kritantavadan made excellent battle-formations. An auspicious hour was fixed for setting off on the campaign. The preparations for the war were made so secretly that the king of Mathura had no information about the campaign.

Shatrughna set off on his campaign with a vast army, at an auspicious hour. Soon, he arrived with his army on the banks of a river near Mathura. His armies camped on the vast plains near Mathura. In a few hours, there appeared military tents everywhere. Spies went into Mathura to gather information.

It was night. The spies came to Shatrughna and gave him the latest news. They gave him an account of the city of Mathura.

“Dear Lord! There is a beautiful garden called Kuber to the east of the city. Today, Madhu has gone there with his Queen-consort Jayanti to play sports there. In fact, we went even to the garden. Madhu is absorbed there in playing sports with his queens.”

“Does he have the *shul* with him ?”

“No. It is in the arsenal.”

“Very good. We are now free from one great danger. Now, whatever we have to do, we should do within this night. This night’s battle will decide whether we are going to be successful or not.” Shatrughna sent away the spies and began to attend to the military operations. He sent for the commander, Kritantavadan. The commander came at once.

“Dear commander ! Please order our armies to enter the city at once, and on the eastern side of the city let there be adequate battle-formations. Please keep this a secret. All these things should be done with such great secrecy that the enemy should not get any news of our activities. Remember this night we are going to fight a decisive battle.”

Shatrughna planned to achieve his objective by means of deceptive strategy and skilful manœuvres. The situation was such that he could easily defeat King Madhu because at that time he did not have the *Shul* with him. In accordance with their strategy, they took the armies across the river to the other bank. The commander, Kritantavadan was asked to take a position with a large army on the western side of the city. Leaving the commander there Shatrughna, entered the city by the eastern gate with his army. His plan was to fight against Madhu at this gate. The guards at the gate were taken captive and the soldiers of Ayodhya occupied the city and assumed control over it in such a way that the peace of the city remained undisturbed; and then Shatrughna and his army stood waiting for the return of king Madhu. The first phase of the night ended. There was silence everywhere. Nothing was visible in the dense darkness of the night. The whole city was sound asleep. According to the information brought by the spies King Madhu would return to the city at midnight.

Within a short while a commotion seemed to have arisen on the way from the garden. They could hear the sound of chariots rattling through the road. One magnificently decorated chariot was speeding towards the city surrounded by a number of

soldiers on horseback. Madhu heard the noises of the chariot wheels and the horse-hoofs in the stillness of the night. Already the soldiers of Ayodhya had climbed the tall and sturdy trees on the side of the roads and sat concealed there in the foliage. King Madhu's son, prince Lavan was riding at the head of the cavalcade. He was proceeding with great circumspection. He was just then stepping on the threshold of youth. He was of course a young man but he was valiant and heroic. Lavan, fully armed was riding on a stately horse, King Madhu's chariot was following Lavan. He had never dreamt that he would be thus ambushed and attacked in that covert manner. He was absorbed in a delightful conversation with his Queen.-consort, Jayantidevi. No sooner had Lavan entered the gate, than Shatrughna challenged him to a fight. The soldiers of Ayodhya at once surrounded King Madhu. Kritantavadan rushed to the spot with the speed of a lightning and chopped off the heads of two riders on horseback who were guarding King Madhu. Within the twinkling of an eye Shatrughna attacked Lavan and sent him to the abode of death.

King Madhu was stupefied by the surprise attack made by Shatrughna. He was so greatly shocked that he could not, for a few moments, think of doing anything in that unexpected situation. He also witnessed with his own eyes the dreadful attack made on Lavan and his death. Infuriated by this he leaped down from his chariot. He took up his bow and arrows and showed his readiness to fight against Shatrughna.

Both were heroic and both were equally valiant and capable as warriors. Therefore, they decided upon fighting a duel instead of launching a war which would cause the death of thousands of soldiers. Madhu and Shatrughna stood facing each other. They released tremendous weapons against each other. Each broke to pieces the devices released by the other. Thus, a terrible fight went on for three hours between them. They were equals in valour and ability. Therefore, neither could be defeated.

Shatrughna recited the relevant mantras and there appeared in his hands the miraculous bow called *Samudravart* and then

the supernatural weapons called *Shilimukh* and *Agnimukh*, appeared miraculously in his quiver as a result of the *mantras* he recited. He fixed the arrows to his bow and shot them at Madhu. When those weapons pierced Madhu, he collapsed on the ground.

Queen Jayanti at once leaped down from her chariot. She fell over the gashed body of her husband and began weeping aloud. Within a short while the whole atmosphere became gloomy. Kritantavadan came forward and gave the queen the necessary protection. Madhu who was dying began to contemplate on his soul.

"I committed a great blunder in leaving the *Shul* in the arsenal, I have not been able to defeat Shatrughna. All these days I led a life of pomp and infatuation and illusion and I have not been able to defeat my enemy. Moreover, I have not been able to conquer my inner enemies. Actually, this worldly life is transient, futile and jointless. If there is any source of eternal felicity it is a genuine devotion for the *Paramatma*. If there is any true felicity in this universe it is possible only if I render service to the holy feet of Lord Arihant."

As his death approached him nearer and nearer his spiritual contemplation grew purer and purer. In fact, his animosity against his enemy abated and calmed down. Again he began to float on the waves of spiritual meditation: "Unfortunately I never worshipped the Lord even once in my life. I never constructed Jin temples. I never rendered devotion and service to *Shramans*. I never did any deed of charity, I never showed compassion to the suffering in my life. I did not act according to the sublime *Sutra*; "Make your life fruitful by living according to the principle; *Dharma*." Actually, my life has been a total failure. Dear Lord Arihant, save me, direct me on the right path."

His throat began to dry up and so he began speaking in dying accents. He was agitated with a terrible thirst. His life was flickering for the finish. As suggested by the commander, a soldier brought water in a vessel and poured water into the dying man's mouth. Only a few drops could enter his throat

and then Madhu recovered his spirits a little. At once, he adopted the *Charitradharma*. He sought the forgiveness of all jivas, in the universe and recited with heartfelt devotion the great mantra *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra*. So, his soul passed out of his body while he was engaged in a sublime contemplation on the *Paramatma* and reached the heavenly world. He was born as a heavenly being in the third heaven.

Queen Jayanti began to lament loudly, and her throat became choked with anguish. Who was there to console her in her distress? Of course, Shatrughna's heart melted away in compassion. The heavenly beings showered flowers on Madhu's body; and their cry: "May Madhu attain the supreme victory," resounded in the skies.

Then Madhu's dead body was taken into the city with due honour. His obsequies were carried out with royal honours; and in silent grief.

Madhu's mighty weapon, *Shul!*

It was verily a god! Therefore, it returned to Chamarendra. Chamarendra came to know of all the details relating to the slaying of Madhu. He began to boil with anger. He became infuriated when he learnt that Shatrughna had killed Madhu in a deceptive manner. His anger flared up to the skies. He at once, decided to kill Shatrughna; and was planning to set off to destroy Shatrughna. A heavenly being called Venudhari asked him.

"Where are you going?"

"Dear friend! I am going to kill Shatrughna who killed my dear friend in a deceptive manner."

"Please restrain your anger a little; and think calmly. Come out of your forgetfulness a little. Please look into the past and realize how the mighty weapon *Amoghvijaya* which was given to Ravan by Dharanendra himself, failed to kill Lakshman, who is an *Ardha Chakravarti*, when Ravan attacked Lakshman with it. The *Amoghvijaya* failed and Ravan himself was killed

by Lakshman. What could Madhu do against such a mighty hero as Lakshman? Shatrughna killed Madhu only in accordance with Lakshman's commands.

“Oh you king of eagles! What you say is true. But Lakshman could survive the attack made by the *Amoghvijaya*, only because of the help rendered by Vishalya, a Vidyadhar damsel. It was her power that saved Lakshman's life. At that time she was a maid but now she has married Lakshman; and so she has lost her miraculous powers. Whatever you may say, I will surely kill Shatrughna; and will regain peace of mind only after killing him.”

Chamarendra at once assumed a dreadful form; and descended to earth. He hurried to Mathura; but the sight he saw there was completely contrary to his expectations. Peace and felicity reigned everywhere. The king and the people lived in absolute peace and amity. So he after much thinking decided to create havoc in the kingdom by casting upon it a dreadful pestilence. At once, there began to rage in Mathura and in its surroundings various kinds of dreadful diseases. The agitation of Shatrughna knew no bounds. He fell into great anguish and distress. He worshipped his *kuladevata* (his family deity). The deity appeared before him and revealed the truth to him. “All this is the work of Chamarendra.”

Shatrughna, at once proceeded to Ayodhya to consult his brothers and seek from them a solution to the problem.

On reaching Ayodhya, Shatrughna informed Shri Ram and Lakshman of the calamity that had befallen him. All fell into deep thought and seemed helpless.

## XCV

### SHATRUGHNA'S PURVAJANMA

The two Munis Kulabhushan and Deshbhushan happened to visit Ayodhya just when Shatrughna went there. The guard in charge of the gardens conveyed to Shri Ram and others the news relating to the arrival of the Munis. At once, Shri Ram set out to the garden accompanied by Lakshman, Shatrughna and others. Shri Ram saluted the munis who possessed infinite knowledge and supreme enlightenment; and said;

“Revered Lords! Why is my younger brother, Shatrughna so desirous of possessing Mathura? What is the cause for his inordinate attachment for Mathura? Why does Mathura fascinate him so much? I tried my best to prevent him from going to Mathura; but he did not listen to my words. Why was he so insistent?”

“Dear king! Shatrughna's attachment for Mathura goes back to several janmas. Hence his fascination for Mathura is natural and proper,” said Deshbhushan Muni answering Shri Ram's question. All were amazed. Shri Ram entreated the Muni to explain the cause for it.

Deshbhushan Muni began his narration.

“Oh king! In one of his earlier janmas Shatrughna was a very handsome youth called Sridhar. In the entire city of Mathura no other young man possessed such a fascinating appearance. He was like the veritable god of love and his appearance was captivating. Sridhar was always absorbed in worshipping and meditating upon the lord. His only motto in life was to render service to shramans.

One day, Shridhar happened to be walking along a main road of the city. The Queen Lalitha who possessed unexampled beauty happened to see him as she sat in the balcony of her magnificent palace. She was captivated by his beauty. She sat stupefied. Her winged fancy wandered through her thought ranging beyond its limitations. Passion filled her to the brims of her being. She drew his attention towards herself and made a sign suggesting that he should meet her in the palace secretly. With the assistance of a confidant of the queen he entered the palace by a secret passage. He met the queen in a secret chamber and the two forgot themselves in sensual pleasures. They were like two impetuous rivers, running down a valley uniting and flowing on and ultimately falling into the ocean of ecstasy. Just then the king by chance came into the palace. The sudden and unexpected arrival of the king filled the queen with mortal fear and agitation. In consequence she darted out of her sleeping chamber; went to the king and began sobbing, clinging to him. The queen employed this guile to show that she was innocent. She said with pretended agitation.

“Some robber has broken into my sleeping chamber !”

The king did not doubt her words. Without making any enquiries he sent for the chief guard of the palace and said;

“Take this wretched fellow to the scaffold and cut off his head !”

The guard took Shridhar to the scaffold. Though he was going to be beheaded he said nothing. Even after seeing the deceptive and pretentious guile adopted by the queen he thought it good to remain silent. Just then by chance a Muni happened to be passing by. His name was Kalyan Muni. He was a master of many powers and accomplishments. He knew Sridhar and was fully convinced that he had a great devotion for Shramans; therefore he advised the guard to release Sridhar. The guard informed the king of the Muni's persuasion. The king moved by the muni's persuasion released Sridhar.



After his release Sridhar became a Shraman renouncing worldly life. He carried out severe spiritual austerity and after his death he reached the heavenly world.

In course of time after the span of his heavenly life ended he was born again in Mathura.

At that time Chandrabhadra was the king of Mathura. His queen-consort was Kanchanprabha who possessed unexampled beauty.

Sridhar was born to Kanchanprabha and Chandrabhadra. The prince was named Achal. The king loved the prince greatly and the boy was the apple of the king's eyes. Apart from queen Kanchanprabha King Chandrabhadra had six other queens. They too had given birth to eight princes. Banuprabha was the first among them. Those princes were worried because the king bestowed extraordinary affection on Achal. Whenever they met together they discussed the same thing.

"Whatever our mothers may do our father is determined to make Achal his successor to the throne." Therefore, we should somehow remove this impediment that stands on our way to the throne."

They carried out long and secret discussions and made a plan to kill Achal but somehow the Chief Minister sensed their conspiracy. In consequence, he cautioned Achal against the danger that was about to befall him. On a dark night, Achal ran away from Mathura. He went into dense forests to safeguard himself.

Achal was walking alone in the midst of a wild forest in the dense darkness of the night. He could not see any path in the forest; nor could he find a safe shelter in the night. He was running away barefoot and unarmed. While he was thus running away a sharp thorn pierced his foot. The thorn caused a great agony to him. Blood flowed profusely from his foot. He could not walk further and he sat there experiencing great pain. He wept bitterly. Just then the day dawned. A wood-cutter came along that road carrying a bundle of firewood. He saw the young

man sitting there and groaning. His heart was moved to pity. He threw down his bundle of fire-wood; went to prince and pulled out the large thorn that had penetrated deep into his foot. Achal was relieved of his pain. He was silent for a while; and then he said in a polite voice.

“Brother ! Who are you ? Why have you come into this forest ?”

“I live in the city of Shravasti. My name is Ank; and I eke out my livelihood by selling fire-wood;

“Dear friend ! I will never forget your benefaction. When in future, you hear that Achal has become the king of Mathura, you come and meet me at Mathura. I will never forget your benevolent action.”

Then Achal accompanied Ank to Kaushambi. While he was in Kaushambi he heard about a great teacher; and went to his *Ashram*. The king of Kaushambi used to visit the ashram to learn the art of archery from the teacher. Achal prostrated before the teacher; and said;

“Oh you compassionate one ! If you permit me, I will display my skill in archery.” After obtaining the consent of the teacher, Achal displayed extraordinary skill as an archer and won the admiration of the teacher and the king. In consequence, there appeared a great intimacy between Indradath and Achal. After sometime, Indradath gave his beautiful daughter to Achal in marriage.

Sometime later, with the assistance of King Indradath Achal took a large army; invaded the kingdom of Anga; and captured it. After that victory, Achal marched towards Mathura with a vast army. After reaching Mathura, he declared a war against Mathura. He achieved an easy victory and imprisoned Bhanuprabha and his brothers. King Chandrabhadra sent his Chief Minister to Achal on a mission of peace and conciliation. Achal revealed his identity to the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister and the other ministers were greatly delighted to hear this. They were greatly elated; and informed the king of the matter. The Chief Minister said;

“Your Highness ! He is not an enemy king. He is the apple of your eyes. . . .Your dear son, Achal.”

King Chandrabhadra’s joy knew no bounds. He received Achal into the city with all grandeur and eclat and installed him, upon the throne amidst magnificent celebrations and jubilations and crowned him king of the country. At the same time Chandrabhadra banished Bhanuprabha and other princes but Achal did not approve of this order of Chandrabhadra. He gave them protection and engaged them as his confidants.

Sometime later, unexpectedly Achal happened to see Ank of the city of Shravasti. He saw some soldiers beating him severely and treating him in a heinous manner. Achal gave him protection and consoled him by telling him who he was. He said,

“Noble man ! What do you want ?”

“Dear Lord ! Kindly send me back to my place.”

“You may return to your place. I will bestow upon you the kingdom of Shravasti as a gift. Henceforth, you will not be a contemptible man but the king of Shravasti. Go and rule over the kingdom. May you have peace and prosperity.” He gave his minister the necessary instructions and ordered him to take Ank to Shravasti. In course of time, Ank was crowned king of Shravasti. Ank and Achal became bosom friends.

Once a great Acharya by name Samudracharya happened to visit Mathura with his disciples. His spiritual discourses inspired in the theart of Achal the spirit of renunciation. He at once sent for Ank and the two friends received the Deeksha from the great Acharya.

The two brothers after becoming munis carried out severe spiritual austerities and after their death in this world, they were born in the Brahmadevalok. Later, they took birth again in this world. Achal was born as Shatrughna and Ank was born as the commander Kritantavadan. This is the reason why your brother Shatrughna has such a great attachment for Mathura.”

After that, Shatrughna stood up and said in a humble voice. "Revered lord! How did the dreadful pestilence caused by Chamarendra in Mathura come to an end?"

"Dear Prince! On account of the benevolence of the seven great sages, the pestilence ended and you will get the news, about it and then you will return to Mathura."

Shatrughna's heart bloomed into bliss. All returned to the palace in great elation. Shatrughna informed his mothers Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha of the way in which he conquered Mathura and the pestilence that appeared in Mathura on account of Chamarendra's spell. The mothers advised him not to return to Mathura at such a time as that. Accordingly Shatrughna decided to remain in Ayodhya for sometime.

\* \* \* \* \*

The city of Prabhapur!

Shrinandan was the king of Prabhapur; and Dharinidevi was the queen.

They begot seven sons.

The princes were named Suranand, Shrinand, Shritilak, Sarvasundar, Jayant, Amar and Jayamitra. When the eighth son was born, Shrinandan received the Deeksha and became initiated into the *Sadhudharma* along with his seven sons. He carried out spiritual austerities under the guidance of a great spiritual head by name Pritikar and attained salvattion.

The seven princes by virtue of the efficacy of their spiritual austerities attained a supernatural power called "*Jangha-Charan Labdhi*." In consequence they could fly through the sky.

Once the seven munis during their flights through the sky happened to visit Mathura. Since it was the rainy season, they decided to spend the rainy season in a cave on the side of a mountain near Mathura. They were engaged always in carrying out spiritual austerities and in worshipping the Arihant. Sometimes, they fasted for three or four days at a stretch. Sometimes

they fasted even for eight days and some times they fasted for a whole month. After performing the fasts, they used to fly to distant places to carry out the completion ceremonies. After the completion ceremony was over, they used to return to the mountain-cave near Mathura.

On account of the efficacy of the spiritual austerities carried out by the Munis, the pestilence disappeared. The power of Chamarendra decreased day by day and finally disappeared. The whole city was pervaded with the spiritual radiance of the Munis. Thus human beings achieved a victory over a god.

Sometime later, the seven Munis went to Ayodhya to carry out the completion ceremony of their tapascharya. They went to the house of Shri Arhad Datta Shreshti for *Biksha*. Seeing the Munis who had come to his house during the rainy season. Arhad Datta began to think.

“What kind of Sadhus are these who keep travelling during the *Chaturmas*?” His mind was filled with many kinds of doubts and fears. He continued to think. “These Sadhus have not been staying at Ayodhya. That is certain. They seem to be some pretenders in the guise of Munis. Yet let me know their whereabouts. It is necessary to know all details about them before coming to any conclusion about them. But what is the use of knowing those details? No. No. It is a sin even to converse with such cheats. So, instead of conversing with them, it is better not to see even their faces.” While Arhad Shreshti was thinking thus, his daughter-in-law gave *Biksha* to the munis.

The Munis, went to the *Upashray* of an Acharya by name *Dhyuti* who was spending the *Chaturmas* in Ayodhya. As soon as the Acharya saw the Munis, he stood up; moved forward a few steps; and received them. He entreated them to be seated and made polite enquiries about their health. The Munis had their food in Acharya *Dhyuti*'s *Upashray*. Eventhough, the Acharya honoured the Munis, his disciples did not salute them; and instead of honouring them, they ignored them because they

came in the *Chaturmas*. After eating food, the Munis said to the Acharya.

"We came from Mathura; and now we will again go there today."

And the Munis went away, flying through the sky.

Then Acharya Dhyuti addressed his disciples; and said in a soft voice.

"Dear disciples! They are *Jangha-charan* Munis. They always fly through the sky. They have attained extraordinary spiritual excellence and many supernatural powers."

The disciples were filled with grief and regret on hearing this. They felt greatly ashamed of the way they had treated the Munis. They were full of regret. Filled with agitation and grief, they said;

"Gurudev ! Kindly pardon us. We committed a great blunder. Eventhough you honoured them, we did not even care to salute them, on account of our ignorance and infatuation. Moreover, we committed the sin of treating them with contempt and indifference." Just at that point Arhad Datta came there. He saluted the feet of the Acharya; and said in a voice shaken with agitation.

"Gurudev ! Some pretenders have been visiting the city in the guise of Munis during the *Chaturmas*."

"Arhad Datt ! Do not speak ill of those great munis. It is a serious sin to calumniate them. I am really sad that even you have not been able to recognize their greatness. You are a great devotee of the Lord; yet even you have not been able to recognize their greatness. Dear *Shravak* ! They are not pretenders; but they are great Munis who have attained extraordinary powers. They came from Mathura for food; and have again returned to Mathura flying through the sky."

"What are you saying Gurudev ! What an amazing thing ! Are they really *Jangha-charan* Munis ? What a great misfor-

tune has befallen me! When they visited my house, instead of honouring them, I ill-treated them and turned them away. I even scoffed at them. I entertained wrong notions about them. I committed a grave sin in thus insulting them. Oh! What will happen to me?" The merchant was filled with grief and repentance.

"Revered Lord! Is there any atonement for my unpardonable sin?" said Arhad Datta, overcome with grief and repentance.

"There is only one way. You must go to Mathura and seek their pardon."

In consequence, Arhad Datta set off to Mathura on the seventh day of the bright fortnight of *Kartik*, accompanied by the members of his family. After reaching Mathura, he worshipped the Lord in the magnificent temple there; and then went to the great Munis. He saluted their feet and said in a humble manner;

"Oh you revered Munis! I am a sinner...a wretch from Ayodhya. When you visited my house and sought *Biksha* I, in sheer ignorance, ill-treated you. I entertained many doubts regarding you. I scoffed at you and dishonoured you. I committed a great sin. I realized this only after I learnt from Acharyashri Dhyuti that you were great Munis. I gathered a terrible kind of sinful karma by thus ill-treating you. Hence I entreat you to pardon me; and to free me from my sinful karma."

The great Munis pardoned the merchant and spoke to him compassionately. Later, the merchant returned to Ayodhya.

"The calamity that had befallen Mathura disappeared because of the spiritual powers of the Munis. The people were completely rid of the pestilence."

On hearing all this, Shatrughna proceeded to Mathura; and as soon as arriving there, he went to offer his devotion to the seven sages. He entreated them to have food at his palace. But

they did not accept his entreaty. They said, "We do not as a matter of principle, receive food from kings."

"Revered lords ! You have bestowed a great benefaction upon me and my kingdom. Your extraordinary spiritual powers freed my people from the calamity caused by Chamarendhra. Therefore you revered benefactors ! I entreat you to remain here always. I entreat you to remain at Mathura."

But the munis did not remain at Mathura. While leaving Mathura they said to Shatrughna,

"Oh king, let a Jin image be installed in every house and mansion of Ayodhya. If that is done no calamities or pestilences can descend on the city."

In accordance with the commands of the seven munis Shatrughna erected the images of the Jin and the images of the sages around the mountain near Mathura.





## XCV

### BALDEV — VASUDEV

The southern range of the Vaithadhya mountains !

A city called Ratnapur was situated among those mountains. A mighty hero by name Ratnarath was the king of that city.

His queen, Chandramukhi gave birth to a beautiful daughter. She was named Manorama.

Manorama possessed outstanding beauty. Her name suggested her beauty and her character. She grew up to be a young damsel of fascinating beauty and charm. As a girl she captivated the heart of everyone by her mischievous pranks and guiles. As soon as she stepped on the threshold of youth the king was worried. Whenever he was alone he thought, "Where can I find a suitable bridegroom for my daughter?" This problem worried him greatly.

One day, when king Ratnarath sat alone absorbed in thinking about this problem, the divine sage Narad happened to visit Ratnapur. The king received him with great honour. In the course of his conversation with the king he found out the problem that was worrying the royal family and said by way of suggesting a solution.

"Oh king ! In the whole world I see no one except Vasudev Lakshman who can be a match to your daughter Manorama. According to me, only Lakshman is a suitable bridegroom for princess Manorama."

But there had been existing a feud between the families of Lakshman and Manorama for several generations. As soon as

Manorama heard about Narad's suggestion she approached her father. Narad was still sitting there conversing with the king. Manorama was furious. Her face was burning with anger. She said in burning anger pointing towards Narad, "Dear father, he must be a hypocrite. Please send him away at once." Narad realised the feelings of Manorama. Therefore, he at once went away from there flying through the sky.

Narad was infuriated by Manorama's rude behaviour. His anger shot up to the skies. He made a terrific determination. "I will see that Manorama marries only Lakshman." With the purpose of carrying out his determination he set off towards Ayodhya. Within a short while, he reached Ayodhya.

Narad sat in a lonely corner of a garden outside the city of Ayodhya, and painted a fascinating portrait of Manorama on a cloth. Then, he went straight to Lakshman's palace. Lakshman received the divine sage with due honour. Ignoring all formalities, Narad showed the portrait to Lakshman; and said in an excited voice.

"Oh! Do you know how proud and haughty this princess is? As soon as she heard your name mentioned by me, she became furious and ordered her servants to turn me out. Somehow, I managed to escape alive. I fled away from there; otherwise, they would have dishonoured me and thrown me out and would have even attacked me physically. Oh! Somehow she must be made to eat humble pie. This arrogant girl must be taught a bitter lesson; otherwise, I cannot have peace of mind."

Lakshman kept watching the portrait with deep concentration. Unexpectedly, he became captivated by her beauty and in his heart, there sprouted love for her. He decided to secure the hand of Manorama in marriage; and said to Narad:

"Divine sage! Give up your agitation. Your desire will surely be fulfilled. I will see that Manorama is brought to my harem."

Greatly pleased with Lakshman's words, Narad went away.

Lakshman, at once, went to Shri Ram. He informed Shri Ram of what he had heard from Narad, and of his own determination. Shri Ram happily gave his consent to Lakshman's plan.

Lakshman issued orders to the commander to get ready for a war, and to make urgent preparations for a war.

On an auspicious day, Lakshman and Shri Ram sat in an airship and proceeded towards the Vaithadhya mountains. The vast army of Ayodhya surrounded the city of Ratnapur. Camping outside the city, Lakshman sent a message to king Ratnarath.

“Vasudev, Lakshman is desirous of marrying your daughter, Manorama. If you agree to this proposal, we can avoid unnecessary violence and bloodshed; otherwise we will be constrained to take recourse to a war.”

King Ratnarath did not give a cordial reply to Lakshman's message; on the other hand, he made speedy preparations for a war. The war broke out, but within a few hours, Lakshman defeated Ratnarath and captured him.

The war ended suddenly. Lakshman entered the city in triumph and exultation. The court assembled. Lakshman released King Ratnarath, and said to him respectfully.

“Dear king! Please bring your daughter to our presence. I will marry her only if she willingly agrees to marry me; otherwise I will not compel her to marry me.”

King Ratnarath had met Lakshman for the first time. That was the first time he saw Lakshman. He was greatly impressed with Lakshman's fascinating appearance, and his militaric skill and superhuman heroism. He thought, “Lakshman is really fit to be a bridegroom for my daughter. From all points of view, he is an ideal husband to my daughter”. Thinking thus, he sent for Manorama. In obedience to her father's instruction, Manorama appeared in the court. Feeling shy and timid, she bowed to Shri Ram. When she saw Lakshman, she felt a thrill shoot-

ing through her veins to the brims of her being. She felt greatly fascinated by his appearance and bearing. Ratnarath said affectionately.

“Dear daughter ! This is Lakshman, the famous hero. He is the Emperor of Ayodhya and the younger brother of Shri Ram, My desire is that you should marry him. Of course, you are free to take your own decision. Nobody will compel you to marry him. Everyone will respect your wish.”

“Dear father ! I humbly obey your commands. Moreover, at the very first sight I chose him for my husband,” she said with great hesitation.

The atmosphere in the palace, at once, became joyous and jubilant. The whole city of Ratnapur began to sway with delight and elation. Everyone was delighted with Manorama’s decision. Ratnarath said to Shri Ram in a tender voice.

“Oh you greatest of men ! I entreat you to be so gracious as to accept the hand of my second daughter. Shridhama, in marriage. I will feel blessed if you grant this entreaty of mine, and I will also be free from a great responsibility.

Shri Ram gave his silent consent to King Ratnarath’s proposal.

The city of Ratnapur put on a colourful appearance. The celebrations and the jubilations relating to the marriages resounded in the farthest skies. The city which a little while ago was shuddering with the fear of war was now a boundless ocean of joy and peace. The people of the city thronged the palace to have a glimpse of the radiant faces of Shri Ram and Lakshman. The women and the girls of the city congratulated Manorama and Shridhama on their good fortune in securing such husbands. They said. “You are indeed blessed ! Indeed, your lives have attained fulfilment !”

The marriages took place with all grandeur and eclat. A new bond of cordiality arose between Ratnapur and Ayodhya. Then Shri Ram and Lakshman invaded the southern parts of the

Vaithadhya mountains, and subjugated the kingdoms situated in that area. They achieved magnificent victories. Sometime later, the two brothers returned to Ayodhya accompanied by Shridhama and Manorama.

\* \* \* \*

### LAKSHMAN WAS A VASUDEV

A Vasudev has to enjoy the fruits of the merits he has attained in his earlier janmas, and he has also to fall into the snares of sinful Karmas.

This is a law of this creation. This is an inexorable and unalterable law of this universe. No power in this universe can alter it.

The delights that accrue from *punyoday* (the efficacy of merit) are of two kinds: (1) the delights by enjoying which one can attain *punya* or merit. (2) the pleasures and enjoyments which bring sinful Karmas.

A Vasudev attains happiness on account of the efficacy of his merit (*Punya*). He enjoys the pleasures accruing from his *Punya* and gathers sinful Karmas. Outwardly, he seems to be enjoying all kinds of happiness, but the sinful Karmas he gathers by enjoying those pleasures are not outwardly visible. They can be seen only by a *Kevaljnani*, a supremely enlightened one.

Lakshman had sixteen thousand wives of whom eight were his queens-consort. Vishalya was the first among them. Apart from them, Rupavati, Vanamala, Kalyanamalika, Ratnamalika, Jitpadma, Abhayavati and Manorama were also his prominent queens. Each of the eight queens-consort gave birth to a son. Vishalya gave birth to Shridar; Rupavati gave birth to Pritivi Tilak; Vanamala gave birth to Arjun; Kalyanmalika gave birth to Mangal; Ratnamalika gave birth to Vimal; Jitapadma begot Shrikeshi; Abhayavati begot Satyakirti; and Manorama begot Suparshwakirti. Lakshman's other queens also begot sons. He had two hundred and fifty sons.

\* \* \* \*

Shri Ram !

Shri Ram was a *Baladev*.

He too possessed extraordinary *Punya* (Merit). He too had to enjoy pleasures on account of the efficacy of his merit; but his pleasures differed in respect of their extent and kind compared to those of Lakshman. The way in which he enjoyed pleasures was unique. Baladev undoubtedly enjoys pleasures and delights but he enjoys them in such a way that he does not commit any sin in the process and in such a way that those pleasures and delights do not bring him sinful karmas.

Shri Ram had four queens by name Sita, Prabhavati, Ratinibha and Shridhama.

Shri Ram loved Sita more than his life but he loved his other queens also greatly but the other queens of Shri Ram were jealous of the extraordinary love that Shri Ram had for Sita. They were jealous of Sita because Shri Ram loved her greatly. This is a speciality of the samsar. Jealousy is a green-eyed monster whose clutches no one can escape.

NOTE : According to the Trishashtishalaka Purush Charitra (Parva 7, Sarga 8) of Hemachandrasoori, Shri Ram had four wives.

## XCVI

### THE FLAMES OF JEALOUSY

Sita had a dream one night in the last *Prahar* when the day was about to break. It was an extremely auspicious dream.

“Two octopads suddenly alighted from a magnificent airship and entered her courtyard.” She at once woke up from her dreams and felt stupefied by it. She could not sleep anymore. For a long time she was immersed in thought and kept walking to and fro in her chamber. Then, she woke up Shri Ram and described her dream to him. She desired to know what the dream signified.

“Dear Queen! You are going to be a mother. You will beget two sons but the octopads alighting from the airship is not an auspicious sign.” Shri Ram said by way of giving a reply to her question. Shri Ram did not seem to be delighted or depressed but his voice was serious and his face was mysteriously serene.

“Dear lord! Do not be depressed. I am sure that on account of my dharma (purity of mind and soul) and your greatness, nothing inauspicious can occur. Only something auspicious and felicitous will take place.” Sita said smiling.

Sita became pregnant. She began to take care of the jivas in her womb with extraordinary concern and caution. Shri Ram loved Sita more than his life but after she became pregnant, his love increased a thousandfold. He always used to think of her comforts and safety. He would not allow her to be away from him even for a moment.

Undoubtedly, Sita enjoyed Shri Ram's heartiest love and affection. She bloomed like a flower in the endless showers of

his extraordinary love. But the other queens of Shri Ram felt that they were neglected by him. They thought, "Sita has ensnared our lord Shri Ram, with her charms and affection. He is greatly infatuated with her. Therefore, we should manage somehow or the other to bring about a separation between them; otherwise, we will be totally neglected. We will have to be like fish out of water. Shri Ram will not care even to glance at us." Whenever those three queens met together, they discussed only this matter. They believed that they could not get Shri Ram's love and affection unless they brought about a separation between Shri Ram and Sita. This is called *samsar* !

In this world, people take delight in causing anguish to us. They desire to secure happiness by destroying others' happiness. This is the nature of people in this *samsar*.

Those three queens began to burn with jealousy. They could not bear to see Sita enjoying such affection from Shri Ram. They felt that they were slighted. Envy envenomed their minds and hearts. They were filled with thoughts of jealousy. "How can Sita get affection from Shri Ram?" This feeling of jealousy kept erupting in their minds like a volcano. They desired to secure delight and happiness by destroying Sita's happiness. Of course, whenever they met Sita, they made a pretence of being affectionate and cordial towards her. They conversed with her jovially and cheerfully and often engaged themselves in frolicsome talk with her. But all this was a mere pretence, a mere show. In their hearts, they desired Sita's ruin. In the presence of Sita, they praised her and admired her but in their hearts, they despised her. When they were in the presence of Shri Ram or Sita, they put on an appearance of being cheerful and happy while inwardly they were burning with the flames of jealousy.

Sita was a plain-hearted woman. She was an angel in appearance and in nature. Since she was noble, she always entertained sublime thoughts and she could never sense the venom of jealousy that lay behind the apparent amity of the other queens. She was completely immersed in the ocean of splendid love and affection. She thought that the other queens



also were happy like her; she loved them as her sisters and always treated them with great amity. Therefore, she could not sense the venom that filled the hearts of her sisters." She was always thinking thus, "All calamities have ended. Now, clouds of anguish will never appear in my life." She entertained such thoughts and feelings.

Once, Shri Ram went to the gardens accompanied by Sita to play games and sports.

The magnificent palace of Ayodhya appeared lonely and deserted.

Ratinibha and Shridhama went to Prabhavathi's palace. Since Shri Ram and Sita were absent, they felt that they had got a golden opportunity to hatch a conspiracy.

Shridhama went there with a ready plan in her mind. Prabhavati received them cordially. Ratinibha and Shridhama began to discuss the matter with Prabhavati freely.

"What shall I say, sister? We should strike the iron while it is hot. We should nip this matter in the bud. We should make use of this opportunity of the absence of Shri Ram and Sita to make our plans. Therefore, we thought of meeting you and discussing the matter with you thereby disburdening ourselves of our anguish a little." Shridhama said this expressing her contempt for Sita. She heaved a long sigh, folding her hands.

"Dear friend! You are most welcome. Your visit has filled me with delight. I too was feeling lonely. We can spend some time jovially together." Prabhavati said in a tender voice. But Shridhama could easily discern the gloom and grief in the eyes of Prabhavati. Meanwhile, Ratinibha stood at the window and kept watching the city. There was silence for sometime. The attendants brought delicious refreshments in gold plates. The three queens took refreshments. The attendants left the chamber.

"Actually, Sita is very fortunate. No one in this world can be so fortunate as she." Shridhama said breaking the silence.

“Our lord cannot bear with separation from her even for a moment.” Ratinibha said endorsing the opinion expressed by Shridhama and smiled a little suggesting her meaning. Her smiles revealed her venomous feelings.

“How long can we bear with this indignity and ill-treatment? We must do something about it; and in the heat. We must change the situation somehow. This should not be allowed to continue. Is only Sita his wife? Are we not also his wives? Are we not also his queens? We should do something to create a misunderstanding between them. We should do something to poison Shri Ram’s mind against Sita. This excessive fondness he has for her should not be allowed to continue.”

Shridhama glanced towards Prabhavati. Prabhavati’s eyes were fixed on the ground. Her face looked serious and gloomy. She was certainly listening to Shridhama’s words in silence; but it was evident from her face that she did not relish this conversation; and that she was not at all interested in that kind of talk.

“Sister Shridhama! Have you thought of any plan by means of which we can create a misunderstanding between Shri Ram and Sita?” Ratinibha looked at Shridhama with piercing eyes.

“Yes. I have thought of a plan.”

“What is it? Let us know.” Ratinibha’s eagerness increased.

Prabhavati also looked towards Shridhama. She seemed to be desirous of carrying out Shridhama’s plan. For a few moments, nobody said anything. There was silence in the chamber. Then Shridhama got up and nervously closed the door of the chamber. Then she explained in a low and suppressed voice her plan to Ratinibha and Prabhavati. Ratinibha felt greatly elated to hear it but Prabhavati was silent. She did not say anything but Shridhama was of the opinion that they could carry out the plan only if Prabhavati agreed to join them in doing so. She insisted upon Prabhavati’s acceding to the plan. Therefore Prabhavati gave her consent. After that Shridhama returned to her palace.

\* \* \* \*

The magnificent palace of Sita....

It was mid-day. Sita sat on a cushioned chair. Cool air was blowing into the room through the windows on the western and southern sides of the chamber. A woman who was the most renowned musician of the court was singing a sweet and melodious song. Sita was hearing the song with rapture. Just then, Ratinibha, Shridhama and Prabhavati came into the chamber. Sita joyously received them and offered them seats, with due regard. They sat in seats of state near Sita. The three smiling with pretended joy took their seats. Shridhama suggested by means of a gesture to the singer to stop singing, but Sita said; "You may stop now. We will hear your songs tomorrow. You sing excellently."

The musician saluted Sita and left the chamber.

"Now, we shall spend sometime conversing jovially." Sita's voice echoed in the chamber.

"Dear sister! How are you?" Prabhavati said.

"By the grace of the Paramatma, our spiritual head and our dear lord, all are well and happy." said Sita.

"Dear Queen! You are indeed fortunate."

"Fortune is inconstant. It keeps changing places. Sometimes we get good fortune and sometimes we get misfortune. We should be ready for both."

"You are absolutely right. Did not Queen Sita experience the worst of calamities? Did not Ravan, the king of Rakshasas abduct her and keep her in Lanka?" Shridhama looked at Ratinibha with piercing eyes and made a pretence of expressing compassion for Sita's past misfortunes and adversities.

"But dear sister! If you do not think otherwise I would like to mention a point. May I?" said Ratinibha.

"O you mad creature! When we are engaged in a jovial conversation, where is the question of anyone mistaking you?"

Well ! Tell us what you have in your mind without any hesitation."

"Well sister ! The life in the forests was indeed painful. It was a great adversity. Your abduction by Ravan was a worse calamity but at the same time you had some good fortune also. You could see the magnificent empire of Lanka. You could understand the secrets of Lanka and you had the good fortune of seeing Ravan, the mightiest of heroes. Is not this a good fortune ?" Ratinibha said smiling with malice.

"Sister ! I despised all those things. I had no mind to see or to enjoy those sights. I always kept praying for a reunion with our dear lord. I always kept yearning for a place at his holy feet."

"Even then you saw Ravan. Did you not ?" Shridhama said with pretended affection.

"No. No. I did not even glance at the face of that wicked fellow. Yes, of course, every day he came to the Devaraman garden and made appeals and entreaties to me. At those times, I saw only his feet. I never lifted up my eyes." Sita said in a dignified voice which was expressive of the purity of her heart.

"Well ! How were his feet?" Shridhama and Prabhavati said together.

"What was there in those feet to be noted specially ?" Sita said showing her indifference.

"Please tell us if there was any thing special in the feet of Ravan. We are eager to know it. Please paint a picture of his feet and show it to us." Shridhama said expressing great eagerness.

"What a funny thing ! How can I paint a picture ?"

"Dear Queen ! You are an expert artist. Please draw a picture and show it to us," Ratinibha said moving a little towards Sita in an apparently child-like manner.

Sita who was plain-hearted and unsuspecting did not know that the three queens were planning her ruin. She was totally unaware of the fact that it was an evil-scheme. So, she drew a picture of Ravan's feet.

"Ah! Extremely beautiful! How can I praise your extraordinary skill in drawing a picture?"

Shridhama and Ratinibha said expressing apparent admiration and appreciation. They swayed with delight and elation. Even Prabhavati could not conceal her innate feelings. Shridhama took the picture of Ravan's feet; and retained it with her. Sita was delighted to see that the other queens were happy. She was happy that she had delighted them.

The three queens, were happy that their plan had succeeded. They felt delighted at the thought of the way in which they could ruin Sita.

One was happy that she had given joy to others.

The others were happy that they had played a trick on Sita and achieved their selfish objective.

Just then, the attendants came and said to Sita, "Our revered mother Aparajita desires to see you."

"Go and inform mother that I will call upon her at once." Then turning towards Shridhama, Ratinibha and Prabhavati, she said "Mother desires to see me. I must go. You are always welcome here."

"Surely, dear sister! When we come to you, we experience great joy and satisfaction!" Shridhama said gravely and returned to her palace. Ratinibha and Prabhavati also left the chamber. Sita set out to meet the Queen-mother.

\* \* \* \*

After sometime, the three queens met in the palace of Prabhavati.

Shridhama's joy knew no bounds. For the first time in her life, she had attained such success. She embraced Prabhavati. Her joy knew no bounds.

"We have achieved our objective. Our plan has succeeded'."

"True. How plain-hearted Sita is!" said Prabhavati expressing her feelings.

"We played our dice intelligently and so we succeeded." Ratinibha said artfully.

"Now, we should play our dice against our lord together and then our lord's love for Sita will turn into hatred and abhorrence."

"Shridhama! You are absolutely right", said Prabhavati expressing her reaction.

Then having spent sometime in the discussion of the plan, they together met Shri Ram when he was alone.

"We desire to speak to you dear lord!"

"You are most welcome to say what you want to say. I am all ears."

"What we are going to say is a truth."

"But when did I say that your words are not true?"

"Then it is all right. But it is certain that you have no love or affection for us."

"No. No. You are wrong. I love you all greatly but how can I prove it to you?"

"Dear lord! It may be that you do not love us and it may be that we do not deserve your love but this is certain. You are the lord of our lives. You are the pillar of all our joys and hopes. We love you though you may not love us. We cannot bear to see something unpleasant happening to you. When we see you derided and beguiled, we feel extremely distressed." At once Shridhama shed tears pretending to be sad. She pretended that her voice was choked and that she could say nothing more.

“When something unpleasant occurs to you and when we come to know of it, we deem it our first duty to inform you of it.” Ratinibha said with pretended concern and anxiety.

“Speak out fearlessly. What is it that you want to say. I am ready to listen to you.” Shri Ram said in a calm voice.

“Then dear lord, please take the trouble of looking at this picture.” Shridhama placed before Shri Ram at once the picture of Ravan’s feet. Shri Ram observed the picture closely for sometime and then looking towards Shridhama said.

“Dear Shridhama! I am unable to understand anything. What do you want to say ? Whose feet are drawn in this picture?”

“Dear Lord ! These are the feet of Lankesh Ravan. Sita has drawn them in this picture.”

“Yes. Sita has drawn that picture. . . . The same Sita whom you loved more than your life. She always keeps remembering Lankesh Ravan. She utters his name with love and devotion. She takes delight in thinking of him and she deems Ravan, the lord of her life and how could such a woman win your love ?” Ratinibha said expressing her pretended grief.

Shri Ram glanced at Ratinibha and Shridhama and then went to the window and stood there looking at the vacant sky. He fell into deep thought.

“Dear Lord! We do not like to say anything more. We know that we have wasted only our breath. We know very well that you do not like to hear even a word of complaint against Sita. You are blinded with your love for her. Well! A truth can never remain concealed for ever.”

“Dear Queen! I heard what you said with attention. Do not worry. Action will be taken in this regard.” and Shri Ram left Prabhavati’s palace and went straight to Sita’s palace.

The three queens stood like stone-images looking at each other for some time.

"You know I told you already that our lord would not certainly believe our words. I knew that he would say nothing. Now, our plan has failed. All our attempts have been in vain." Shridhama said expressing her anger and dissatisfaction.

"But I will not leave it at that if he does not take any action. We will have to adopt some other plan but I will not allow Sita to live in peace." Shridhama stamped the floor with her feet angrily and set off to her palace. Ratinibha also returned to her palace. Prabhavati began to shudder with fear and anxiety. She feared that something unhappy would occur.

"Where was the need for doing all these things. Our joys and sorrows depend upon our karmas but how can I convince Shridhama of this great truth?" Prabhavati thought. Her heart was filled with a nameless fear.

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"Dear Sita! I hope you are well."

"I am absolutely well by your grace and by the grace of our spiritual head."

Shri Ram felt a little calm as he met Sita. He had been greatly disturbed and agitated by what he had heard in Prabhavati's palace. He was a man of outstanding nobility and he abhorred mean thoughts and false and malicious gossip. He was a man of extraordinary humanity and magnanimity and so he despised crooked ways and wicked thoughts. He knew very well the inner thoughts and feelings of these three queens. He could easily see that it was a crooked conspiracy made by the three queens. Therefore all that they had said had produced little effect on his mind. In fact, his love and attachment for Sita increased. He went near Sita and said in a tender voice.

"Dear one! The pleasant breezes of the spring season have been filling the world with joy and jubilation. Let us go to the *Mahendra* garden and spend sometime joyfully there."

"Dear lord! I desire to worship the Paramatma. I will collect flowers from the garden; and worship the Lord. Will you accede to my entreaty?"



Shri Ram, at once, gave orders to his servants. Proper arrangements were made in the garden, for the visit of Shri Ram and Sita.

The next morning, Sita worshipped the lord with heartfelt devotion decorating the lord's image with fresh and fragrant flowers. After the worship was over, Shri Ram and Sita set off to the Mahendra garden accompanied by the members of the royal family. The citizens of Ayodhya made enthusiastic preparations to extend a fitting welcome to the spring, the king of seasons. Grand arrangements were made for the spring festival. Arrangements were made not only for jubilations but also for the austerities relating to the worship of the Paramatma.

Shri Ram noticed that the people of Ayodhya were deeply and forgetfully immersed in the jubilations and celebrations.

Just then, Sita greatly shocked said, "Dear lord! My right eye is shaking. I do not know what lies concealed in the womb of the future!" Sita shuddered to the brims of her being at the thought of some inauspicious occurrence.

"This is not a good omen!" said Shri Ram expressing his anxiety and looking towards Sita.

"Are not the fates satisfied with the sports they played with my life? They caused the greatest adversity to me. I had to experience the anguish of being a captive in Lanka. I do not know what greater calamity the fates are planning to cause to me. Dear lord! I fear that some great calamity will occur. Otherwise, my right eye would not have shaken thus."

Sita's bright and cheerful face grew bleak and blighted. She kept looking at Shri Ram.

"Dear Sita! Do not give way to grief. Our joys and sorrows depend upon our karmas. Everyone has to experience the fruits of his karmas. If some inauspicious karma emerges to the surface no power on this earth can prevent it from carrying out its purpose."

"My dear lord! My mind is greatly shaken by fear and anxiety."

"Dear Sita! Now you go to your palace and worship the Paramatma with devotion. Meditate upon the lord. Carry out sublime contemplations. Give gifts to the deserving. Give food and clothes to the needy and the destitute. At a time of calamity, Dharma is the only refuge. Only Dharma can provide protection to human beings."

Accordingly, Sita proceeded to her palace in her chariot accompanied by her attendants. Restraining her fears and anxieties, she worshipped the Paramatma with absolute devotion. She gave gifts of money and clothes to the needy and the indigent. She thought of the evil that might befall her and decided to counter its effects by means of spiritual austerities. There was no indication of the possibility of the occurrence of any calamity yet.

Shridhama and Ratinibha were secretly observing the behaviour of Shri Ram and Sita to see if their attachment continued as before or if there was any change in Shri Ram's attitude towards Sita. But when they heard that Shri Ram had set off with Sita joyfully to take part in the spring festival, they were shocked and disappointed. Anger flamed out through their eyes. They became furious; stamped the ground with their feet and felt greatly and bitterly disappointed. They two again had a secret discussion. Both were equally unhappy and agitated. Both were furious.

"Look! Our lord, has taken with him only Sita to enjoy the delights of the spring festival. They will enjoy sensual delights to their fill. I am sure that our lord's infatuation for Sita can never abate. He cannot live even for a moment without Sita."

"Shridhama! What you say is true. We have to adopt some other plan to prejudice his mind against Sita. Our lord does not believe our words. He thinks that we are liars and hypocrites."

"I am ready to co-operate with you in anything that you propose to do."

“We three should join together and spread rumours and scandals against Sita. We should see that all in the city would talk about the matter. We should speak of the picture of Ravan’s feet in such a way that the attendants will come to know about it and will begin talking about it. Then, soon the rumour will spread throughout the city. When the scandals reach the ears of our lord, there will be a cyclone; and then he will have to think of the matter seriously; and will have to take some steps.”

Ratinibha was filled with fears when she heard the words of Shridhama; but when she realized the inner meaning of her words, she felt happy. But she thought fearfully, “If our plan fails, we three will have to face disgrace and bitterness.” But Shridhama said, “But we need not fear anything. The matter will spread in the form of a rumour; and nobody will come to know that it is a conspiracy.” When Ratinibha heard this assurance given by Shridhama she felt a little relieved. Her fears disappeared. Then the two went to meet Prabhavati. They explained their scheme to Prabhavati and secured her consent.

In consequence, they decided to implement their plan in Prabhavati’s palace. They began talking about the matter in such a way that soon the attendants in the palace began to whisper to one another saying. “It seems Sita has drawn a picture of Ravan’s feet ! It seems she always keeps remembering Ravan.” These rumours and scandals began to spread among the attendants and servants. The same rumours and scandals appeared among servants and attendants of Ratinibha and Shridhama. Even when they heard these rumours, no one was willing to believe them. They thought that it was impossible to believe those rumours that Sita had drawn such a picture; but when they saw the picture with their own eyes, they could not help believing the rumours. They could not discredit the rumours.

Soon, the rumours about the picture spread like wild fire throughout the city of Ayodhya.

People began to talk about the matter everywhere in the city. Sita's character became a subject of discussion and people began to entertain doubts regarding her chastity and purity. But Sita was totally unaware of all these developments.

Strange are the ways of destiny !

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## XCVII

### THE MOON WAS ECLIPSED

The people of the city of Ayodhya used to adore and glorify Sita as a woman of outstanding nobility; they used to deem her an angel of sublime virtues, a goddess at whose very sight they used to feel blessed; they used to think that a glance of her sublime eye could wash away all their sins; and her blessings used to make the hearts of the people bloom into bliss; but now all that changed. Sita whom people adored and venerated as a goddess now became a subject of frivolous gossip and censorious scandals.

“Ravan abducted Sita and took her away to Lanka. He kept her for a long time in the Devaraman garden. He would not have allowed her to remain chaste. Ravan was a Rakshasa; you know!”

“Lankesh Ravan, it seems possessed a fascinating appearance which would captivate the heart of anyone. It seems he was a veritable god in appearance. Countless damsels, it seems were ready to surrender themselves heart and soul mesmerized by his magnificent appearance.”

“There were countless queens in his harem.”

“And they voluntarily surrendered themselves to Ravan. I wonder what a mesmeric appearance he possessed!”

“When such was the case there is no wonder if Sita also had become infatuated with him!”

“The heart of a woman is unfathomable.”

“But Sita, we thought, was an exception to this rule. But to-day we have to conclude that even she is frail. The truth

is this. This is a matter relating to big people. How can we know the truth? How can common people know what takes place among the great ones?"

"Oh! Ravan has been killed. Sita has not been able to forget him. Otherwise, why should she draw the picture of Ravan's feet?"

"Brother! This is called love. Someone has rightly said that passion knows no propriety. Shri Ram made a war against Ravan and brought Sita to Ayodhya but Sita was quite happy at Lanka."

"We have to admit that this has stained the splendour of the tradition of the royal family of Ayodhya."

"Yes. That is true; otherwise who would believe all these things. Is Shri Ram totally ignorant of all this?"

"It is likely that Shri Ram knows nothing of this matter. He is a great man! You see."

"Then he must be informed of this matter".

"But who has the courage to inform Shri Ram of this matter?"

"Who will court troubles and disasters? Who would like to convey this news to Shri Ram? Only the Chief Citizens can!"

"But before they approach Shri Ram, they should verify the truth of these rumours. It is not proper to do anything decisive on the basis of mere rumours and gossip."

"No. No. All this is true. There are people who have actually seen the picture of Ravan's feet drawn by Sita. Where was the need for her to draw the picture of Ravan's feet if she had no secret love and admiration for him? What other proof do you need?"

"No one even dreamt that a noble woman like Sita would be so ignoble."

“That is a fact.”

“But how monstrous ! What a gross sin she has committed ! Eventhough she is the wife of such a great man as Shri Ram, she has stooped to this level; has she not ?”

“What else could she do ? Was not the prosperous city of Lanka a happy place compared to the forests where she had to wander with Shri Ram ? Added to this, Ravan who is a *Prati-vasudev* admired her. She had the good fortune of securing such an admirer. So, naturally she stooped to this mean level.”

The attitude of the people of Ayodhya towards Sita totally changed. The evil design of the wicked queens Ratinibha, Shridhama and Prabhavati succeeded. They were fully successful in staining the character of Sita which was pure and white like milk. A cyclone of rumours and scandals rose all over the city of Ayodhya. The joy and satisfaction of the jealous queens knew no bounds. They felt elated and triumphant since Sita's character was now stained and besmirched. They thought, “Now, our lord will despise Sita. Henceforth, he will be in our possession and we will bathe him with the waters of our love.” The three queens were experiencing reckless happiness. They felt triumphant and forgot themselves in their joy.

The rumours and scandals relating to Sita spread to every nook and corner of the city. The leading citizens of Ayodhya fell into a confounding dilemma. They were shocked to hear these rumours. They began to spend sleepless nights. So, the leading citizens decided to hold a meeting to discuss the matter. Accordingly, the leading citizens of Ayodhya, Vijayashreshti, Surdev, Madhumal, Pingal, Shuladhar, Kashyap, Kal, and Kshema met in the house of Vijayashreshti. All were in a state of distress and gloom. They looked bleak and blighted. They knew the purpose of the meeting. They were fully aware of the seriousness and importance of the matter. They knew that the voice of Duty was stern and exacting. They knew how hard it was to carry out their duty in this regard. After a long silence, Vijayshreshti began;

“Oh you leading citizens of Ayodhya! All of us know the rumours and scandals that have been raging in Ayodhya for some days. Hence, there is no need to repeat them here. We have met here with the purpose of refuting and repudiating those rumours. But we can do so only by meeting Shri Ram. It is not proper to take any decision in his absence. Therefore, we should, at once, meet Shri Ram and inform him of these rumours and scandals. We should discuss the matter with him. Then Shri Ram can take any decision which he deems proper. But we should do our duty; otherwise people would say that we have failed in carrying out our duty.”

There was silence in the chamber. Everyone was listening to the words of Vijayshreshti with deep concentration. All sat with their heads bowed. Everyone looked agitated and worried. Then Kshema Mahattar looked towards Vijayshreshti.

“Come on Kshem! Let us know your opinion.”

“Dear Sir! What can I say? My mind has become completely agitated. A great calamity has befallen Ayodhya! How unfortunate we are to see all this! I wonder why the people of Ayodhya have not been punished by gods for committing this enormity of calumniating Sita! I wonder why their tongues are not paralysed! The truth is that rumours do not have any basis. I cannot believe these rumours.”

“We too do not believe these rumours. Sita is not at all such a woman. This is impossible.” All the leading citizens said expressing their opinion and endorsing the opinion expressed by Kshem.

“But when we do not believe these rumours where is any need to inform Shri Ram of this matter?”

It is our duty to inform him of what people have been saying and what we have discussed,” said Vijayashreshti in a calm manner.

“Of course, we should inform him of what people have been saying but we should also make it clear to him that we have not played any role in spreading those rumours.”



“What we have to do is to place before him the facts and then to entreat him to discover the truth behind these rumours.”

“Then why delay? Why should we not meet him at once?” Surdev said expressing his opinion.

The eight leading citizens set off at once to meet Shri Ram. Vijayashreshti was given the duty of conveying the information to Shri Ram and to be the spokesman of the committee. Vijayashreshti felt uneasy. He knew very well that Shri Ram had great love and affection for Sita and he was fully aware of the fact that it would be an unpleasant task to say anything against Sita in the presence of Shri Ram. He wondered what the consequences would be. Shri Ram had fought a terrible war against Ravan for the sake of Sita and he also endured countless difficulties for her sake and so he thought that it was really unpleasant to speak ill of Sita in the presence of Shri Ram. Vijayashreshti fell into deep thought and set off towards the palace in great mental agitation. He had to carry out a very important but painful duty.

The guard at the gate stopped them.

“Please, inform the king that the leading citizens of Ayodhya desire to meet him.”

The guard conveyed the news to Shri Ram.

Shri Ram ordered that the leading citizens should be at once permitted to meet him. The guard took them to the presence of Shri Ram. The leading citizens saluted Shri Ram respectfully and sat on the floor before him.

Shri Ram glanced at everyone and said in a soft voice : “You are most welcome here. I am extremely happy to see you. Kindly tell me, what your purpose is? What may be the cause for this unexpected visit? I hope all our citizens are happy and cheerful. I hope there is no disturbance or lawlessness anywhere.”

The leading citizens sat with their heads bowed and with their eyes fixed on the ground. They were shivering with a

nameless dread. They were unable to say anything. The splendour of Shri Ram's face threw them into a state of stupefaction. They seemed to be experiencing great agitation and distress.

"Noble men ! You need not fear anything. If you have anything to say, please speak out fearlessly. You need not at all worry about anything. I have the fullest confidence in you. I know that you are my well-wishers and that you always endeavour to keep up the splendour of our traditions. I know that your only intention is to keep up the honour and prestige of the Ikshvaku dynasty."

Shri Ram encouraged the leading citizens to speak out fearlessly. They summoned some courage to speak out. Then, Vijayshreshti ventured to speak out. He got ready to speak using all his intelligence; and looked towards Shri Ram. The other seven members kept breathlessly watching him. Shri Ram also kept looking towards Vijayshreshti.

"Dear lord ! We find ourselves in a dilemma. Our loyalty and sense of duty impel us to reveal to you what we have heard; but if we reveal it, it will pain you. But you and the people of the city have placed us in this responsible position; and have placed on our shoulders the responsibility of maintaining the safety and honour of the city; and so if we do not inform you of the rumours that are current in the city, we would have failed in our duty. Honoured lord ! Throughout the city rumours have spread about queen Sita. Everyone in the city has been speaking of it. But we do not at all like these scandals against Sita. Why did Ravan carry away Sita ? Naturally, out of his lust for her beauty, he took her away; and kept her in Lanka. Even then, we do not mean to say that Sita had any admiration for Ravan. She would not have entertained any sensual desires. We are sure of it. We fully believe that she remained detached in Lanka. She might have remained detached but inspite of it Ravan might have compelled her by using force to yield to him. There might have been other circumstances compelling her to yield to him and she might have lost her chastity. Ravan's sensuality and lust for beautiful women are well known. His

greatest weakness is his lust for beautiful women; so anything might have happened."

"Dear lord. All this is what people are saying in Ayodhya I am only placing before you what people are saying about Sita. I have placed before you their thoughts and feelings for your information. When I heard this rumour for the first time I was stunned and stupefied. We were greatly agitated to hear this. We despised the scandal-mongers. We had nothing but contempt and abhorrence for them but the rumours have assumed the form of a cyclone in Ayodhya. Therefore we had a discussion and decided to place the matter before you.

Of course we are absolutely certain that these malicious rumours have no basis. They are merely ill-natured scandals. Rumours emanate from common people. Moreover this rumour is a collective one so we wonder why you should be agitated over these rumours. Why should your glory be stained? What do they gain by staining the splendour of the royal dynasty? Why should you stain the Royal traditions of your family by allowing the people to talk thus? Oh! king what else can we say?"

Whatever Vijayshreshti wanted to say he spoke out without pausing. He had disburdened himself of the weight that was pressing upon his mind and began to shudder with the fear that Shri Ram might become angry. They feared that some unexpected and untoward development might result from this since they had made bold to speak of the secrets of the harem. Shri Ram heard every word of Vijayshreshti with deep attention. When he heard it he experienced inordinate grief and agitation. There arose in his mind a tremendous commotion of impetuous thoughts and feelings: "What a terrible injustice to Sita! How meanly are the common people calumniating her and staining her character! Sita's character has become stained in the eyes of the people of Ayodhya" Shri Ram was deeply agitated by these thoughts. His heart was filled with boundless grief. He writhed in agony. He retained his equanimity and then looking up towards the sky; in a serious voice, he said:

“Noble men ! Undoubtedly you have carried out your duty with unquestionable loyalty. So far I have not ignored you. When that is so how can you ignore my interest ? It is an eternal truth that dedicated people are never neglected by the king and yes ! You may be sure that I will never invite ignominy for the sake of a woman.”

What Shri Ram said greatly pleased the city-heads. Greatly relieved and pleased they left the palace. But Shri Ram was filled with unbearable grief and agitation.

Now Shri Ram had only two ways open to him both equally painful and agonising. One was to keep silent over Sita's affair and to bear with disgrace and the other was to abandon Sita and to bear the grief of separation from her. He experienced such anguish as he did not experience even at the time of his leaving Ayodhya to fulfil his father's promise.

He could not even bear with the thought of living without Sita. His heart was filled with grief. The stain on Sita's character had to disappear by itself. Otherwise; the only way left to him was to abandon her. But the very thought of abandoning Sita filled him with grief.

Conflicting and confusing thoughts arose in his mind : “Let people say what they like to say against Sita. Let me face the ignominy silently’ but the very next moment a contradictory thought arose : “Merely for the sake of Sita is it proper to stain the Ikshwaku dynasty and of our royal family ?” Shri Ram continued to think thus. He could not find a way out. His face which had been formerly radiant now became bleak and blighted. Throughout the day he remained in grief At night he tried to find out personally what people were saying about Sita.

The sun set in the west. The goddess of the evening made her appearance. The sky appeared colourful in the rays of the setting sun. Small clouds seemed to be playing hide and seek in the sky. Step by step dense darkness descended upon the city. The city became silent. Shri Ram set out in disguise.

Only a few people were seen moving about on the streets. While passing through the streets Shri Ram carefully overheard what people were saying to one another at various places. The people were saying the something everywhere. At every step, he heard some people discussing Sita's affairs.

“Ravan carried away Sita to Lanka ! He retained her in the Devaraman garden. Of course Shri Ram fought against Ravan and brought back Sita. He believes that Sita is pure and chaste. But how can we believe that Sita is pure and chaste ? Ravan who was all-powerful in Lanka would not have lost the opportunity of enjoying sensual pleasures with Sita. It is really amazing that Shri Ram has never thought of this. Where love is thick faults are thin. Attachment blinds a man to realities. In this darkness of the night we cannot see anything. Similarly in the darkness of infatuation Shri Ram cannot see anything.”

When Shri Ram heard such things being said by the people of Ayodhya he was stunned and he felt dizzy. A tremendous conflict arose in his mind. Dense darkness enveloped him. He found himself in a great dilemma. He felt that his fiery thoughts whose face was violent could never look back. He returned to the palace in this state of mind. He was in a state of absolute stupefaction. On one hand he loved Sita more than his life; on the other he loved the splendid traditions of her royal family. He loved pure glory. He was unable to decide which he could discard.

We do not know when evil karmas emerge to the surface; and produce their effects ! When they emerge to the surface they envelop the whole life of a person and cause terrible calamities to him. The *jivas* in samsar keep wandering thus. Caught in the bondage of sinful karmas they experience inordinate grief and agony. Fie upon such evil karmas ! They should be destroyed.

Shri Ram could not get a wink of sleep. He was greatly agitated. He spent the whole night writhing in agony.

## XCVIII

### THE ABANDONMENT OF SITA

“Is it my illusion ? Is it merely imagination ? My mind has become deeply agitated by what the city-heads said. I think what people have been saying is but an external manifestation of my own internal doubts and suspicions. Now, I must order my spies to find out the truth behind these rumours. I must find out the origin of these rumours. Otherwise, there will be unnecessary delay. I must find a solution to this problem as soon as possible.”

Shri Ram thought for a while and then sent for his spies. He ordered them to collect full details about the rumours that were raging in the city like a whirlwind. The spies saluted Shri Ram and went away to carry out his commands. Shri Ram kept walking to and fro in his chamber. Just then the guard at the door came in and said in a humble voice.

“May his Highness be victorious !”

“What is the matter ? Any news ?” said Shri Ram looking towards the guard.

“Dear Lord ! Sugriv, the king of the Vanardweep and Vibhishan, the king of Lanka have come to the city. They desire to meet you,” the guard said with his head bowed, in respect.

“Bring them in honour.”

The guard saluted Shri Ram and went out. Within a short while. Vibhishan and Sugriv entered the chamber. They saluted Shri Ram and sat in seats of state. Shri Ram received them with great honour and made polite enquiries regarding their welfare. Sugriv who possessed incisive intelligence immediately

noticed that Shri Ram was absent-minded and worried. Vibhishan also noticed the mental state of Shri Ram. But they were helpless. It was not in their power to relieve Shri Ram of his agitation. They had come to know of the cause for his distress. Once, Sugriv had seen Shri Ram in such a state of distress and anguish. That was when Ravan had abducted Sita and when they had not been able to find out the whereabouts of Sita. Shri Ram had gone to Kishkindha in boundless grief and anguish. Now, Shri Ram was experiencing the same anguish as he had experienced when Lakshman lay lifeless almost, hit by the *Amoghavijaya* released by Ravan.

Sugriv and Vibhishan sat before Shri Ram, yet Shri Ram kept looking into the sky with fixed eyes. He had totally forgotten himself in thinking of the affair of Sita. The news had reached the ears of Lakshman also. "The city-heads met Shri Ram and had some secret discussion with him. Since then Shri Ram has been in great anguish." Lakshman learnt all this from reliable sources. As soon as he heard this, he went to meet Shri Ram. He entered Shri Ram's chamber and bowed to him. He was greatly shocked to see Shri Ram in distress.

Shri Ram sat lost in his thoughts. He was thinking: "I destroyed Ravan and his friends for the sake of Sita. I fought, a terrible war for her. I killed countless Rakshasa warriors for the sake of Sita! Now, a dreadful calamity has befallen her. I know very well that Sita is innocent; and that she is absolutely pure and chaste. She is sublime. Of course, Ravan was lusty and sensual; but that does not make Sita guilty. Her character is absolutely pure and spotless. But what can I do now? Ah! Into what a terrible conflict have I fallen!"

Just then, the spies came in. They were filled with fear when they saw Shri Ram surrounded by Sugriv, Vibhishan and Lakshman. They bowed to Shri Ram and said: "My lord! In every nook and corner of the city of Ayodhya people have been saying the samething; "Sita is not really pure. She is no more chaste. She was living in Lanka for a long time and Ravan who was a sensual and passionate person would not have allowed her

to remain pure. My lord! People have been saying many such things."

Lakshman became indignant on hearing what the spies said. His anger flamed to the highest skies. He said in a thundering voice: "Who says that Sita's character is stained? She is as sublime as the Ganga and as splendid as the Himalayas. She is a great woman. Some people have set afloat such malicious rumours with some selfish motives. Their purpose seems to be to stain the noble character of Sita. Let those people speak ill of Sita to their hearts' content. But let those scandal-mongers also remember that Lakshman is still alive and that he will surely destroy them. While he is alive no one can do any harm to our goddess Sita. Let them remember that Lakshman will not tolerate a single ill-natured word said against Sita." Lakshman's indignant fulminations filled everyone with mortal dread. His voice reverberated in the chamber.

Then Shri Ram said advising him to calm down: "Dear brother! The City-heads met me and informed me of the rumours against Sita. Then I went out in the night in disguise to find out personally what people were saying. I too found people saying the same thing. Then I sent our spies to find out further details about the rumours. In consequence, our spies now have communicated to us what they have been able to gather. They are not at fault and the people are not to blame."

"Well! But you should not care for these rumours."

"We cannot ignore these rumours. If we do not take cognisance of the rumours, a great calamity will occur. I received back Sita who had been in Lanka. This is the cause for all these rumours. Now, I have decided to abandon Sita. People will blame you if you come in my way. Rumours and scandals are like a river. People can give them any twist or turn." Even then Lakshman was not convinced of Shri Ram's point. He could not approve of Shri Ram's opinion. He was greatly agitated by Shri Ram's decision to abandon Sita. He said in a grief-stricken tone: "Dear lord! Please do not abandon Sita misled by malicious rumours. Just as we cannot stop a torrential downpour



of rain we cannot also check these rumours. We cannot silence people. We must hear what people say but take our own decisions. Do not be led away by these rumours. I am sure that this is a conspiracy to besmirch Sita's image but it is as clear as a crystal that Sita is pure and innocent. Her character is sublime. Generally, common people try to pick holes in the affairs of the royal family. They always take delight in denigrating their superiors. Therefore, you just ignore these rumours. You need not punish those wicked fellows who are the originators of these rumours but you must ignore them. You should not take any step against their scandalous gossip."

"Lakshman! You are absolutely right. What you say is true but the way of the world, is the same in every matter. A king should not adopt any policy that is contrary to the will of the people. He has to ignore even truth to respect the will of the people. He has to do so for the welfare of the people."

Lakshman stood stupefied. He had not expected this attitude from Shri Ram. Sugriv and Vibhishan sat with blank minds. They understood the situation fully.

Lakshman began to shake with anger. He stood up and said in an angry voice :

"Dear brother! I do not care for fame or blame. It is absolutely improper to abandon Sita to safeguard the splendid traditions of the Ikshvaku dynasty, as you say. If you do not have the slightest doubt regarding Sita's purity and chastity you need not fear the rumours. If you abandon Sita giving importance to the rumours, what will happen to her? Have you ever thought of the disasters that she will have to face in consequence? Can Sita ever live even for a moment without you? Can she bear with a separation from you? You ask Hanuman and he will tell you what her condition was in the Devaraman garden. She had given up eating food since she could not bear with the separation from you. It seems Hanuman found it extremely difficult to prevail upon her to end her fast. O king of Ayodhya! I again and again entreat you not to abandon Sita caring for the words of the people."

Lakshman was shivering like a leaf shaken by violent winds. Shri Ram's blighted face revealed his determination. He said refuting Lakshman's arguments :

"Dear Lakshman ! The abandonment of Sita is unavoidable."

Then he clapped his hands. The door-keeper came in at once and saluted Shri Ram. He ordered the guard to bring the commander Kritantavadan. Accordingly, Kritantavadan appeared before Shri Ram within a few moments. He saluted Shri Ram and Lakshman and stood before them with a bowed head.

"Kritantavadan ! Take Sita to some forest and leave her there."

"But dear lord ! Think over the matter a little calmly. Sita is pregnant. It is not at all proper to send her away in this condition."

"She may be pregnant but she has to be abandoned. There is no other way out."

Shri Ram stood up. Lakshman overcome with grief fell at his feet. The tears streamed down his eyes. With great difficulty, he said;

"Dear brother ! It is highly improper to abandon such a noble woman as Sita. Please do not abandon her."

"Lakshman ! Be silent. The king who fails to act according to the law is unfit to be a king and now according to the laws of our kingdom, the abandonment of Sita is unavoidable."

There was silence everywhere. Nobody could say anything. All were silent and petrified and sat like stone-images.

"Dear Commander ! Sita once expressed her desire to go on a pilgrimage to Sametshikhar. Therefore, take her away under the pretext of taking her to Sametshikhar and leave her in some wild forest." Shri Ram's command echoed in the chamber.

Lakshman returned to his palace overwhelmed with anguish. He felt helpless against Shri Ram's sense of justice and duty.

He was a Vasudev. He possessed extraordinary power and strength but he was incapable of ignoring Shri Ram's command and rescuing Sita from a disaster. Of course, he was filled with grief and anguish because of the extraordinary devotion and veneration, he had for Sita but he could do nothing. He could only shed tears of blood and could do nothing else because he could not disregard Shri Ram's command.

The commander Kritantavadan !

After all, he was a servant of the throne though he occupied a high position. Therefore, it was his first duty to carry out the commands of the king. The king had commanded that he should take Sita and leave her in some wild forest. This important responsibility was given to him and he had to carry it out at any cost. He was a veritable god of death to enemies but tender towards friends. He had extraordinary devotion and veneration for Sita. His faith in her purity was firm and unshakeable but he thought it improper to express his opinion in the presence of Shri Ram. "When his dear brother Lakshman himself has not been able to persuade him to give up his decision, would he care for my entreaties ?" He thought. His heart was filled with grief and agony. In great grief and anguish, he proceeded to Sita's palace. The attendants informed Sita of the arrival of the commander. Sita calmly asked the commander why he had called at her palace unexpectedly. In reply to her question, the commander said respectfully bowing his head. "The king has commanded me to take you to Sametshikhar. If you desire to go on a pilgrimage to Sametshikhar, I am ready to take you there."

Kritantavadan said this of course, but he stood with his eyes fixed on the ground as if he was guilty of having committed a serious sin. He did not have the courage to look up.

Sita was greatly delighted to hear that Shri Ram was sending her to Sametshikhar. She was overwhelmed with joy. For sometime past, she had been requesting Shri Ram to take her to Sametshikhar. Now, she felt happy because her long-cherished desire was going to be fulfilled. She made speedy preparations and came out of her palace.

But she was not aware of Shri Ram's deceptive plan. She did not know that she would be left in the forest and that she would not be going on a pilgrimage. She did not know that she was leaving her palace for good and that she would never return to her palace.

Sita, the sublime !

Sita had remained firm and unshakeable like the Meru mountain in Lanka. She had firmly rejected Ravan's entreaties with utter contempt but now the chastity of that noble woman was suspected by the people of Ayodhya. Countless gods and goddesses, Gandharvas and Kinnaras had admired Sita's purity and glorified her nobility and their cries of jubilation had reverberated throughout the universe but the same sublime Sita was being abandoned by her lord today. Shri Ram had adopted a deceptive plan to discard her. Of course, Shri Ram experienced inordinate grief when he abandoned Sita. He experienced great anguish at the thought of the separation from Sita. His mind whirled like a dry leaf caught in a whirlwind, but what happened at the end ? What could he do ? Whenever sinful karmas emerge to the surface, such unexpected calamities occur. At such times, calamities fall upon human beings like crumbling mountains. The clouds of calamities envelop their lives and the jivas in samsar feel absolutely helpless against the immeasurable power of karmas.

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## XCIX

### IN THE FOREST OF SIMHANINAD

Actually, Sita was a plain-hearted and noble-minded woman.

She was the very embodiment of gentleness, amiability and ingenuity.

She entertained no fears or doubts regarding Shri Ram's commands. She had the fullest confidence in his greatness. She deemed him her god.

Plain-hearted people do not suspect others. They do not entertain any doubts or suspicions regarding their friends or relatives. Therefore, Sita did not entertain any doubt regarding what Kritantavadan had said. Of course, on the eve of her departure from her palace, she witnessed some evil and inauspicious omens but Sita fearlessly sat in the chariot. No fear or suspicion rose in her mind. The chariot sped away from Ayodhya. Sita did not ask the commander these questions. "Is my noble lord accompanying me or is he following me in another chariot? Are any other members of our family accompanying me? Why do I not hear the noise of other chariots?" She did not ask him any question, because she had unshakeable faith in Shri Ram. She believed that whatever he did was right, and that he would not do anything unjust or unfair. She never had even dreamt that she would be thus deceptively deserted. She had never dreamt that her dear lord would adopt any deceptive or guileful methods. Therefore, she remained calm and serene and kept watching the graces and glories of nature with elation.

The chariot halted in a beautiful and peaceful place on the bank of the Ganga. A raft was kept ready by previous arrange-

ment. Kritantavadan took Sita and the chariot across the river to the other bank of the Ganga. The forest of Simhaninad was situated close to the Ganga. It was a wild and dreadful forest, pathless and boundless. It seemed to extend to the horizons. They entered the forest of Simhaninad. Kritantavadan stopped the chariot in the forest and he alighted from it. His eyes were streaming with tears and his face was bleak and blighted. He was shuddering with fear and he was unable to say anything. His voice was choked with grief.

Sita wondered why he had stopped the chariot there, glanced at him doubtfully and said in a serious voice. "Kritantavadan! Why have you stopped the chariot here, in the middle of the forest? Are you waiting for the other chariots to arrive? Where are the other chariots carrying my lord and the others?"

But poor Kritantavadan was unable to say anything. He had no answer to these questions. So, he remained speechless and tears streamed down his eyes. He sobbed and wept like a helpless child.

Noticing the tears streaming down his eyes, Sita said anxiously, "Ah! Kritantavadan! Why are you shedding tears? What is the matter? Why have you suddenly started weeping? Have you committed any mistake or have you lost your way in the jungle? Dear brother! Speak out." Sita asked him these questions without pausing for breath. What could Kritantavadan do? He was grief-stricken but he had to say something in reply to her questions. He could not conceal the truth any more. So, he said in a grief-stricken voice. "Revered Queen! What shall I say. If I had died before answering these questions, I would have lived a blessed time. Oh! I have to say what should not be said. I have done what I ought not to have done but I am a poor servant of the king. The painful responsibility of telling you what cannot be uttered has fallen to my lot? I am a servant to the throne and I have to carry out the commands of the king even against my will. Sometimes, a servant has to commit even an enormity to carry out the commands of the king."

"Dear commander! I cannot understand anything. Speak out clearly what you want to say. You need not conceal any-

thing from me and I wonder why you are weeping like a helpless child." Sita's anxiety increased every moment. Fearing some unexpected calamity, she kept looking at the commander with fixed eyes.

"Fearing ignominy and disgrace, Shri Ram has abandoned you, revered queen!" He said this sobbing. He covered his face with his hands.

Sita was greatly stunned to hear this. With great difficulty, she said, "What kind of ignominy? What is the disgrace that my lord has to face? I am unable to understand anything."

"Revered Queen! Throughout Ayodhya people have been spreading scandals and rumours saying, "Sita is no more pure. Ravan would not have allowed her to remain pure. She is a fallen woman and Shri Ramachandra has broken the lofty traditions of the royal family by receiving Sita." When the spies brought this news to Shri Ram, he decided to abandon you. Lakshman, of course, opposed his decision. He tried his best to dissuade Shri Ram from carrying out his decision but Shri Ram remained firm. He did not budge an inch. In consequence, Lakshman returned to his palace grief-stricken. At that time, all were present in the court. Even Sugriv and Vibhishan were there but no one would change Shri Ram's decision. They sat mute and helpless. Then, Shri Ram commanded this sinner...this wretched, mean mortal to leave you in a wild forest. I am a poor servant of the king. I had to carry out the king's command. So, I have brought you here. The voice of duty compelled me to commit this enormity. Revered Queen! This is a dreadful forest where wild and ferocious beasts keep wandering fearlessly. You are thrown into the jaws of death. Only your purity must protect you. Only your spotless character can save you from this disaster."

Kritantavadan's adamant heart grew tender and soft like a flower and he began to weep like a child.

Sita swooned and fell off the chariot.

Kritantavadan shuddered with fear when he saw Sita lying on the ground unconscious. He feared that Sita might die. So, he screamed in a heart-rending manner. He began to lament aloud : "Oh ! What a wretch I am ! What a sinner I am ! I have had to carry out this painful duty. How very unfortunate I am ! Oh ! I have been responsible for the death of the revered Queen." Shocked and grieved, he collapsed on the ground. The whole atmosphere was pervaded with grief. Even the birds and animals in the forest were mute and stupefied. Trees, plants and creepers drooped in anguish. It was as though, the whole forest was lamenting. Even birds began twittering in the skies. The greatest woman of Bharat... The queen-consort of Shri Ram... the imperial jointress in the magnificent kingdom of Ayodhya... Sita now lay unconscious on the ground. The commander who had killed thousands of soldiers in war was now helpless and grieving in a heart-rending manner. Is there anyone who would love the samsar when such are its ways ? Is there any unfortunate person who would entertain the desire of enjoying worldly delights ? Ah ! This is the dreadful way of the samsar. This is its futility. We cannot say when evil Karmas engulf and overwhelm us.

But the air in the forest could not bear with the sight of Sita's misfortune. Even the air of the forest was moved to pity by the heart-rending lamentations of Kritantavadan. So, cool breezes blew over Sita with abounding compassion. The birds of the forest brought water on their wings; and sprinkled it on her face. Every object in the forest was filled with grief; and did its best to help Sita to recover her consciousness. Hence, a short while later, Sita recovered her consciousness. She looked around with grief-stricken eyes; cried out, "Oh Shri Ram" and again swooned; but Kritantavadan was happy to see that Sita was alive. After a long time again, she recovered her consciousness. Looking at Kritantavadan with fixed eyes; she said in a broken voice.

"How far is Ayodhya from here.? Where is my dear lord Shri Ram ?"

"Revered queen ! What is the use of your knowing whether Ayodhya is near or far ? That is not a solution to the problem.



Moreover, what is the use of calling upon Shri Ram for help? Please give up for ever the hope of returning to Shri Ram who has given this stern command. That will be good for you."

"Then, has Shri Ram abandoned me for ever?"

"Yes mother! Shri Ram has abandoned you once for all; otherwise, why should he command me to leave you in this wild forest?"

And the commander began to lament loudly. He could not bear to see the heart-rending sight of Sita's anguish and agony. Clouds of a mysterious kind of seriousness covered Sita's face. She thought about the situation for a while, and then in a serene voice, she said.

"Noble man! My lord might have abandoned me. It is a matter relating to his position as king. But you must remember that he is the lord of my life. He is the life of my life. My love and devotion for him cannot be shaken by anything. But please convey this message of mine to him.

"If you fear the censure of the world; if you think that on account of me the splendour of your dynasty will be stained then why did you not subject me to the fire-ordeal? You could have tested my integrity thus and you could have established that I am pure and chaste. The fire-ordeal would have established my chastity beyond all doubts and suspicions but I am unfortunate. You did not think of any such method and without giving me a chance to prove my innocence you have suddenly abandoned me. Well! It does not matter. All this is the result of my own sinful Karmas. This is the work of my inauspicious Karmas. I will live in this dreadful forest alone. My fortune has fallen to pieces. I am an unfortunate wretch but what you have done must be right. You have taken this step, I am sure, after much thinking. Your action is becoming of you. You are the greatest of men. The whole world knows that you are the embodiment of supreme wisdom. I too believe that your wisdom is unexampled in this world. Yet, it seems certain that the step you have taken is not wise or thoughtful. You, out of your concern for the honour of the Ikshvaku dynasty, have abandoned

me. Is it proper to abandon an absolutely pure and innocent woman and to cast her away in a wild forest thus, in order to safeguard the honour and prestige of your royal dynasty? Were you not sure of my chastity and integrity? Did Lakshman or any other member of the royal family suspect my integrity and purity? Was there no other way to silence the people and to eradicate the scandals against me? My lord! I will face and endure with calmness and courage all the calamities and adversities that will befall me on account of my sinful Karmas. This samsar is an ocean of misery. This samsar is a morass of conflicts, confusions and agonies, but we have to face the samsar, but kindly do not abandon the Dharma just because it is condemned by some ignorant or unenlightened people just as you have abandoned me on account of your fear of popular censure." Sita's voice was choked with anguish. Her eyes welled up with tears. She shuddered with a nameless fear and collapsed to the ground unconscious. Kritantavadan's patience gave way. He began to weep in a heart-rending manner. Even the horses shed tears of sorrow. After a short while, Sita again regained her consciousness. She rose to her feet and looking towards Kritantavadan said in a voice filled with grief.

"Oh! How can Shri Ram live without me? How can he bear with this separation from me? Alas? I am indeed a wretch, a sinner, an unfortunate woman. Though alive, I am unable to reside at the feet of my lord. Dear child Kritantavadan! May Shri Ram be prosperous. Kindly convey my heartfelt blessings to Lakshman and my salutations to all our relatives and friends and now dear son! May all travellers be blessed with felicity. You at once return to my lord Shri Ram."

Kritantavadan thought for a while about the irony of fate. He shed tears thinking of the separation between the noble woman, Sita and Shri Ram. He sat holding on to a stone in absolute anguish looking at Sita. He saluted Sita again and again. He went near the horses and stroked their backs tenderly. The horses neighed loudly. They lifted their faces up and refused to proceed in the direction of Ayodhya. Kritantavadan

looked around with eyes full of grief. "Oh! The great woman Sita has to live in this dreadful forest. Who is there to help her in this desolate place? Who is here to save her from the fury of ferocious beasts? Is it not absolute cruelty to abandon her thus?" The commander sat in the chariot in a state of stupefaction and then drove the chariot towards Ayodhya.

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## C

### SHRI RAM'S LAMENTATION

A wild and dreadful forest. The forest was dense and dark with countless huge trees, bushes, plants and coiling creepers. Stillness and silence filled the atmosphere. It was pitch-dark in the forest. Nothing was visible. Terrified by the loud roars of lions Sita ran higher and thither in search of a refuge. There was no road or footpath. The entire area was uneven, stony, flinty and thorny. The forest abounded in thorny bushes. Sita kept cursing herself. "I must have committed great sins in my earlier lives and those sinful karmas of mine have brought about these calamities. I have to experience the bitter fruits of my sinful karmas." For a little while, Sita found consolation in the philosophy of karma. But the very next moment her heart writhed in anguish and she began lamenting over her misfortune. At times, she stumbled over something and fell down, upon stones. She continued to travel thus stumbling, falling and then getting up and again walking and then getting up and again walking. She did not know in which direction she was walking. She kept trudging on the stony ground. She proceeded thus without resting or pausing "When can I get food? Where can I get food? Will I get food at all?" These questions did not appear in her mind. "Where can I get shelter? Can I get the help of someone?" She did not worry about these things. She continued to walk through the forest stumbling on stones, falling down; getting up and then moving on.

Just then she saw a plain at a distance. It was even and without any impediments like thorny bushes or stones. Some soldiers had put up their tents on that plain. An army seemed to be camping there. The soldiers were engaged in their routine activities. When Sita saw that military camp she began to shudder

with fear. She was stupefied by the fear of some unexpected calamity. She shuddered with dread but now life and death were the same to her. She had no fear of death nor did she have any attachment for life. She recovered her calmness and recited *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* which brings supreme benefits and blessings. She stood at a place reciting the *mantra* with devotion.

All of a sudden the soldiers noticed her. She stood stupefied. Her fear was boundless.

She had incomparable beauty ! Stately and divine in form !

The soldiers were awe-struck at the very sight of Sita. Filled with a nameless fear they began to whisper to one another. "Can she be some goddess of the forest ? She may be some deceptive demigoddess; and probably wants to test us." They continued to stare at her, with wonder, fear and amazement.

"Let us inform the king of this matter." Saying this, they rushed to the tent of the king. Sita lost all courage. She began to shudder with fear, anxiety and doubts. Suddenly, she began weeping. She sat down there unable to remain standing. Every creature in the forest began to shiver with grief unable to bear with the sight of her anguish. Her cries of anguish fell on the ears of the king. The king was a great scholar. He had mastered all *Shastras* (Scriptural and philosophical texts). From her cries, he could make out that she was a great woman; and that she was sublime. He was moved to compassion. At once, he approached Sita. He could not bear to see the sight of her anguish. Sita was in great fear and anxiety. She removed her ornaments and placed them before the king; and stood mute and helpless.

"Oh you noble woman ! Dear sister ! You need not fear anything. I am not a robber or a thief. I do not at all have the intention of plundering your ornaments or to disgrace you. Kindly wear these ornaments. I do not need them. But dear sister ! Who are you ? Why have you wandered into this terrible forest ? Why are you in grief and anguish ? Who abandoned you in this wild forest ? Who is that heartless man who abandoned you thus ? Think that I am your brother; and tell me without any hesitation who did this grievous injustice to you;

and why you were thus abandoned. I am unable to bear with the sight of your misery." The king said in a voice, shaken with emotion.

Sita heaved a sigh of relief. The king's compassionate words gave her great comfort, solace and consolation. She realized from his tone and feelings that he was a noble man. She felt as if a great weight had been removed from her heart. Her heart grew light. Just at that point, the Chief Minister Sumati who was with the king said;

"Oh noble woman ! This is king Vajrajang, the valiant hero. He is the son of Emperor Gajavahan and empress Bandhudevi. He is the king of a vast kingdom called Pundarikanagar. He worships and practises the *Arhat Dharma*. He is the very emodiment of humanity and nobility. He came here with his soldiers to hunt for elephants; and having caught some elephants, he was about to return home, and then he heard your heart-rending cries; and came here deeply grieved by your cries. Therefore, kindly give up all your fears; and tell him everything without any hesitation."

Sita felt greatly relieved, to hear what the Chief Minister Sumati said introducing the king to her. All her fears disappeared. She trusted the king and the Chief Minister and told them all about herself. As soon as they found that it was the noble woman Sita, they were stunned and stupefied. They felt that the person standing before them was not an ordinary woman but a sublime woman, a goddess in human form. Their joy and elation knew no bounds. "So you are the queen of Ayodhya and the wife of Shri Ram, the greatest of men !" Saying this they folded their hands and bowed to her respectfully. This unexpected meeting with Sita filled them with great delight but at the same time the story of her adversities filled them with grief. The tears flowed from their eyes.

The atmosphere grew gloomy. Even now the tears kept streaming from Sita's eyes. Her voice was choked. Her lips were shivering. A little while later somehow managing to restrain his grief, king Vajrajang said to Sita :

“Noble woman! You are like my sister. We are followers of the same dharma and so indeed we are brother and sister. Therefore, treat me as your brother, Bhamandal and kindly consecrate our palace by accompanying us. I deem myself fortunate thinking that I have found my sister and for a woman when she cannot stay in her husband’s place the best place is her mother’s or brother’s place. You need not worry about anything. The days of your anguish have come to an end. Shri Ram abandoned you fearing social censure, not because of his suspicion regarding your chastity and fidelity. Moreover, it is certain that he would be experiencing grief and repentance now and like you he too would be experiencing the anguish of separation. I am sure that within a short time he too will set off in search of you. O you noble woman! On account of the separation from you Shri Ram would be experiencing grief like a chakravaka bird separated from its mate. Venerable lady! Kindly accompany us to Pundarikanagar without any fear or suspicions. Actually, I am fortunate in finding you in this wild forest, and in getting this opportunity of helping you.”

King Vajrajang’s words gave some comfort to Sita’s grief-stricken heart. She thought it proper to go to Pundariknagar because she was pregnant. As soon as she gave her consent, a palanquin was got ready for her. Taking her with him King Vajrajang proceeded towards Pundarikanagar.

The commander Kritantavadan returned to Ayodhya. He approached Shri Ram and said :

“My lord! In accordance with your commands, I left Queen Sita in the forest of Simhaninad. When she came to know that you had abandoned her, she was thunder-struck. She wept like a helpless child and she fell down unconscious several times. Her lamentations filled the whole forest with gloom. This went on for a long time. At the end, when I got ready to return to Ayodhya, she restrained her anguish a little and desired this message of hers to be communicated to you :

“Which code of ethics or which law says that a person can be punished thus without being given an opportunity to defend

herself or that a person can be thus punished without proper enquiry? You are the very embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. You are the greatest of men and you have thus acted thoughtlessly and if you yourself do such a thing, what wonder is there if others punish innocent ones? But of course I do not blame you for this. Whatever has happened, has happened because of my misfortune. You are absolutely blameless. Yet dear lord! Kindly do not abandon the Dharma listening to the words of disbelievers just as you have abandoned me listening to the rumours spread by some malicious persons."

After giving this message to be conveyed to you the noble queen fell down unconscious. She regained her consciousness when cool breezes blew over her; and then again, she began weeping bitterly. In the midst of her sobs, she said, "How can my Lord live without me? How can he bear with this separation from me?"

Even before Kritantavadan could complete his narration, Shri Ram fell down unconscious like an uprooted tree. A loud commotion arose in the palace. The attendants and guards were stunned and stupefied. Hearing that Shri Ram had swooned, Lakshman came in running. He at once sprinkled cool water on Shri Ram's face; and smeared cool sandal-paste to his body. Sometime later, Shri Ram recovered his consciousness. He began to weep bitterly. He said in a voice choked with emotion.

"Where is the noble woman, Sita? Kritantavadan! Where did you leave her? Ah! I am indeed a sinner. Heeding rumours and scandals, I abandoned that angel of chastity and purity. I discarded her for ever though she was absolutely innocent. Indeed, I did a terrible injustice to her. I acted thoughtlessly and rashly in abandoning her. Alas! Sita has to face countless perils and calamities in that wild forest." He placed his head in Lakshman's lap; and like a helpless child, he began weeping bitterly.

"Revered brother! I am sure that Sita is safe by virtue of her purity and chastity. Even now, it is not too late to mend matters. Kindly proceed to the forest at once, and bring her



back to Ayodhya. Dear brother! Do not delay. If you delay even a moment, serious calamities might occur; and Sita unable to bear with the separation from you will commit suicide."

"Can Sita still be alive in that terrible forest?"

"Surely dear brother!"

"Then, I will set off at once."

Shri Ram, at once, got up. Lakshman also got ready to accompany him. The commander Kritantavadan and others like Vibhishan also got ready for the journey. They all sat in the *Pushpak Viman*; and set off in the direction of the Simhaninad forest. Within a short while, they reached the forest. The Pushpak began flying over the forest. The Pushpak landed where the commander had left Sita. Shri Ram and Lakshman leaped down at once. All began to search for Sita. Shri Ram wandered through the forest crying, "Sita! . . . Oh Sita!" Lakshman climbed tall trees and looked around for Sita. Kritantavadan went into dense parts of the forest and searched for Sita in every bush and brake. Vibhishan followed Shri Ram like his shadow.

They searched for her in every mountain, every valley and every cave.

They searched for her in every bush, brake and bower.

But they could not see Sita anywhere; nor could they find any trace or mark of her movements there.

In consequence, Shri Ram sank to the ground in utter gloom and despair, like a severed branch of a tree. Lakshman, Vibhishan and Kritantavadan also sat down by Shri Ram's side in utter gloom and anguish.

"How can she remain alive in this terrible forest which abounds in wild animals? Some wild beast might have killed and eaten her." Imagining this possibility, Shri Ram felt stupefied. His heart broke to pieces. His body seemed to be falling to pieces. Again summoning some courage and entertaining new

hopes, he began to search for her. He tried his best to find her foot-steps; but how could there be foot-steps in that place which was covered with sharp stones, shrubs and grass and which abounded in trees, hills, caves and valleys? Shri Ram felt helpless.

Just then, Vibhishan said in a humble voice.

“Dear lord! We have searched for Sita in every nook and corner of the forest. We have searched for her in every hill; cave and valley. Yet we have not been able to find any trace of her. Hence, no purpose would be served by our staying here longer.”

“Dear Vibhishan! What you say is true. Now, my life also has no purpose. Why should I live when Sita is not with me?” Shri Ram’s eyes welled up with tears. His throat was choked with emotion.

The sun had set. The darkness of the evening slowly spread over the earth and the dark forest grew darker. All sat in the Pushpak and returned to Ayodhya in despair and anguish. The magnificent palace of Ayodhya appeared desolate and deserted. Everyone was in deep grief and anguish.

The next day Shri Ram performed obsequies for Sita. He was in bitter anguish. The whole universe appeared blank to him.

A tremendous change came about in Shri Ram’s life. He began to lead a life of absolute renunciation.

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## CI

### LAV AND KUSH

Sita reached Pundarikanagar safely. She felt that it was Mithila because she was treated with genuine affection there. She felt that king Vajrajangh was like her brother, Bhamandal. The king requested Sita to stay in a splendid palace. The palace was magnificently decorated. A large number of attendants and servants waited upon her. He took care to see that Sita would have all comforts and would not feel the absence of any comfort. He made excellent arrangements for her stay. Then he approached her and said in a humble voice, "Dear sister! You may reside here without any worry or fear. This is your brother's house. If you need anything, you need not at all hesitate to ask for it. Moreover, you should not give way to grief again. Very soon, the clouds of adversity will disappear and the sun of your prosperity will appear."

Sita felt extremely grateful to Vajrajang for the brotherly affection he showed her. She too loved him as a sister. She became absorbed in spiritual austerities and took care of her health because she was pregnant. Thus, sometime passed. In course of time she gave birth to twins. The attendants were delighted and at once conveyed the news to King Vajrajang. The king who was delighted to hear this happy news ordered his officers to celebrate the birth of the children in the city with all grandeur and eclat. He organised the celebrations and jubilations with a greater enthusiasm than the one with which he would have organised the birthday of his own children. He gave gifts to the needy and the indigent. He rendered help to all those who were in misery and poverty.

Sita thought, "Even in Ayodhya probably such a grand celebration would not have been organised." Her heart overflowed with delight and bloomed into bliss. When she saw her two sons who were fascinating to look at, she was filled with joy and jubilation. The two children were radiant like the sun and pleasant like the moon. It was as if they were the incarnations of the Sun and the Moon.

Grand celebrations were organised on the day of the naming ceremony. Extraordinary spiritual activities were organised and in accordance with scriptural prescriptions, the ceremony was carried out. The two boys were named Ananga Lavan and Madanankush and in course of time, people called them Lav and Kush affectionately.

King Vajrajang engaged excellent attendants to take care of the two children. He got a nursery made for the children. The two boys grew up in the lap of affection and affluence blooming like flowers. The sight of the children filled Sita's heart with great delight. She spent all her time in hearing their cries and playful shrieks. Several years passed thus. Lav and Kush passed from the stage of infancy to the stage of boyhood. Sita thought, "Now, the boys should be given education. They must be taught the shastras and the arts of war. They must be made experts in these arts. Proper arrangements must be made for their education. The two boys possess exceptional intellectual brilliance. They possess unexampled physical strength." In consequence, Sita was searching for a capable teacher who could make her sons experts in shastras and other arts. By chance, a great Siddha happened to call at her palace for *Biksha*. His name was Siddhartha.

Siddhartha was the greatest and the most famous sage of the time. He was a master of many branches of knowledge and an expert in many arts. Every day, flying through the sky in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, he visited the Jin temples situated on the Meru mountain. Though he was a supreme master of many arts and accomplishments he was the very embodiment of politeness, detachment and benevolence.

Sita observed Siddhartha carefully and found out that he was a man of extraordinary attainments. She extended to him an honourable welcome :

“Revered Lord ! I feel blessed to have met you. Kindly tell me who you are.” Siddhartha told Sita all about himself. She was greatly delighted to hear it. Then, as desired by Siddhartha, Sita told him all about herself. The noble woman told him everything without any reservation.

Hearing the story of Sita’s life, Siddhartha said :

“Revered lady ! Please do not give way to grief. What is the use of grieving over misfortunes thus ? Why should a woman who has such radiant sons as Lav and Kush grieve over anything ? Your sons are heroic. They possess extraordinary virtues and talents. Actually they are like Ram and Lakshman. It is certain that your innate aspirations will be fulfilled. You need not have any doubt regarding this.”

Siddharth had mastered the shastras relating to omens, called *Ashtanga*. As soon as he looked at Lav and Kush he could divine that they had a splendid future. Therefore he revealed only a glimpse of their splendid future. Sita felt supremely delighted and elated to hear this. She heaved a sigh of relief and said :

“O you revered sage ! If you really admire these children and if you desire to shape their future, you kindly stay here and give them proper instructions and guidance.”

“Revered lady ! I have already told you that I am a Siddha. I cannot stay anywhere for a long time but I keep flying through the sky to the Meru mountain to worship the Jin temples there. When that is the case, how can I stay here ?”

“Until now you have carried out many such pilgrimages. You have spent much of your time in visiting Jin temples and in worshipping Jin images. You are also an ocean of knowledge. Would you not bestow a part of your knowledge on others ? Would you not bestow that treasure upon others ? If you think

that these two boys are worthy of your guidance, kindly make them your spiritual successors and bestow upon them your knowledge which will surely brighten their minds and enlighten their souls. These two boys are the only props of my life. I have no other interest in life."

"Revered lady! What you say is true. Yet, I am not willing to stay in the same place for a long time."

"Kindly treat me as your sister and for the sake of these two children, you change your mind a little.'" Sita's voice was choked with emotion. Siddhartha fell into a strange conflict. He thought, "She is the wife of Shri Ram. She is a sublime woman who has experienced countless calamities and who has been deprived of all joys and jubilations. She has fallen into the depths of bitter despair. If my stay here can inspire in her new hopes and a new enthusiasm then I must stay here. Probably, this may be the decree of Destiny." Siddhartha's heart overflowed with compassion for Sita.

"Revered sage! You must stay here. I will convey this information to King Vajrajang also. He too will entreat you to stay here and to educate my sons".

"Revered lady! I am unable to reject your entreaty. I will stay here. Are you satisfied?"

Sita's joy knew no bounds. She offered her heartfelt devotion to Lord Parameshwar and expressed her deepest gratitude to Siddhartha. Subsequently, she informed Vajrajang of her plan. Vajrajang also was greatly pleased with her plan. He felt happy thinking that Lav and Kush would certainly become masters of all knowledge and experts in wars under the guidance of Siddhartha who possessed extraordinary attainments and virtues. So, he said to Siddhartha humbly. "O you revered one! You have bestowed a great benefaction upon us. Lav and Kush are really fortunate in securing such a great teacher as you; and I am sure that they are worthy of your able and enlightened guidance. If you bestow your knowledge upon them they will certainly attain extraordinary levels of excellence."

“Dear King! I would not reject the entreaty of Sita, who is the very embodiment of purity and nobility.”

“Revered Sage! What you say is true. Sita is the very image of spiritual excellence.”

“Her sons possess extraordinary talents. They are like Ram and Lakshman.”

“Gurudev! Shri Ram’s children must be like Shri Ram.”

“They may even excel Shri Ram. I see such a promise in them.”

“That is not impossible when you guide them.”

“I will certainly fulfil Sita’s noble aspiration.”

“O you great sage! Your word can never be untrue.”

“All this is the result of the grace of the Supreme Lord.”

King Vajrajang arranged an excellent residence for Siddhartha. Surrounded by beautiful gardens, it looked like an ashram. Even Siddhartha was delighted with the arrangements made for his residence.

The education of Lav and Kush began ceremoniously on an auspicious day under the able and elevated guidance of Siddhartha. Lav and Kush were polite and humble always. They had the highest regard for their elders and seniors. Very soon, they earned Siddhartha’s affection and admiration by means of their humility and extraordinary intellectual incisiveness. Siddhartha admired and loved the two boys and began training them in all arts and accomplishments.

What cannot be achieved in this world, if the teacher’s love and the pupils’ humility combine in the process of education? What heights of excellence cannot be attained by such pupils? Is there any art or accomplishment which cannot be attained by humble pupils at the feet of a loving master? Siddhartha was greatly impressed by the humility of Lav and Kush. He admired their intellectual brilliance. In consequence he imparted

to Lav and Kush all the vast knowledge and attainments, he had mastered.

The education of Lav and Kush went on for a long time. It was a long and arduous endeavour. They had to carry out their studies with extraordinary industry and perseverance. Excitement or impatience or haste had no place in that educational process. The boys carried out their studies with indefatigable industry and unfailing dedication. A long time passed thus. The education of the two boys went on unimpeded. They passed from boyhood to youth. They became incomparable experts in the art of war and attained a supreme mastery over all knowledge. They had attained such a lofty level of excellence that even gods would come down to have a glimpse of their radiant faces. They became such heroic warriors that they could rout even the greatest gods.

Sita sometimes took delight in watching their militaric skill and sometimes, she took delight in listening to their scriptural discussions. Sometimes, she heard discussions going on between the teacher and the pupils and sometimes, she heard the discussions going on between the two brothers. At such times, she felt greatly delighted, and her heart overflowed with joy. Lav and Kush loved Sita; honoured her and adored her as a goddess. Lav and Kush were absolutely free from arrogance, talkativeness and impoliteness which are natural in youngsters. The darkness of infatuation had not yet fallen upon them. They had not fallen into the whirlwinds of negligence or indifference or ineptitude, but they were free from all such weaknesses and vices.

King Vajrajang felt greatly happy when he saw the blooming youngsters. He made several plans for their future. One day, he approached Sita and said in a humble voice.

“Revered lady ! Lav and Kush have stepped on the threshold of youth. They have attained mastery over all arts and accomplishments at the feet of Siddharth. They are grown up boys.”

“Actually, all this is the result of Siddhartha’s unceasing guidance and enlightened instructions !”



“The two boys have mastered every branch of knowledge and every art of war.”

“Dear brother ! You have always bestowed your keenest attention on the boys and helped them to achieve these things.”

“Noble lady ! That is not true. What did I do for them ? I was always engaged in my duties relating to the administration of the kingdom. Actually, you brought them up with care and affection. You are their truest teacher and their mother in the truest sense !”

“No. No. O king ! I did nothing. I was only an instrument. It is all the result of their *punya* (merit)”.

“That is true. Fascinated by their merit (*Punya*), I have made a plan for them.”

“What is it ? O king !”

“I have thought of celebrating Lava’s marriage with Shashichoola.”

This unexpected suggestion made by Vajrajang threw Sita into deep reflection. Shashichoola was a beautiful princess. She was the daughter of King Vajrajang. She was a suitable bride for Lav in all respects. Sita was silent thinking whether the right time had come for the performance of Lava’s marriage or not.

“Revered lady ! Why are you silent ? Do you not like my idea ? Is not Shashichoola worthy of Lav ?

“O king ! Why do you think so ? You are right in thinking of celebrating Lav’s marriage. So, please do what you think proper. You are the well-wisher of the two boys.”

“I wish to celebrate the marriage of Lav with Shashichoola and the other thirty-two princesses. I think, this is proper.” Vajrajang secured Sita’s consent.

Sita’s joy knew no bounds. King Vajrajang proceeded to the palace of Queen Lakshmiwati in great delight and elation. He informed her of his plan. She too was delighted to hear it. She

felt that Shashichoola was fortunate in securing such a bridegroom as Lava. When Shashichoola heard of this, she felt greatly elated. Her joy knew no bounds. She had been watching Lav for years. They used to play together when they were children. They had grown up together. She also loved Lav greatly.

One evening, Sita sent for Lav and told him affectionately of Vajrajang's proposal. Lav felt shy at first but when he heard fully what Sita said, he felt thrilled and elated.

"Mother! What can I say about this? You do whatever you think proper!" Lav said humbly.

"Dear son! I know very well that you would not oppose my wish. But marriage is a serious matter and so your heartfelt consent is absolutely essential. Of course, I have already given my consent to the marriage because King Vajrajang has bestowed a great benefaction upon us. He is our well-wisher and his plan is absolutely proper. Moreover, Shashichoola is the very emodiment of beauty and virtues. She is a worthy bride!"

Just then, Siddhartha happened to come there. Lav at once saluted him with folded hands. Sita saluted him respectfully. Lav entreated him to take a seat. Siddhartha bestowed his heartiest blessings on the boy. After being silent for a while, Sita said humbly.

"O you revered one! King Vajrajang has decided to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Shashichoola with Lav."

"Revered lady! The King's decision is quite proper. Shashichoola is a worthy bride to Lav in every respect."

Sita heard what Siddhartha said and fell into deep thought. Lav sat silent. There was silence for a while.

"Revered lady! What are you thinking of?"

"Revered sage! What is there to think about? Yet one idea keeps agitating me. Shri Ram will not be present at the

time of Lav's marriage. Lakshman also will not be present." At once Sita's eyes welled up with tears.

"Revered lady! Why do you agitate yourself with these thoughts? What is the use of thinking of those things? Of course, it is natural that you should desire that Shri Ram should be present at the time of his son's marriage but at present, it is futile to think of it. In future, surely the sons will become reunited with their father. No power on this earth can prevent it. Therefore, let Lav's marriage take place now.

Just at this point, a guard came in and conveyed to Siddhartha the king's invitation to meet him. Siddhartha at once set out to meet the king. Sita stood up and saluted him. Lav accompanied him upto the gate of the king's palace to see him off. On the way, Siddhartha looked at Lav with his eyes overflowing with affection. Lav was greatly delighted and elated.

King Vajrajang received Siddhartha with due honour. He discussed with him the plans relating to the marriage and fixed a date for the marriage.

The marriage took place with all grandeur and eclat. Lav married Shashichoola and the other thirty-two princesses. The daughters-in-law saluted the feet of Sita. Sita who had led a life of loneliness and depression for some years was now filled with joy and jubilation. For a while, she forgot all her sorrows. She was happy...her joy knew no bounds.



## CII

### THE MARRIAGES OF THE PRINCES

Lav's marriage took place with all grandeur and eclat. For several days, the city of Pundarikanagar swayed joyously in the swing of jubilation. Queen Lakshmiwati felt greatly happy when her daughter was married to Lav. She extended the highest veneration to Sita. Siddhartha was supremely happy but King Vajrajang felt that his responsibility regarding Sita and her sons had not ended. So, he began to look for a suitable bride for Kush. Unexpectedly, his mind was drawn towards Prithvipur. He decided to send his Chief Minister to Prithvipur and to negotiate the marriage of Kush with Kanakamalni, the princess of Prithvipur.

But King Prithu did not accept King Vajrajang's proposal. He sent a message to Vajrajang, "How can I give my daughter in marriage to a young man when I do not know his father and his family?"

King Vajrajang became furious on hearing the message sent by King Prithu. He began to burn with anger. When Lav and Kush heard of this, they too became furious. King Vajrajang suddenly made preparations for a war and invaded prithvipur. King Prithu also had made preparations for a war. King Vajrajang advised Lav and Kush not to join the campaign but they were heroic young men. The blood of the Ikshvaku race ran through their veins. Therefore they refused to budge even an inch. They said to Vajrajang, "Sir! We too want to join this campaign and help King Prithu to know who our father is and which our dynasty is. Please permit us to join this campaign. King Prithu will see personally in the battle-field who we are." Sita was delighted with the valour and heroism of her sons. She

marked their foreheads with Tilak and blessed them. Lav and Kush accompanied King Vajrajang to Prithvipur.

The vast army of king Prithu stood ready for the war outside the city. A terrible war broke out between the two armies. King Prithu's soldiers fought heroically and within a few hours killed a large number of Vajrajang's soldiers and defeated Vajrajang's army. In consequence, a terrible commotion arose in Vajrajang's army. The soldiers began to run helter-skelter. Lav and Kush were moved by the sight. Till then they were merely watching the war. But when they saw Vajrajang's soldiers running away, they leaped into the battle-field. They fought heroically and inspired a fresh confidence in the soldiers and the soldiers again started fighting. They were greatly amazed at the heroism of the two princes Lav and Kush.

Within a few moments, Lav and Kush turned the tables on King Prithu. Lav and Kush turned towards King Prithu with triumphant smiles on their faces and said : "O king ! Why are you running away ? You do not know who we are; whose sons we are and to which royal family we belong. We are way-farers, homeless way-farers. You belong to a famous royal family. When that is so, you should not run away from us."

King Prithu stopped at once on hearing the words of Lav and Kush. After a short pause he said in a calm voice :

"Young man ! Your tremendous heroism and valour clearly show that you belong to an illustrious royal family. The proposal of marriage made by King Vajrajang is quite appropriate. My daughter is indeed fortunate in getting such a heroic bridegroom as Kush. At that time, I was a fool in not realising the truth about you. Now I have understood the truth about you. Where can I find a better bridegroom for my daughter than Kush ? Therefore I seek your forgiveness and I am ready to give my daughter in marriage to Ankush."

Just then, King Vajrajang's chariot arrived there. Lav and Kush alighted from the chariot saluted Vajrajang and stood near them. King Vajrajang embraced the two brothers and bathed them with the tears of affection.

“Valiant young men ! Today you fought in such a way that even the greatest gods would feel jealous of your heroism and abilities. By achieving this victory you have brought glory to your mother and father. You have brought a tremendous glory to the Ikshvaku dynasty to which you belong. I find no words to describe your unexampled heroism.”

At this point King Prithu saluted King Vajrajang and said : “O king ! Kindly forgive me. Your proposal that I should give my daughter in marriage to Kush is absolutely proper. This alliance is certainly beneficial to me but being a fool, I could not realise it then. Their heroism has revealed their greatness. Therefore, I am happy to give my daughter Kanakamalini in marriage to Ankush.”

“O King ! I am grateful to you for your kindness. It is really remarkable that you are sensible at least after being defeated.”

King Prithu made magnificent arrangements for the marriage of his daughter, Kanakamalini. He sent invitations to many kings and princes. King Vajrajang also sent invitations to many kings and princes. On an auspicious day, the marriage of Kush with Kanakamalini took place with all grandeur and eclat.

After the marriage was over, the court assembled while Vajrajang sat on the throne.

Just at this time, the divine sage Narad happened to visit Pundarikanagar. He went straight to the royal court.

“Our heartiest welcome to Narad, the divine sage.” said Vajrajang.

“O king ! May you be always victorious”, Narad bestowed his blessings upon King Vajrajang. King Vajrajang offered him a seat. Narad sat on a seat of state. All those who had gathered there and the two princes Lav and Kush saluted Narad respectfully.

“O divine sage ! You have bestowed a blessing upon us by visiting us. Be so gracious as to fulfil the desire of the kings

who have gathered here." King Vajrajang said looking at Narad meaningfully, Lav and Kush sat near King Vajrajang. They had already offered their salutations to the divine sage and he had bestowed his blessings upon them. This was the first time that Lav and Kush saw Narad. Of course they knew all about Narad because their teacher Siddhartha had mentioned the name of Narad in many of his discussions and illustrations. They kept looking at Narad with fixed eyes. Narad also glanced at them a few times.

"O king! What is the desire of these kings? What do they want to know?"

"Divine sage! All these kings desire to know who these two young men are and to which royal dynasty they belong. So be so gracious as to introduce these young men to the kings who have assembled here."

Joyous smiles appeared on Narad's face. He glanced at King Prithu and the other kings who had gathered there. He looked at Lav and Kush with fixed eyes and then Narad greatly delighted began traversing the realms of the past. After being silent for a while, he said.

"O king! What did you say? Do these two young men require any introduction? Really amazing! Is there any one who does not know their dynasty which is famous throughout the world? This is the dynasty of Lord Rishabhdev. Bharath, Bahubali and other mighty warriors of this dynasty are world-famous. Moreover, is there any one who has not heard of their father Shri Ramachandra?"

"So, these young men are the sons of Shri Ram, the king of Ayodhya." King Prithu and the other Kings said with uncontrollable delight and amazement.

"Yes, dear Kings! These two young men are Shri Ram's sons. Lakshman, the valiant is their uncle. Shri Ram and Lakshman are the Baladev and Vasudev of this millenium; and you know that they destroyed Ravan, the emperor of Lanka and liberated the Vidyadhar world from his wicked clutches and

monstrosities. When Sita was pregnant, Shri Ram abandoned her out of consideration for what people said against Sita. People spread rumours and scandals against Sita but it was all the result of a conspiracy. There was no truth in the rumours. Yet fearing social censure, Shri Ram abandoned her and she was left alone in a terrible forest."

Lav's eyes were fixed on the ground while Kush kept looking at Narad with unwinking eyes. The face of Kush revealed his anger and he said furiously.

"Divine Sage ! What Shri Ram has done is highly improper. It is certainly unbecoming of such a great man to abandon his noble wife in such a heartless manner. He could have adopted other methods to refute and to repudiate those rumours and scandals. It is absolutely unbecoming of Shri Ram to have abandoned his wife thus. It is a heinous action and it deserves nothing but censure and condemnation."

"Dear Prince ! What you say is true but the decrees of destiny are unalterable. What was destined to occur has occurred. When a great man commits a blunder, who can prevent him from doing so ? Your uncle Lakshman did everything to persuade Shri Ram not to abandon Sita but Shri Ram remained adamant. Therefore let us forget the past. What is the use of remembering those things ?"

"O divine sage ! Is there any justice in abandoning a noble woman to safeguard the glory of one's dynasty ? Is it right to abandon a noble woman to safeguard one's own name and fame ? We firmly believe that Shri Ram cast away our mother as a prey to wild animals only to safeguard his honour and fame but Dharma safeguards those who safeguard Dharma. In accordance with this profound statement, my mother's purity and nobility safeguarded her. Moreover, it was her sublimity that safeguarded us also and by chance King Vajrajang, who is the very embodiment of nobility and ethical excellence found her in the forest and brought her here. So, she found a safe refuge. Otherwise, she should have faced terrible calamities in the forest. I shudder to think of this."



Ankush gave vent to the feelings that lay in his heart pent up for years. Narad listened to what Ankush said in concentration. He looked up at the sky and heaved a long sigh and Lav said.

“O you divine sage! Kindly tell us how far that city is where our father and his brother are living.”

“Dear young man! Your honoured father lives in the famous city of Ayodhya, which is situated at a distance of 160 Yojanas”. After saying this, Narad kept looking at Lav with unwinking eyes. Lav’s face grew serious. He tried to read Lav’s thoughts in his face. He could easily divine that Lav was not only desirous of visiting Ayodhya but also of avenging the injustice done to his mother. It was evident that Lav was seriously and angrily thinking of taking revenge against his father who had abandoned his mother heartlessly.

The court was dismissed for the day. All were happy; and Kanakamalini’s joy knew no bounds. Her mother Queen Lakshmiwati was in a mood of great joy and jubilation. All the women and girls of the city called upon Kanakamalini; and congratulated her upon her good fortune in securing such a husband. Kanakamalini thanked her stars because she had become the daughter-in-law of Shri Ram who was adored by the three worlds.

After dinner, Lav and Kush met King Vajrajang. He received the princes with affection and spent sometime conversing with them jovially. The chamber reverberated with their jovial conversation. Joy and jubilation filled the atmosphere. The king was conversing with them with an open heart. Finding a suitable opportunity, Lav said.

“Venerable King! We are extremely eager to visit Ayodhya. We are desirous of seeing Shri Ram and Lakshman.”

“Dear Prince! Of course, you have to go to Ayodhya some day or the other; but the proper time has not yet come. I too desire that you should meet your father who is the greatest hero of the world; but...” King Vajrajang stopped in the middle of his sentence. He could not say anything more.

“Revered Sir! Why are you silent?” Kush asked King Vajrajang, with evident anxiety. King Vajrajang’s face revealed his anguish, anger and agitation. He looked gloomy and dispirited. He was silent for a while; and then looking towards Lav, he said.

“Dear Prince! You have to go to Ayodhya; but not as helpless people seeking refuge there. We should go there as equals in might and heroism. You should be equal to those mighty heroes. You should go to Ayodhya holding your heads high; and carrying the flag of your fame and heroism; so that they may be terror-stricken on seeing the sons of the sublime woman, Sita; and we need some time to make preparations for that event. We have to conquer some kingdoms. You should make emperors and kings recognize your heroism. You two must create for yourselves such a fame that the very mention of your names should send a shudder through the veins of the greatest heroes of the world. The very mention of your name must confound the greatest warriors and create a commotion among people. Then we can proceed to Ayodhya.”

“We agree with you fully dear king! All right, we shall act according to your advice.” Lav and Kush said enthusiastically.

King Vajrajang!

King Prithu!

And the heroes Lav and Kush! Two mighty Kings; and their two mightier sons-in-law! The four heroes sat together in King Prithu’s chamber and had a discussion regarding the future course of action. King Vajrajang had thought of an excellent plan. He had the plan in his mind for some years; and he wanted to give it a definite shape now. He had to inspire enthusiasm in Lav and Kush to carry out this plan. King Vajrajang had realised the heroism and military abilities of Lav and Kush in the war against King Prithu. He was fully aware of the abilities of the two brothers. He felt that the opportune time had arrived for the implementation of his plan. He decided to carry out his plan only through Lav and Kush. He had no

selfish purpose in conceiving this plan but on the contrary he desired only the welfare and progress of Lav and Kush. Moreover they could get the assistance of King Prithu who was very heroic and who was now a close relative of the two brothers. Therefore, he was full of bubbling enthusiasm.

He said with evident enthusiasm, "O you hero ! What is the use of delaying now ? Let us launch the campaign immediately. We have to conquer a number of kingdoms. You must display your abilities and heroism to achieve this objective. If we remain idle and inactive, our intelligence and knowledge grow dull. Whatever is to be done, we should do at once without any hesitation or anxiety. King Prithu and I will also join the campaign.

"King Vajrajang is right ! He and I will extend all support to you. Our heartiest aspiration is that you must attain great fame and glory as warriors and that you must establish a splendid tradition of unexampled military heroism. You must attain extraordinary fame and glory." King Prithu said endorsing Vajrajang's opinion.

"We have the highest veneration for you both. You are our fathers-in-law, as venerable as our father. We shall carry out the commands with the utmost obedience. Moreover, we are extremely eager to commence this triumphal march. Kindly make the necessary arrangements to launch the campaign so that we may set off on our march on an auspicious day," said Lav and Kush with overflowing enthusiasm.

"But our mother is in Pundarikanagar. We have to secure her consent for our plan", said Kush intervening in the discussion. Then Vajrajang said, "Dear Prince ! You need not worry about anything. I will at once send a messenger to Pundarikanagar and secure Sita's consent to our plans."

After the discussion was over, Lav and Kush returned to their palaces. King Vajrajang and King Prithu joined together and planned out the arrangements that were to be made for the triumphal march.

It was not difficult to secure Sita's consent. On hearing about the plan and all the details relating to it, she gave her consent to it. An auspicious day was fixed for the launching of the campaign. All the preparations were made for the campaign. Enthusiasm and elation filled the heart of everyone.

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## CIII

### THE CONQUEST OF THE WORLD

King Vajrajang and King Prithu collected their armies and set off on the march of victory. The joy and elation of Lav and Kush knew no bounds. Though they were young, their enthusiasm and heroism were greater than that of any veteran military hero. The very thought of a war filled the two young men with enthusiasm and elation. They proceeded routing, defeating and capturing the kingdoms on the way. Some kings and potentates surrendered themselves to Lav and Kush while some opposed them and such kings were defeated and subjugated. The armies of all those kings joined the campaign.

જાનકી જાગૃતિ સંસ્થા

They reached Lokapurnagar. Kuberkant, the king of Lokapurnagar was renowned for his heroism; and militaric abilities. The entire area knew the tory of his achievement. Lav and Kush sent a messenger to Kuberkant demanding his surrender but he did not agree to surrender himself to them. He challenged them to fight against him. In consequence, Lav and Kush routed him and subjugated him within a few hours and established their supremacy over Lokapurnagar.

Kuberkant was greatly amazed at the heroism and the militaric abilities displayed by Lav and Kush in the war. Lav and Kush invited Kuberkant to join the march of victory and Kukerkant readily and gladly agreed to join them.

Later, they defeated Ekakarna, the king of Lampaka. They defeated and subjugated Brathrushatha, the king of Vijayastali and when they proceeded further, they saw the sublime river Ganga, whose holy water washes away all sins. The Ganga was flowing slowly and majestically. The Ganga which has been

venerated and worshipped by people through countless millenia, was flowing in a lofty and dignified manner. On the other bank of Ganga, there stood the Himalaya mountain, the king of mountains with its endless ranges of sky-high peaks covered with snow. The Himalaya stood like a mighty sage, whose equanimity remains unshaken by elations or depression. The Himalayas seemed to embody the quality of equanimity. They stood firm and stolid and seemed to be inviting people to lift their eyes and to visualize the higher states of excellence and also inspired in the beholders courage, confidence and the quality of equanimity.

Lav and Kush camped on the banks of the Ganga with their vast armies. Countless tents were pitched on the plains. The entire area seemed to be a city that had suddenly taken shape. Lav and Kush held a meeting and discussed the future plans with their friends and well-wishers. They gathered details about the geographical features of the kingdoms and areas on the other side of Ganga. They gathered the necessary information through their spies. Lav and Kush and all their friends decided to carry out their expedition over all the areas on the other side of Ganga. They communicated the necessary instructions to their armies. In consequence soon, they prepared rafts, boats and floats to cross the river. Within a short time, the vast army crossed the river and reached the other bank.

They continued their march to the north of Kailash.

They subjugated various kingdoms such as Rus, Kuntal, Kavambhu, Nandi, Nandan, Simhal, and then Lav and Kush with their vast armies crossed the river Sindhu. They defeated and subjugated countless kingdoms both Aryan and non-Aryan situated on the other bank of Sindhu. They extended their sway and militaric ability. Then they proceeded towards Pundarik-nagar. Their march of victory was thus successful. The fame and glory of Lav and Kush spread far and wide. Their names began to live on millions of tongues.

Lav and Kush became emperors, with a vast area under their sway. After achieving this imperial sway, they returned to

Pundariknagar. When they thought of the joy of their mother, they felt elated and jubilant.

King Vajrajang had already sent information to his ministers to make the necessary arrangements to receive Lav and Kush with all grandeur and *eclat*. Sita also came to know of the tremendous achievements of her sons and she was eager to meet and greet her sons. The ministers made magnificent arrangements to receive Lav and Kush. The city was decorated colourfully. The people of the city displayed their joy and jubilation. Thousands of people had gathered at Pundariknagar to receive Lav and Kush who were returning after achieving tremendous victories.

The Ministers made magnificent arrangements to extend a warm reception to the mighty victors. At the head of all, there rode a white-robed man on horseback, holding high the flag of the kingdom. Behind him, bands of musicians playing on various musical instruments were walking slowly. Behind the musicians, there was a procession of soldiers on one hundred and eight elephants. The elephants moving in lines of two stepped on majestically one behind another. Then followed troupes of dancers. Their artistic dances filled the beholders with joy and elation. Behind the troupes of dancers, King Vajrajang drove slowly in his chariot. Behind him, Lav and Kush drove in a magnificently decorated chariot. Behind them, drove King Prithu in his chariot. Their subordinate kings followed them in chariots, in lines of four chariots each. Behind them rode on horseback a large number of victorious generals, commanders and warriors. Behind them all, there were thousands of soldiers moving on foot slowly and issuing cries of elation and jubilation.

The heads of the city extended to Lav and Kush and to others a grand welcome. The roads and streets were colourfully decorated with festoons and garlands. At every circle of the city, arches had been put up. Thousands of people had gathered on the sides of the roads. They welcomed the princes by flinging at them, holy grain, flowers and scented and colourful substances.

“May King Vajrajang, who has such mighty heroes by his side, be victorious! Queen Sita is blessed in having given birth to such mighty heroes as surpass even gods!” Such exclamations of praise were made by people all along the way. All showered their praise on the victorious princes.

The cries of victory reverberated throughout the sky. The whole city of Pundariknagar was swaying in the swing of joy and jubilation. The merit of Lav and Kush manifested itself in all its splendour. The members of the royal family were filled with great joy and elation. Sita, who witnessed all these things, swayed in indescribable joy. After the celebration of the event in the court was over, Lav and Kush proceeded to their mother’s palace. The two brothers went forward and saluted their mother’s feet. Sita bathed their heads with the tears of joy that flowed from her eyes. Since she saw her sons after a long time, her heart overflowed with affection for them. She took them into her lap; and embraced them. She kissed them on their foreheads and became overwhelmed with boundless delight and elation.

“Dear children! You must become as great as Shri Ram and Lakshman!”

“Dear mother! We will surely equal Ram and Lakshman; not only that, we will excel them and conquer them.” Lav said in a determined voice.

Just then, the teacher Siddhartha arrived there. The two princes stood up politely, saluted his feet and entreated him to be seated. Siddhartha overwhelmed with delight blessed them in a tender voice.

“Dear pupils! Now you are not merely young men but Emperors, ruling over kings. You attained victories wherever you went yet I call you only pupils. Actually, you have made great attainments and filled us with deep delight. You have achieved extraordinary fame. Your names will remain green and fresh in the history of this world. All people will glorify you.”

“Gurudev! All this is the result of your boundless compassion; of our mothers benign blessings and of our father-in-law



Vajrajang's affection and blessings." Kush said expressing his gratitude.

Just then a guard came and announced.

"Mother! King Vajrajang and King Prithu are coming to meet you."

Lav, Kush and Siddhartha went to the door of the palace and received the two kings with honour. The kings bowed to Sita. They conveyed to her the news of the tremendous victories achieved by her sons. Sita entreated them to be seated.

"Dear sister!" Vajrajang said after a pause.

"Yes, brother".

"This is King Prithu. King of Prithvipur. His daughter has become your daughter-in-law." At once Kanakamalini saluted the feet of Sita and stood near her.

"She has married Madanankush." Vajrajang said. Sita blessed Kanakamalini with great joy.

"Dear sister! Indeed your sons are unexampled heroes. They are like Ram and Lakshman. During the march of victory, I had many opportunities of witnessing their heroism and extraordinary abilities. Their skill and abilities filled me with joy and elation. I deem it my good fortune that I have secured such a great son-in-law." King Prithu said with great joy. The tears of joy flowed from his eyes. King Vajrajang also shed tears of joy.

"O King! All this is the result of the Arihant Bhagwan's compassion."

"And all this is the result of the extraordinary purity and sanctity of our mother who is as sublime as the Ganga." Lav and Kush said enthusiastically. A little later King Vajrajang whispered into the ears of Lav, "The other kings and princes are desirous of meeting Sita. What message shall I give them?" Lav moved towards Sita and said, "Dear mother! The kings

and princes whom we have subjugated are desirous of meeting you and receiving his blessings. If you permit me, we will bring them in." As soon as Sita gave her consent, Lav made a sign to Vajrajang. All the Kings and princes who were waiting to see Sita were brought in. They saluted Sita and felt blessed. Sita blessed them heartily and went into an inner chamber followed by her daughters-in-law.

This was the second memorable day of joyful occurrence in Sita's life. The first one was when she was brought back to Ayodhya after the destruction of Ravan. For a few moments, she was immersed in reminiscences. At that time she was only a wife but now she was a mother-in-law.

The wheel of time continued to revolve.

Sita was spending her time joyfully in the company of her sons and daughters-in-law. She was always thoughtful regarding the comforts and joys of her daughters-in-law. She always saw that they did not feel the absence of any comfort or joy. She bestowed upon them her heartfelt affection and love, and they too loved and honoured her greatly. Sita's life which had been darkened by dense clouds of calamities again was brightened by new rays of joy and jubilation. She spent her time joyfully taking care of her family. She enjoyed the love and affection of her sons and daughters-in-law. They also enjoyed the love and honour of King Vajrajang and the people of King Pundarikanagar.

Life comprises scorching heat and cool shadows.

Life comprises dreadful venom as well as the nectar of felicity.

Joy and woe are woven into the garland of life.

But the cool shadows do not last long. In human life, joys are short-lived but long periods of scorching heat appear in life. Man throughout his life has to experience inordinate agony and anguish. The nectar of felicity falls now and then sweetening human life but it is always rendered bitter by the venom of

perplexity. True felicity lies only in a life of absolute detachment. The supreme serenity is present only in the spirit of equanimity and in spiritual delight. Spiritual elevation brings the truest kind of elation.

Time's winged chariot kept moving on. Days, months and years passed unnoticed.

No one felt the passage of time since all were immersed in joys, jubilations, delights and pleasures. Unexpectedly, one day, Lav heard his mother Sita saying to Siddhartha. "My sons Lav and Kush are like Shri Ram and Lakshman!" As soon as he heard the name of Shri Ram he became furious. His anger shot up to the highest skies. He thought: "Fearing scandals and rumours, he abandoned my noble mother and cast her away in a terrible forest." Suddenly there arose in his mind a spring of hostility against Shri Ram. He became infuriated and went out to meet Kush.

"Dear brother! When shall we go to Ayodhya?" Kush was a little shocked by this unexpected question of Lav and kept looking at him with unwinking eyes.

"Should we not meet Shri Ram and Lakshman? Is it not necessary to see them once?" Lav's voice showed his anger.

"First we should meet our uncle king Vajrajang."

"Then why delay. Come on! Let us go and meet him now". And Lav took Kush with him and proceeded to meet King Vajrajang. The two brothers saluted Vajrajang, and stood near him with bowed heads. Vajrajang asked them to be seated. They sat down and tried to compose themselves a little. After the preliminaries were over, Lav said to Vajrajang.

"Dear uncle! You have already given your consent to our going to Ayodhya. I hope you have not forgotten it."

"Yes. Yes. I remember it."

"Then kindly give the necessary commands. Kindly send for King Prithu. Send messages to the kings of Lampak, Kalamphu,

Kuntal and various other kingdoms to get ready for the invasion of Ayodhya. Let a proclamation be made that we are launching a campaign. We would like to see the heroism of those who did a great injustice to our sacred mother."

"Dear sons ! Before we make the proclamation, you must secure your mother's consent. I agree to your plan. I am ready."

"Now, we cannot delay even a moment. Kindly join us. We will go and get our mother's consent." And the three proceeded to meet Sita. Sita received Vajrajang with honour and said : "Any news ? What's the matter ?"

"Revered Queen ! Lav and Kush want to proceed to Ayodhya. They desire your consent."

"No uncle ! Not only we but also all our armies must proceed towards Ayodhya. We would like to see our father's extraordinary heroism !" Kush said in boiling anger. Sita was stunned to hear this. Her heart was filled with anguish. Her eyes welled up with tears. She said :

"Dear son ! Do not think of such an unpleasant thing. You should not fight a war against your father. How could you ever entertain such an idea ? What a sin it is !" Sita spoke with great anguish. Then she paused a little. She heaved a long sigh and said again;

"Dear sons ! Your father and uncle are not ordinary heroes. They are invincible in this universe. Even gods cannot defeat them. They destroyed Ravan, who was the greatest hero in the three worlds. They defeated Kumbhakarna, the valiant and Meghanath, the invincible and you want to fight against them. No. No. I can never give my consent to this plan."

"Mother dear ! Do not worry. You do not know the heroism and abilities of your sons. Let Shri Ram and Lakshman who killed Lankesh Ravan witness a little the heroism of their sons."

"No, dear children ! If you really want to see Shri Ram and Lakshman, you must go there as humble children because the venerable deserve politeness. You will attain glory if you approach them with politeness and affection."

"No mother ! Why should we be polite with them ? We can never be polite to Shri Ram. Politeness is shown to friends and venerable people, not to enemies. How can we respect those who have done a great injustice to our sacred mother ? They are our enemies. Shri Ram may be our father and Lakshman may be our uncle. We do not care for these relationships. We can never be polite to them. It is impossible."

"No, dear children ! They were not responsible for my adversity. It was not their fault. It was the result of my sinful karmas." Suddenly, Sita's eyes welled up with tears.

Then, should we go; and sit at his feet and say ? "We are your sons ! Our mother is Sita !" If we speak to him thus helplessly it will not bring honour either to him or to us. Therefore, mother dear ! Instead of preventing us from marching against Ayodhya; please bless us and we will go and challenge Shri Ram and Lakshman to fight against us. We are sure that if we challenge him to a fight he will be delighted and will feel honoured. Only this course will bring honour and glory to both the parties. Do not worry at all. You know we are your heroic sons."

Lav tried his best to please his mother; and to get her consent; but Sita was not at all willing to give her consent. "A war between the father and the sons ! Such a thing can never take place. If some calamity occurs". Sita's tender heart was filled with anguish.

Lav and Kush were silent. They stood up and got ready to leave; and proceeded towards the door. Sita greatly agitated said; "Lav ! . . . Kush ! Wait a little. Do not go away displeased." Saying this, Sita swooned. Her daughters-in-law at once attended on her. They sprinkled cool water on her face; and fanned air. When a little later, Sita recovered her consciousness, King Vajrajang said :

"Revered lady ! Do not fear anything. King Prithu and I will be with your sons. No one can even dream of defeating your heroic sons; nor will any calamity occur. We will not

allow any calamity to occur. Please do not stop them. Permit them to proceed towards Ayodhya.”

“Now, they are so determined that no power on earth can stop them.”

King Prithu also arrived at Pundarikpur. All the kings and princes were commanded to proceed towards Ayodhya with their armies. The kings and princes kept looking at Lav and Kush with the mixed feelings of wonder, fear and elation.

The trumpets were blown. The noises of bugles filled the air.

At an auspicious time while the priests were reciting the relevant holy mantras, Lav and Kush set off towards Ayodhya leading a vast army.



## CIV

### TOWARDS AYODHYA

The divine sage Narad, during his wanderings through the sky happened to visit Ratanupur. Of course, he had not thought of visiting Ratanupur. He visited the city by chance. While he was flying through the sky, he happened to see Ratanupur and so he descended there. When King Bhamandal came to know of the arrival of the divine sage, he extended an honourable welcome to him. He requested Narad to be seated and then asked him out of curiosity, "O divine sage ! Whence have you come ? I hope all are well and prosperous throughout the world. Did you notice any surprising event during your wanderings ?"

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

"Dear Bhamandal ! I always keep flying over the world but I did not see any surprising event anywhere. but your nephews Lav and Kush succeeded in confounding King Prithu of Prithvipur." Narad said smiling.

"What did you say, divine sage ! My nephews in Prithvipur ! What did they do to confound King Prithu. Divine sage! Please stop speaking in riddles. Tell me clearly what happened so that I may understand what actually happened." Bhamandal's eagerness increased.

"Yes. I have spoken the truth. Your two nephews Lav and Kush set right King Prithu's senses. Ah ! Have you not understood what happened ? The venerable lady Sita gave birth to Lav and Kush. Don't you know that Shri Ram abandoned Sita fearing scandals and rumours ? She was left in a wild forest. Later, King Vajrajang of Pundarikanagar met her by chance and took her to Pundarikanagar. He treated her as his sister and gave her shelter and protection. At that time, Sita was pregnant.

In course of time she gave birth to Lav and Kush in Pundarikarnagar. The first one was named Lav and the second one was called Kush. When they reached the age of marriage, King Vajrajang gave his daughter in marriage to Lav. He requested King Prithu of Prithvipur to give his daughter Kanakamalini in marriage to Kush but Prithu gave a proud reply. "How can I give my daughter in marriage to a young man whose family and background are unknown to me? Angered by this reply, King Vajrajang declared a war against King Prithu. In the war, Lav and Kush displayed great heroism and defeated King Prithu. Later, King Prithu celebrated the marriage of his daughter with Kush. I happened to visit Prithvipur when they were celebrating the event and when they had organised a reception to Lav and Kush. I had to tell the kings and princes all about Lav and Kush. The kings and princes, the Vidyadhars and the Gandharvas who had gathered there were delighted to hear this."

Bhamandal was mute with astonishment and delight to hear all this because he was totally ignorant of all this. He was filled with grief and anguish to hear the story of Sita.

"Dear sage! Is all this true?"

"Dear King! I am really sad that you never met Sita for many years. Even now, it is not too late. At once go to Pundarikapur and meet Sita. You will know everything in greater detail."

At once, Bhamandal set off to Pundarikapur flying through the sky. Narad also accompanied him. They straight went to the palace of Vajrajang. They found that Vajrajang had set off on a campaign and they would not be able to meet them. Then they went to Sita's palace. The attendants stopped them at the gate. Bhamandal gave them his signet-ring and said, "Please show this to Sita and tell her that Bhamandal has come to see her."

The attendants at once conveyed the ring and the message to Sita. At that time Sita was taking rest. Her daughters-in-law sat near her rendering service to her. The attendant saluted



Sita and said, "May revered Sita be victorious ! Some radiant and princely personalities have come to see you. One of them said that his name was Bhamandal and that he wanted to meet you."

"My dear brother Bhamandal ! Has Bhamandal come ?" Sita sank upon her cot unable to believe her ears. Her astonishment knew no bounds. She said to her daughters-in-law. "Bhamandal is my brother. We are children of King Janak." And then she went running to the door to receive them. When she saw Bhamandal, her eyes welled up with tears. Her throat was choked with emotion. Countless events of the past flashed before her like pictures. Bhamandal saluted Sita's feet. His eyes also welled up with tears. He kept looking at Sita with unwinking eyes. A few moments passed thus. Then composing herself a little, she went forward and welcomed Narad. She took them into the palace and offered them seats of state. Within a few moments, the atmosphere became cheerful. After going through the routine of having a bath and taking food, Bhamandal sat near Sita and said :

"Dear Sita ! Where are Lav and Kush ?

"They went to Ayodhya."

"What for ? Who accompanied them ?"

"They have gone to meet their father and their uncle. They have taken with them a vast army." Sita's voice was shaken with grief.

"I am unable to follow you." Bhamandal said boding some inauspicious event.

"Brother ! I think you are not aware of the heroism of your nephews. You do not know fully how valiant they are. That is why you speak thus. Otherwise... Well they are angry with their father. They want to take revenge against their father. The sons have gone to fight against their father. Of course, King Vajrajang and King Prithu are with them. They will not allow any calamity to occur but you do not know how heroic Shri Ram and Lakshman are. Moreover, they do not know who Lav and Kush are. Therefore, I fear that some calamity may occur."

And suddenly Sita began to weep bitterly. She sobbed like a helpless child. She was unable to say anything more. Bhamandal tried to console her. Sita even as she wept narrated to Bhamandal, the story of her adversity. Bhamandal's heart melted away in compassion. He said in a voice full of compassion."

"Dear sister ! Shri Ram has acted thoughtlessly and rashly but we should not repeat it. Even before anything untoward happens, we should reach the war front and prevent the occurrence of any untoward events. Let us set off at once. Delay is dangerous now."

"Revered lady ! What Bhamandal says is true. It is absolutely necessary that you too should go there. Set off at once. I too will visit that place at the proper time". Narad said endorsing Bhamandal's opinion and went away from there. Later Sita got ready for the journey. She gave the necessary instructions to her daughters-in-law and sat in Bhamandal's airship. The airship began flying towards Ayodhya.

The vast army of Lav and Kush had camped on a plain outside the city of Ayodhya. There were millions of soldiers. The whole area was covered with tents. Thousands of horses, elephants, chariots and soldiers stood on the plain. The camp looked like a city. Bhamandal landed his airship in the midst of the tents. The soldiers became alert on seeing the airship landing there. They ran towards the Viman with their daggers drawn and surrounded it. Lav and Kush also came there running. On seeing Sita, alighting from the airship, they threw away their weapons and saluted her. They stood near her with bowed heads.

"Dear children ! This is young uncle Bhamandal. .my brother Bhamandal." Sita introduced Bhamandal to them. Lav and Kush saluted the feet of Bhamandal. The soldiers also saluted Bhamandal and Sita.

Lav and Kush took Sita and Bhamandal to their tent. As soon as they entered the tent, Bhamandal embraced Lav and

Kush and bathed them with the tears of affection. Then turning towards Sita, he said :

“Sita ! Indeed you are fortunate in begetting such sons. I am really happy. You are the wife of a hero. Now you are the mother of heroes. I feel elated with pride and delight, when I think of my sister’s good fortune !” Then turning towards Lav and Kush, he said :

“Dear children ! I feel immensely happy to see you. My joy knows no bounds. You are indeed mighty heroes. You are invincible. But I entreat you not to wage a war against Shri Ram and Lakshman. Please give up your obstinacy. Discard your desire to take revenge against them. Dear children ! You do not know them. I know how heroic they are. They are the mightiest heroes of the world. I personally witnessed their heroism and abilities in the war against Ravan. No one had even dreamt that Ravan, the mighty would thus be routed and destroyed. I think you do not know fully, how mighty Shri Ram and Lakshman are and that you have taken a thoughtless and rash decision to fight a war against them.”

“Dear uncle ! On account of your affection for us, you entertain these fears. Affection brings about such fears. You have said all this because of your affection for us. Our mother also said the same thing but now we cannot think of those things. We cannot change our decision. It is disgraceful for us now, to surrender ourselves to him. Moreover, such an action on our part would bring disgrace to Shri Ram also.” said Lav firmly.

The people of Ayodhya came to know that a large army had arrived and that it had camped on the plains near Ayodhya. All at once, astonishment, fear and curiosity filled the hearts of the people. Everyone was stunned to hear this. There arose a commotion in the city.

Lav and Kush surrounded the city of Ayodhya with their vast army. When Shri Ram and Lakshman heard about this, they were shocked and stunned. They wondered, “Who are these fellows ? Probably, they do not know who we are.” They

thought about the situation. They could not make out who the enemies were. They began to burn with anger. They sent their spies to gather information about the enemy armies. They invited the city heads and had discussions with them.

The spies came back and said, "Your Highness! Thousands of warriors have surrounded the city of Ayodhya and they are led by two young and radiant princes. One is called Lavan and the other is called Ankush. People call them by the pet names Lav and Kush. Apart from the vast armies, there are about ten thousand kings and emperors and they are ready to carry out the commands of the princes."

Shri Ram and Lakshman were stunned to hear all this. They fell into deep thought. They wondered "Who are these two princes. Lav and Kush? We have not at all heard of them." Lakshman thundered :

"We do not care to know who they are. Whoever they may be, they will be burnt to ashes like moths in the flames of Shri Ram's anger and heroism. Go and make the necessary preparations for a war. I will myself go to the war front. I will rout and destroy those two fellows" Lakshman gave this command to the Commander Kritantavadan but he did not try to know who those young heroes were. Shri Ram and Lakshman also did not know that Sita was in the camp.

Trumpets were blown in Ayodhya. War-drums were beaten. The sounds reverberated in the sky. At once, thousands of soldiers stood ready to fight. Sugriv and Vibhishan also were staying at Ayodhya at that time. They too accompanied Shri Rám and Lakshman to the war. The main gate of the city was opened. Shri Ram's vast army moved out like a mighty wave.

Within a few moments, the two armies stood facing each other. As soon as commands were issued, a terrible war broke out between the two armies. Sugriv, Vibhishan and the other Vidyadhars rose into the air and started fighting from the sky. Thousands of soldiers were killed. No one in the army of Lav and Kush knew the technique of fighting in the air. Therefore,

their soldiers were killed in thousands. Bhamandal could not bear to see this. He thought, "There is no doubt that the Vidyadhar heroes like Sugriv will destroy the soldiers of Lav and Kush. Therefore I should leap into the war." Accordingly, leaving Sita in a secure place he rose into the sky and began to fight against the enemies.

A terrible war took place between the two armies.

King Vajrajang was Lav's charioteer and King Prithu was driving the chariot of Kush. Lav roared like a lion and said to Vajrajang "First take me into the midst of Ram's armies."

At once, Vajrajang drove the chariot against Ram's army. The chariot of Kush also drove against Ram's army. The two princes sent showers of tremendous arrows and created a commotion in Ram's army.

Sugriv was greatly astonished to see Bhamandal. His amazement and eagerness knew no bounds. He stood mute thinking, "What is this? Bhamandal is a great devotee of Shri Ram and he is fighting on the side of his enemies. This is really amazing." Sugriv at once went up to Bhamandal and said.

"Bhamandal! What is this? You are fighting on the side of the enemies and who are these two princes?"

"They are Shri Ram's sons!"

"What did you say? Are they sons of Shri Ram? I am unable to believe it."

"Sugriv! I have spoken the truth. Moreover Sita also is in a tent here."

"Really, brother!" Sugriv's joy knew no bounds.

Sugriv at once rushed to Vibhishan. The two conversed with each other in whispers for sometime. The two kings left the battle-field and went to see Sita. Sita was in the tent of Lav and Kush. They saluted Sita's feet and sat before her on the ground.

“Bhamandal! Are Lav and Kush safe?” Sita said turning towards Bhamandal.

“Lav and Kush are carrying out a dance of destruction. They are decimating Ram’s army. They have created a tremendous commotion in Ram’s army. Like veritable gods of war, they are destroying enemy soldiers.”

“Does Shri Ram know who they are?”

“No, sister! No. We should not tell him who they are. Their heroism itself will reveal their identity to Shri Ram. We need not reveal it to him” Sugriv said in a dignified voice.

“But if Lakshman...”

“Revered Queen! Lakshman is with Shri Ram. Do not worry about anything. Everything will be all right.” Sugriv said consoling Sita.

Then Sugriv, Vibhishan and Bhamandal became silent spectators of the war. They stood stupefied by the heroism and abilities of Lav and Kush.

A mortal dread filled the hearts of Shri Ram’s soldiers. They felt helpless against the two princes. They began to run helter-skelter. The chariots of Lav and Kush went speeding towards Shri Ram and Lakshman.



## CV

### SORROW AND JOY

Shri Ram and Lakshman watched Lav and Kush with unwinking eyes. Shri Ram and Lakshman drove their chariots across the battle-field. Shri Ram said to Lakshman, "Lakshman ! How can these radiant princes be our enemies ? No. No. This is impossible. Their radiant and splendid faces show that they cannot be the enemies of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Ah ! The very sight of these princes inspires affection in my heart. How charming they are ! I feel like leaping into their chariots and embracing them. How can I fight against them ?" Even while Shri Ram was saying this to Lakshman, Lav's chariot came speeding and stood before him. In the same manner, the chariot of Kush also stood on the way of Lakshman. Lav and Kush looked up at Shri Ram and Lakshman for a few moments and they felt innately happy. A little later, Lav said addressing Shri Ram in a lofty manner :

"O you invincible hero ! You destroyed Lankesh Ravan himself who was a world-conqueror. For some years, we have been desirous of seeing you and today by chance that desire has been fulfilled. My desire to carry out a war against you has also been fulfilled. O you greatest of men ! If your desire for a heroic fight was not fulfilled in your war against Ravan, now you can fulfil it. I will fulfil your desire and you too fulfil my desire."

Hearing the venomous words of Lav clothed in manna Shri Ram and Lakshman began to shoot arrows. Their anger knew no bounds. Lav and Kush also released arrows which sent shudders through the whole universe. Kritantavadan was driving the chariot of Shri Ram and Lav's chariot was being driven by King Vajrajang.

Viradh was Lakshman's charioteer. King Prithu was driving the chariot of Kush. They were driving the chariots with extraordinary ability and tact. The two charioteers were equal in skill and ability.

Within the twinkling of an eye, a terrible war broke out between the two heroes. The chariots flashed over the battlefield like lightnings; and the heroes released terrible arrows against each other in their endeavour to defeat each other. Lav knew very well that he was fighting against his father but Shri Ram did not know that he was fighting against his son. Lav was carrying out the fight with great care and caution. Shri Ram was out to destroy the enemies. On the other side Kush and Lakshman were carrying out a fight. Kush confounded Lakshman with his might. Viradh and Prithu were driving their chariots with great ability and tact. Kush released miraculous devices and his heroism would fascinate even the greatest gods.

Shri Ram released all the miraculous weapons he had; yet he was merely defending himself. He did not have the desire or enthusiasm to destroy the enemy. Overcome with gloom, he said to Kritantavadan :

“Kritant ! Stop the chariot somewhere.”

Kritantavadan at once carried out Shri Ram's command. He stopped the chariot at a distance from Lav. The armies of Ayodhya fought against Lav using all their might and skill. Shri Ram said to Kritantavadan.

“How long can the war go on thus ? If it continues thus, it can never end. Take my chariot towards the enemy. I will capture him alive.”

“Dear lord ! Today's war has been tedious. Our horses are tired. The enthusiasm of our elephants is exhausted. The enemies have heaped destruction on our cavalry and infantry. Their bodies have been pierced with envenomed arrows. Therefore, they are unable to fight. Even our chariot has been broken by the enemy, and I am unable to drive the horses.



I am also dead tired. O Lord! The enemy is but a young man. Yet he has been displaying abilities which can strike terror into the hearts of even the mightiest gods like Varun."

"Kritantavadan! I wonder why my bow has been slipping from my hands. My hands have become paralysed. Ah! This bow of mine. This *vajravart* has known no defeat. Even this miraculous weapon *Musal* (Pestle) has proved inefficacious. It should have destroyed the enemy because it has such miraculous powers. In the same manner, this miraculous weapon *Hul* (Plough) which used to strike terror into the hearts of enemies is now devoid of all its miraculous powers. It is like an ordinary plough. I am unable to understand why such things are happening. These weapons of mine presided over by supernatural beings possessing extraordinary and miraculous powers have lost all their radiance and are powerless and inefficacious. I wonder, why. There must be some secret reason for all this." Shri Ram's face had become bleak and blighted. He was in great agitation.

Kritantavadan stood watching the heroism and abilities of Lav and Kush with stupefaction. Shri Ram glanced at Lav again and again and fell into deep thought. After a long time he again said, "True Kritant! When I see this radiant youngster, somehow I cannot think of him as my enemy. For some reason unknown to me my heart feels drawn towards him. I feel like discarding all my weapons and embracing him. I do not know why such feelings keep arising in me. How tender his body is! How fascinating his face is! How splendid his appearance! How heroically has he been fighting!"

Lakshman was experiencing the same agitation as Shri Ram was experiencing. Even his miraculous weapons, the creations of Vasudev were devoid of all their powers. Lakshman stood stupefied watching Kush with dazed amazement. Just then, Kush sent a miraculous weapon against Lakshman. Hit by that weapon, Lakshman fell down in his chariot. Viradh was filled with fear. At once, Viradh drove the chariot back to Ayodhya.

Shri Ram did not notice this. He was absorbed in watching the heroic fight of Lav. When Lakshman's chariot reached the

gate of Ayodhya, he recovered his consciousness. In utter confusion and amazement, he looked around. There were no soldiers and there was no noise of battle. For a few moments, he was lost in amazement, but when he realised the situation, he roared like a lion.

“Viradh ! Where are we ? Who brought me here ? Where is the enemy ? No battle is going on here, why ?”

“Dear lord ! Hit by the enemy’s weapons you swooned. We were surrounded by enemies. Fearing capture, I brought you to safety here.”

“Viradh ! You have committed a great blunder. You have certainly blundered. I am Shri Ram’s brother and Emperor Dasharath’s son. Shall I run away from the battle-field, to save my life like coward ? No. No. This is unbecoming of a descendant of the Ikshvaku dynasty. What will Shri Ram say when he comes to know of this ? Viradh ! What a disgraceful thing have you done ! At once, turn the chariot towards the battle-field. Drive me to the battle-field without delay. Where is that enemy ? I will not rest till I destroy him. I will cut off his head without delay. This *chakra* of mine will surely destroy the enemy. Drive me back to the battle-field.”

Viradh shuddered with mortal dread on hearing Lakshman’s words. At once, he drove the chariot back to the battle-field but his mind was full of fears and doubts. He had witnessed from a close point, the enemy’s extraordinary abilities. He had not seen or heard of any hero who could deal such a deadly blow to Lakshman himself and throw him down unconscious but he had to obey Lakshman’s commands. Therefore Viradh did not say anything against Lakshman’s command. He drove the chariot to the battle-field at a great speed.

“Wait a little, you ignorant boy ! I will teach you a lesson !” Lakshman thundered again as soon as he entered the battle-field. The very next moment, he released the *chakra* and it went whirling and flashing through the sky. It went speeding towards Kush.

Lav and Kush sent many miraculous devices to destroy and to break down the *chakra* that was speeding towards them but all their efforts failed.

The *chakra* came whirling through the sky.

It slowly performed a circumambulation around Ankush !

And then ? The very next moment, it returned to Lakshman.

Witnessing this miracle Lakshman stood utterly stupefied. His amazement and anger knew no bounds. Again he furiously sent the *chakra* towards Kush with all his might.

But it was a divine *chakra* ! A supernatural wheel. An extraordinary weapon which had been consecrated by the greatest gods and goddesses who had bestowed upon it miraculous powers but it had its limitations. It could not transgress those limits. It could not attack members of the same *gotra* or family. Kush and Lakshman belonged to the same *gotra*. Therefore the divine wheel was powerless against Kush. What cannot happen will never happen. This is a decree of destiny. This was true in this case also. The *chakra* instead of hitting Kush performed a circumambulation around Kush to honour him and then it returned to its lord Lakshman.

Even the divine *chakra* was inefficacious against the youngster. A tremendous commotion arose everywhere in the army. Shri Ram came running to Lakshman. The *chakra* stood in Lakshman's hands powerless and quiet and Lakshman was in great grief.

“Dear brother ! I do not know what is going to happen today. I released the *chakra* twice against the enemy but it could not attack the enemy. Now I do not have any other weapon which can destroy the enemy. We are unable to do anything to the enemy. I do not know what is concealed in the womb of Destiny.”

“Lakshman ! Can it be that some other Baladev and Vasudev are born in Jambudweep ? Actually these are not ordinary

enemies. They are youngsters of extraordinary abilities. We have never seen such enemies in our lives.”

“This war will never end. It is better to end it. It has been causing unnecessary blood-shed and violence.”

Shri Ram's face was covered with gloom and despair. He stood with a blank mind looking at Lakshman. Lav and Kush were greatly elated by their victory.

Just then, the divine sage Narad and the sage Siddhartha descended from the sky. Shri Ram and Lakshman saluted them. As desired by Gurudev Siddhartha, Lav and Kush stopped fighting. The minds of all were drawn towards Narad and Siddharth. Narad said smiling.

“Dear Shri Ram ! Why are you in such grief ? In fact, you should be happy on this occasion. The sons excel their father. This is a way of the world and your defeat at the hands of your sons is in accordance with that proverb. O you king of Ayodhya ! These two youngsters are the sons of Sita. They are Lav and Kush. War was only a pretext. Their real purpose was to see you. They have come to Ayodhya only to see their father. Therefore, they are not your enemies. Lakshman ! The *chakra* was powerless against them because they are Shri Ram's sons. In the same manner, once the *chakra* was inefficacious when Emperor Bharath released it against his younger brother Bahubali. Therefore, stop grieving.”

Narad's words stunned Shri Ram and Lakshman. They stood stupefied. They at once alighted from their chariots greatly amazed. Shri Ram said to Narad.

“Divine sage ! Is my dear Sita alive ? Where is she ?”

“O you ornament of the Ikshvaku dynasty ! Sita is alive.” Narad narrated the entire story of Sita from the time of her abandonment in the forest of Simhaninad upto the present event. He narrated the story of the birth of Lav and Kush; their marriages and their victories. Narad introduced Siddharth to Shri Ram.

Shri Ram fell down unconscious overcome with sorrow, joy and a sense of shame. A tremendous commotion arose among Ram's armies. Lakshman, Viradh, Kritantavadan and others ran upto Shri Ram. They sprinkled cool and scented water on his face. Shri Ram regained his consciousness. Then he looked towards Lav and Kush, who were standing in their chariots at a great distance. His eyes welled up with tears. Lakshman's eyes also welled up with tears.

They cast away their arms and went hurriedly towards Lav and Kush. Just at this point, Shatrughna also came into the battle-field.

"Kush! Now you should not delay. Our honoured father and uncle are coming to greet us. We too should go forth and receive them." At once the two brothers jumped off the chariots and ran towards Shri Ram and Lakshman.

Lav and Kush fell at the feet of Shri Ram. Shri Ram sat down on the ground unable to contain his joy. Greatly overcome with affection, he took Lav and Kush into his lap. He again and again passed his hand over their heads and embraced them. Shri Ram's heart was torn with the conflicting emotions of joy and grief.

Within a few moments, the battle-field changed into a joyous place reverberating with jubilations. The kings, princes and the warriors sat down to witness the great event of the union between Shri Ram and his sons. King Vajrajang and King Prithu sat quietly near them. All shed tears of joy.

Lakshman embraced the two princes and kissed their foreheads. His adamant heart grew soft and tender. He could not check his tears. Lav and Kush also shed tears of joy.

Shatrughna came forward and embraced the two princes with great affection. The battle-field changed into a happy gathering.

The news of the meeting of Shri Ram and his sons reached the ears of Sita. Her joy knew no bounds.



## CVI

### ENTERING AYODHYA

Sita's joy knew no bounds since she had witnessed the heroism of her sons and the union between her sons and their father. These events filled her with a heavenly felicity. Realising that her objective had been fulfilled Sita sat in the airship and proceeded to Pundarikpur.

After having bidden farewell to Sita, Sugriv the king of Kishkinda and Vibhishan the king of Lanka and Bhamandal came into the battle-field where the union of the sons and the father was being celebrated with jubilations. Countless kings and princes had gathered there. All were in a state of indescribable joy and jubilation.

Introducing King Vajrajang to Shri Ram Bhamandal said enthusiastically : "O you king of Ayodhya ! This is King Vajrajang the ruler of Pundarikpur. It was he who gave shelter and protection to Sita and freed her from all fears and anxieties. He also gave his beautiful daughter in marriage to Lav."

"Dear King Vajrajang ! You are a well-wisher of mine like Bhamandal. You have bestowed a great benefaction upon me. You have brought up my children with parental affection. One can get such a benefactor only by one's good fortune. Actually, I feel blessed for having met you today."

"O you greatest of men ! Please do not flatter me. What benefaction have I done you? I have merely done my duty as a human being. That was my duty and I carried it out." King Vajrajang's voice was choked with emotion.

Afterwards Bhamandal introduced King Prithu also to Shri Ram; and praised his excellent virtues. Shri Ram with great

affection and amity embraced both the kings and entreated them to visit Ayodhya. He also entreated Narad the divine sage and Siddharth, the teacher to hallow the city of Ayodhya by visiting it.

Sugriv communicated to Lav and Kush a silent message through his eyes that Sita had safely returned to Pundarikpur. Lav and Kush were now free from worry.

The Pushpak arrived. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Shatrughna, Lav and Kush sat in it. King Vajrajang, King Prithu, Vibhishan, Sugriv and Bhamandal also sat in the airship. The other members of the royal family also sat in the Pushpak. The sky was reverberating with the melodious songs of birds. The Pushpak began to move slowly over the gardens and the main streets of Ayodhya. The people of Ayodhya were greatly delighted to see the princes Lav and Kush. Their joy and jubilation knew no bounds. The cries of victory issued by the people welcoming Lav and Kush especially reverberated in the skies. The people also glorified Sita. All were swaying with delight. Lav and Kush were entering Ayodhya for the first time. Naturally, they thought of their mother Sita again and again. Shri Ram ecstatically embraced Lav and Kush again and again.

The Pushpak landed at the gate of the magnificent palace of Ayodhya. The courtyard was full of people who had gathered there to see the princes. Their cries of joy and jubilation resounded in the highest skies. All were plunged in the ocean of joy.

“Let grand ceremonies and celebrations and jubiliations be organised throughout the kingdom. Let proper arrangements be made to worship gods and the Jins in temples and in the Jin temples. Let generous gifts of food, clothes and money be given to the needy and the indigent. Let all prisoners be released forthwith.”

This command of Shri Ram reached every city, town and village of the kingdom. The ministers at once got ready to carry out Shri Ram's commands and began making the necessary arrangements for the celebration.

Arrangements were made for the stay of Lav and Kush in Shri Ram's palace. Thousands of citizens, villagers and the members of the royal family, relatives and friends thronged the palace to have a glimpse of the heroic princes Lav and Kush. The people offered their highest respect to the princes. After a long time Shri Ram's palace began to shine resplendent. Since the time Sita left the palace it was desolate like a burial ground. Now again it looked radiant and magnificent.

On that day, a grand banquet was arranged in honour of Lav and Kush at the palace of Lakshman. He took Lav and Kush to his palace. The thousands of queens in Lakshman's harem were waiting impatiently to see the young princes; to receive them with love and affection and to spend some time happily with them, showering upon them their motherly love.

Lakshman had invited even Sugriv, the king of the Vanar-dweep to that banquet. He had also extended such special invitations to Vibhishan the king of Lanka, Hanuman, the son of Pavananjay, Angadh and Bhamandal, the beloved. All gathered in Lakshman's palace at the appointed time.

Before the banquet began, Lav and Kush met Lakshman's queens whose love and affection overwhelmed them with joy. The affectionate treatment given to them by Lakshman at the time of the banquet filled them with inexpressible delight. The guests such as Sugriv and Vibhishan also extended to them an honourable welcome befitting their heroism.

The banquet began in the midst of the divine melodies emanating from various musical instruments on which experts were playing. All were enjoying the banquet but only Sugriv was sad and depressed. He was eating food silently; and he looked serious and thoughtful. He kept glancing at Lav and Kush repeatedly. Bhamandal kept watching carefully the thoughts and feelings appearing on Sugriv's face, while Lav and Kush forgot themselves overwhelmed by the affection shown by the others.

After the dinner, all gathered in Lakshman's counsel-chamber. Lakshman sat with Lav and Kush on a magnificent



throne which had been studded with precious stones. Sugriv, Vibhishan, Bhamandal and the others sat on thrones nearby. After a brief silence, Lakshman thanked the guests; and said:

“Dear friends! You have done me proud by responding graciously to my invitation. Today, I arranged the banquet to celebrate the event of the arrival of Lav and Kush at Ayodhya. You have greatly honoured us by joining us at the banquet. I cannot forget your kindness.”

There was silence again. Then Sugriv glanced towards Lakshman; and after getting his consent, he slowly rose to his feet. His serious voice began resounding in the chamber.

“May Emperor Lakshman be victorious! Dear Lord! We are of course your friends always. We have been your friends through countless janmas. On account of our amity for you we have come now; and we shall continue to visit you off and on. We feel blessed by seeing the sons of the noble Sita here. We are supremely happy to have seen Lavan and Ankush, the heroic sons of Sita. The very sight of these princes fills us with memories relating to that sublime lady, Sita. Until she returns to Ayodhya, we cannot be really happy. Her absence fills our hearts with anguish.” Sugriv said this wiping the tears in his eyes. At once, his voice was choked with grief. His heart was torn with anguish. His agitated voice resounded again.

“When in the battle-field I saw Bhamandal fighting on the side of the Princes my wonder and distress knew no bounds. When I asked for the reason for his taking sides with the princes, he explained to me why he was fighting on their side. His reply filled me with amazement. Hearing that Sita was staying in the tent of Lavan and Ankush, I at once went and saw her. When I saw that noble lady, I experienced the contrary emotions of joy and grief. My heart was torn with anguish. Even now, I feel stupefied when I visualize that sight. Yes, dear lord! It was a heart-rending sight. At that time, even king Vibhishan was with me. Sita was in great anguish since she had been unjustly abandoned by Shri Ram.

She was the very embodiment of anguish at that time. In the whole world, she had no prop or hope in life except Lav and Kush. All her joy lay in having them within her sight. Therefore, dear lord of Ayodhya, I entreat you to make urgent preparations to bring Sita back to Ayodhya. We should also persuade Shri Ram to agree to this plan; otherwise, we have to send the princes to him. Sita cannot live separated from her lord and her sons."

Sugriv completed what he wanted to say; looked meaningfully towards the others who were in the chamber and then resumed his seat. His voice shaken with anguish agitated everyone. All fell into deep grief. Lav and Kush began to shed tears. Bhamandal and Vibhishan could not check their tears. Hanuman became deeply agitated. All experienced boundless grief.

"How did all these things occur? Why did they occur? I came to know of all this after a long time and when I came to know of this, I was greatly grieved. My heart broke into pieces when I heard all this but what could we do? We were all helpless in that situation. Well! Something that should not have occurred has occurred. A great injustice has been done to the sublime woman, Sita. Now, we should remove that injustice and bring Sita back to Ayodhya at once. I am ready to go to Pundarikpur and bring Sita here if the Lord of Ayodhya permits me to do so. What Sugriv said is absolutely true. That sublime woman cannot live separated from her lord and her sons." Hanuman said in a firm voice.

Lakshman at once fell into deep thought. That tragic event flashed before him like a picture. He remembered the day on which Shri Ram made that unjust decision to discard Sita. At that time, he opposed Shri Ram's plan. He condemned Shri Ram's decision and entreated Shri Ram not to carry it out. He fell at Shri Ram's feet with eyes full of tears and entreated Shri Ram to give up the plan of abandoning Sita but Shri Ram remained adamant and stuck to his guns. As Lakshman remembered these things, his grief changed into indignation. He began to shake with anger but the very next moment another situation flashed before his mental eyes. When

Kritantavadan returned to Ayodhya after leaving Sita in the forest and fell down unconscious greatly grieved by what he had done, he at once set off to the forest to bring back Sita. When Lakshman visualised this sequence, his anger again disappeared. He glanced towards Sugriv. He looked at Hanuman for a few moments and then said in a serious voice.

“Dear Sugriv ! and dear Hanuman ! What you have said is true. My wish also is that Sita should be brought back to Ayodhya. Dear Sugriv ! You were a witness to it. I opposed Shri Ram’s decision to discard Sita but he remained firm. Well ! Even now we can mend matters. Now we shall jointly approach Shri Ram and entreat him to bring back Sita. I am sure that he will not reject our entreaty.”

“Dear uncle ! If our father does not agree to it, we shall return to Pundarikpur at once. Kindly inform him of this.” Lav said in a serious voice holding Lakshman’s hands.

“Dear child ! I will surely inform Shri Ram of your feelings. Undoubtedly this is the duty of sons who adore their mother.” Lakshman said consoling Lav.

A little later, Lakshman turned towards Bhamandal and said, “When shall we meet Shri Ram ?” Bhamandal looked at Lakshman for a few moments and then his face which was bright grew bleak.

“Dear Lakshman ! We shall meet Shri Ram whenever you deem it proper to meet him but is there any point in meeting him ? Will it bring any fruit ? In the battle-field, while introducing Lav and Kush to Shri Ram, the divine sage Narad said clearly : “Sita is alive and she is absolutely safe in Pundarikapur.” Even then Shri Ram did not say, “Sita should be brought from Pundarikpur at once and must be received into Ayodhya along with Lav and Kush.” When that is so, I do not see any point in meeting Shri Ram now.” Bhamandal said in great anguish.

Hearing the words of Bhamandal, all became sad and agitated. Bhamandal’s words were absolutely true. At the time

of receiving the princes into Ayodhya Shri Ram never remembered Sita. He did not even care to know about Sita's welfare. He did not care to make even a single enquiry about her welfare. So, it was evident that Shri Ram would not agree to the proposal of bringing Sita back to Ayodhya. So, all felt that Bhamandal was right in entertaining those doubts.

"Dear uncle ! If our father is not willing to bring our mother back to Ayodhya, why should we worry about it ? If that is so, we two shall return to Pundarikpur.' Kush said in a calm voice.

"Well ! We shall meet Shri Ram tomorrow," said Lakshman looking towards Sugriv.

"But Lakshman, you will have to take up the matter with him."

"No, we shall all make an appeal to him but we need not go with you." said Lav and Kush.

"All right. Even if you do not join us, we can meet Shri Ram ourselves."

After this discussion, all returned to their places of residence.

Lav and Kush returned to their palaces but their minds were deeply agitated. They had been agitated by the discussion that had taken place in Lakshman's house. They were unable to think of anything. Of course, the two princes had been greatly impressed with the love and reverence that Lakshman and all the others in Ayodhya had for Sita. They had been deeply moved by Sugriv's words, which were profoundly significant. They were worried by the doubt whether Shri Ram would consent to the proposal or not.

"If our father does not agree to this proposal, what shall we do ?" Kush wanted to know Lav's final decision.

"I am unable to understand why this doubt arises in your mind. I am sure that our father will give his consent to it," Lav said with a feeling of absolute certainty.

“Dear brother ! What you say is true. It seems after abandoning our mother, our father went to the forest in search of her. Not caring for hunger or thirst, it seems, he wandered through the forest areas, over mountains and through valleys. It seems he went walking. He did all that only with the noble desire of bringing our mother back to Ayodhya. Therefore, I do not think that he will reject this proposal now,” Kush said endorsing Lav’s words and after thinking for a while, he again said,

“Of course, our firm determination is to return to Pundarikpur if our mother is not brought to Ayodhya.”

The night had far advanced. The two brothers went to bed. How could they know what was concealed in the womb of the future ?



## CVII

### LEAVING PUNDARIKPUR

Vibhishan, Sugriv, Hanuman, Bhamandal, Angadh and others met in the palace of Lakshman. Lakshman extended a hearty welcome to all. All set off to meet Shri Ramachandra. Doubts and fears filled their minds. All were thinking of the same thing. "Will Shri Ram agree to bring Sita back to Ayodhya?"

They entered Shri Ram's palace and stood before him. After saluting him they sat on seats of state. Shri Ram made polite enquiries and desired to know the purpose of their visit. No one said anything. All were silent. After sometime, Lakshman composing himself a little said in a serious voice.

"Revered brother! We have come to place before you a proposal of ours. The noble lady Sita has been living in Pundarikpur. She has been experiencing inordinate anguish on account of the separation from you; and since now Lav and Kush are not with her. Therefore, Sita must be brought to Ayodhya as early as possible. Otherwise she may not live. She cannot remain alive separated from her husband and her sons. Therefore, if you permit us, we shall bring her to Ayodhya at once."

Lakshman made this entreaty and sat down in a throne near Shri Ram. Then Sugriv, the king of Kishkindha, stood up and saluted Shri Ram and said in a polite voice :

"O you greatest of men! The noble lady Sita should be brought to Ayodhya with all honour. This is what we think is right and proper. She has been experiencing distress, on account of the separation from you. Moreover, now people have not

been saying anything against her. When such is the situation, it is highly improper to keep her away thus. It is like throwing dust at the sun. This is not proper for a heroic and sagacious person like you."

"Even gods and goddesses have declared that Sita is a sublime woman," Hanuman said revealing his agitation.

"O you lord of Ayodhya! Now Lav and Kush have come to Ayodhya. Sita used to derive some solace and happiness from the presence of Lav and Kush but now even they are away from her."

Shri Ram's gracious face grew serious. His eyes were fixed on the ground. He kept silently listening to the words of Lakshman, Sugriv and Hanuman and began thinking deeply about the matter. A little later, he turned towards Sugriv and said looking at him with fixed eyes and in a firm voice :

"Dear Sugriv, dear Lakshman, how can we bring Sita to Ayodhya?" And then Shri Ram again became silent. All were observing carefully the feelings and thoughts that appeared in his face. All were breathless with anxiety. Shri Ram said with anxiety, "Sita has not yet been freed from the accusation made by the people of Ayodhya. The stain of her character has not yet been removed. Of course, I know very well that there is no truth in this accusation. It is absolutely untrue but even a false accusation has to be reckoned with in political matters. It assumes a special importance in political affairs and it has to be proved false. I know very well that Sita is absolutely pure and chaste. She is a sublime woman and her character is pure like the pellucid waters of the Ganga. It is sacred and pure yet..."

Shri Ram again fell into deep thought. Lakshman became agitated and impatient. Sugriv, Vibhishan and the other well-wishers of the Ikshvaku dynasty were steeped in deep agitation. Lakshman could not contain himself. He said in an aggressive voice.

"We have not come here to hear these pious platitudes. If you keep repeating that you have to reckon with rumours and

scandals, we will go away at once. Lav and Kush will go back to Pundarikpur and then you will have to remain here alone separated from them. I hereby declare that I am determined to cut off the heads of those malicious people who have been spreading these scandals and rumours. I cannot put up with this situation. There is a limit to anyone's patience."

"Peace Lakshman! Be peaceful. Do not be emotional. Do not get excited. Refrain from using strong language. Do you think that I do not love Sita? Do you think that she has no place in my heart? O mad fellow! Sita is the life of my life. I think you do not realise that separated from Sita, I cannot have any peace of mind. I feel deeply depressed and distressed on account of this separation. You cannot realise how much anguish I have been experiencing on account of this separation from my dearest Sita but I wish to bring back Sita to Ayodhya in such a way that nobody would be able to find fault with her. Therefore, she has to be subjected to an ordeal in the presence of the people of Ayodhya. After she goes through the ordeal, she can enter Ayodhya. Since Sita is absolutely pure and chaste, she need not fear the ordeal."

"But what kind of test will be devised for her?" Lakshman said impatiently.

"Well! That will be decided later."

"Then shall we bring Sita from Pundarikpur?"

"Before bringing her to Ayodhya, you must get a vast platform constructed outside the city of Ayodhya. Thousands of people, kings and princes should be able to sit upon it. I will myself supervise the construction of that platform. After it is constructed, Sita must be brought to Ayodhya."

"So you will subject her to a test in the presence of all."

"Yes."

"Very well! As commanded by you."

"After saluting Shri Ram, Lakshman, Bhamandal, Hanuman, Vibhishan and the others returned to Lakshman's palace.



The kings and princes were experiencing the extremities of joy and sorrow on hearing about this development. When they met again in Lakshman's palace, Lav and Kush said,

"Has our father given his consent? Has he agreed to our proposal of bringing our mother to Ayodhya?"

"Of course, he has given his consent. but he will receive her into Ayodhya only after her purity has been proved in the presence of all people."

"So he wants to test the chastity and purity of our mother. Is that so? Let him test her. Our mother is absolutely pure. She is sublime like the Ganga!" Lav and Kush said with elation.

Lakshman received the princes into his lap and bathed them with tears of affection.

Just then Sugriv entered the palace and said, "I have given the necessary instructions to the ministers. A magnificent pavilion will be constructed outside the city. A vast platform also will be constructed. The people of Ayodhya can sit upon it and watch the events."

"Now let us not delay even a moment. You make arrangements. You make arrangements to go to Pundarikpur."

"I will set off to Pundarikpur tomorrow morning."

"And yes! You must take the Pushpakviman with you. Kindly entreat Sita on my behalf to return to Ayodhya. Please tell her, "Your child Lakshman is eager to meet you and to receive you."

"We will certainly convey your message to Sita and we will return with Sita."

"Sugriv! Kindly convey to our mother our regards. Please tell her, "Lav and Kush are anxiously awaiting your arrival." If necessary we will also join you," said Kush impatiently.

"No, dear prince! You need not accompany us. There is no need. We will manage it ourselves. If you are with us it is possible that..."

“Dear Lord! We are not insisting on our accompanying you. We merely expressed our desire. That is all.”

At the stipulated time, the Pushpak viman began flying towards Pundarikpur.

A commotion arose in the mind of Sugriv. Countless doubts and fears arose in his mind. “Will Sita agree to return to Ayodhya? Can she recover from the terrible wound caused to her by the abandonment? I hope that Sita has not developed a spirit of detachment. It is possible that she may not agree to return to Ayodhya. She may plead some pretext to avoid returning to Ayodhya but she has extraordinary affection and love for Lav and Kush. I think, she will surely return to Ayodhya at least for the sake of her children if not for the sake of anyone else but if she minds she can call back Lav and Kush to Pundarikpur. No. No. I will persuade her to return to Ayodhya but I must make this point clear to her, “Shri Ram will surely honour you but he will test your purity.” Later she should not feel that I have deceived her. But why should the great lady fear an ordeal? Truth fears no danger.”

The Pushpak approached Pundarikpur. It landed at a safe place.

Sugriv sent a message to Sita about their arrival. Sita was greatly delighted to hear about Sugriv’s arrival. She received him cordially. He folded his hands and saluted Sita. Sita received him with great honour and hospitality. Sugriv finding a suitable opportunity said to Sita.

“Revered queen! I have come in accordance with Shri Ram’s commands. He has sent the Pushpak for you. Therefore kindly accompany me to Ayodhya. Lakshman is eagerly awaiting your arrival. Lav and Kush are anxiously looking for the opportunity of meeting you. The citizens of Ayodhya are eager to receive you.”

“Sugriv! Here you are always welcome. How can I return to Ayodhya? I cannot forget that terrible scene. On that day I was abandoned and left in the dreadful forest of Simhaninad.

That incident caused great anguish to me. I have not been able to recover from that pain. I have not been able to recover my spirits; and now shall I meet my lord and face another calamity? I do not see any point in my returning to Ayodhya.”

Sita began to shudder with fear and anguish. She spoke with great difficulty. Her anguish found expression in her sorrowful accents. Her voice was choked with emotion and her eyes welled up with tears. Sugriv heard Sita's heart-rending words with sympathy. He again saluted her and said,

“Revered Queen! What you say is true. Your anguish fills me with grief. You have been bearing with boundless sorrow with an extraordinary patience but now the days of sorrow have ended. The period of adversity has come to an end. Now you will have peace and felicity. You will meet Shri Ram and so the sun of prosperity will again arise in your life. Shri Ram and Lakshman along with their ministers and countless kings and princes are awaiting your arrival. Shri Ram is thinking of proving your purity and chastity in the presence of all. Therefore kindly return to Ayodhya.”

“Sugriv! I am always ready to prove my innocence and purity. Well! I will return to Ayodhya.”

Sita gave her consent. Sugriv's joy knew no bounds. An urgent message was sent to King Vajrajang. As soon as he received the message he came there. Sita informed him of her decision to return to Ayodhya. At once, the King's eyes welled up with tears.

“Revered lady! I am really happy to hear that you are going to Ayodhya. At the same time, I am greatly sad to hear that you are leaving this city. It is natural that when one's dear sister is returning to her husband's house, one should experience the mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. Dear sister! I wish that you must always be happy and that you should attain prosperity and felicity. If I have committed any mistake or if there has been any lapse in the treatment given to you kindly pardon me. Kindly remember your brother.” And King Vajrajang began to weep like a helpless child.

“Dear brother! I can never forget the benefaction you bestowed upon me. You have taken care of me with the affection of a father, mother and brother. You always treated me with the highest regard and affection. Ah! You have experienced a lot of inconvenience and difficulty on account of me and my sons. You have done, everything to keep us happy and cheerful. I could bear with my difficulties cheerfully only because of the extraordinary affection you showed me. Let no other woman experience so much grief and anguish as I have experienced in life. May no other woman be caught in such a whirlwind of calamities as the one in which I was caught, This is my prayer to the Almighty.”

The tears streamed from Sita's eyes. King Vajrajang's voice was choked. With great difficulty, he said,

“Oh you revered lady! Your arrival at Pundarikpur brought prosperity, felicity and good fortune to the people of our city and to our royal family. Your sacred presence has hallowed our city and has filled us all with joy. Since you have hallowed our city, it will continue to be prosperous and progressive. Your leaving the city is a death-blow to us; and it will cause anguish to all of us; but yet a sister cannot remain with her brother for ever.

King Vajrajang ordered his men to announce to drum-beats the news that Sita was returning to Ayodhya. At once, the people of the city thronged the palace of Sita. All were shedding tears; and were sobbing. Their faces had grown bleak and blighted. Sita instructed her daughters-in-law to get ready to travel to Ayodhya; and then she went up to the window of the balcony to bid farewell to the thronging crowds and to receive their compliments and regards.

All those who had gathered there were saying the same thing;

“Now, Sita will return to Ayodhya for good. Lav and Kush have already gone to Ayodhya. Sita will not remain at Pundarikapur.”

“Revered Queen! Now, we should not delay.” said Sugriv humbly.

Sita folded her hands and saluted the surging crowds of people; and returned into the palace. Her daughters-in-law were now ready for the journey. Then Sita went to the harem and took leave of King Vajrajang’s queen.

The colourfully decorated Pushpak stood ready. Sita ascended it accompanied by her daughters-in-law. Sugriv also ascended the Pushpak.

“May the noble lady Sita be victorious.” This cry issued by the vast crowds reverberated in the highest skies. King Vajrajang bade farewell to all.

King Vajrajang bade farewell to Sita; but he did not know what lay concealed in the womb of the future. How could he decipher the mystic signs of the mysterious future? If he knew the future he would not have bidden farewell to Sita. On the other hand, he would have accompanied her to Ayodhya. He did not know that he was bidding a final farewell to Sita; and that he would not see her again. Ah! Even Sita did not know what the Almighty had decreed regarding her future. She too did not know that she would not enter the city of Ayodhya.

The Pushpak began to fly through the sky. After flying a little while, it turned towards Ayodhya.

The citizens of Ayodhya were eagerly awaiting the arrival of Sita.

## CVIII

### THE FIRE-ORDEAL AND RENUNCIATION

The outskirts of the city of Ayodhya !

The Mahendroday garden !

A magnificent pavilion had been constructed there. It was decorated with flowers of various glorious flowers. Countless kings and a vast mass of people had gathered there. An ocean of humanity seemed to be rolling there. All were looking towards the sky, expecting the arrival of the *Pushpak Viman*. All were looking towards the horizons with fixed eyes. It was past midday and the sun had slightly declined to the west.

Just then the *Pushpak* appeared on the horizon ! With abounding eagerness and impatience all stood up. The kings and princes began looking up turning their eyes towards the sky. Within a few moments, the *Pushpak* entered the territory of Ayodhya. At a great height it performed three circumambulations around Ayodhya. Sugriv landed the *Pushpak* with great skill in the *Mahendroday* garden.

A number of damsels greeted Sita offering her vermilion and holy grain and received her with great cordiality. Sita at once alighted from the *Pushpak*. Her daughters-in-law followed her with great humility. At the end, Sugriv alighted from the *Pushpak*. On seeing Sita, Lakshman rose from his throne; ran towards her and fell at her feet. The other kings who were in the pavilion did the same.

Sita was entreated to be seated on a throne. Bhamandal took Sita's daughters-in-law into the city of Ayodhya. Lav and Kush were in Ayodhya. Lakshman, Sugriv, Vibhishan, Hanu-

man, Angadh, Shatrughna and the other kings and princess entreated Sita.

“Revered Queen! Be so gracious as to step into Ayodhya and to hallow the city. Kindly grant our entreaty.”

“Dear child! I will surely enter Ayodhya but before that my purity and my chastity should be proved. I am determined not to enter the city until the stain on my character has been completely removed.”

Lakshman saluted Sita and approached Shri Ram and informed him of Sita’s determination. Shri Ram also desired this. Seeing Shri Ram coming towards her, Sita stood up.

Shri Ram’s face was serious. It showed his sense of justice and fair-play. His respect for the law had paralysed his affection for Sita. All his affection for Sita seemed to have disappeared. He seemed to have no tenderness for Sita. He said in a serious and stern voice: “Sita! If your chastity remains unaffected inspite of your having been in Ravan’s kingdom, prove it before all these people.”

A smile appeared in Sita’s face. The smile was not an expression of joy but it was a devious expression of her deep-seated grief. She gave her consent to go through the ordeal as desired by Shri Ram. For years, she had been desiring to speak out her mind and now she began to speak out. She lifted her head; her eyes looked serious and she began to speak out in a sharp voice.

“Ah! Revered Lord! No one in this world can be so great, so learned and so fair as you are. Even without making an effort to find out whether I was guilty or innocent, you abandoned me and sent me away to the forest. You are indeed great. You are indeed the noblest scion of Ikshwaku dynasty. You punished me before proving my guilt. Today you want me to go through the fire ordeal. Oh! How lofty you are and how thoughtful and sensible and magnanimous you are! Undoubtedly you are sagacious and wise. That is why you have been subjecting me to all kinds of severe tests and ordeals without think-

ing of my feelings even a little. I am ready to face any test. I will go through any ordeal that you devise for me." Shri Ram's face was covered with sorrow, gloom and shame. In a grief-stricken voice he said,

"Dear Sita! I know very well that you are absolutely innocent and that you are as sublime as the Ganga but I want you to go through the fire-ordeal so that your character may be freed from a stain sticking to it on account of scandals and rumours."

"Dear Lord! I do not refuse to go through any ordeal. If you command me, I will enter fire; if you desire it, I will receive into my hands holy grain on which a magic and mystic spell has been cast. I will sit in the balance that will weigh and decide my purity. I will drink even molten lead if it pleases you and if you desire it, I will cut off my tongue with a sword. What do you want me to do to prove my innocence? Kindly consult your people and advisers; and tell me what I should do. I will not hesitate even a little to carry out any command of yours."

Just then the divine sage Narad and the teacher Siddharth came flying through the sky. They said in one voice :

"No. No. Shri Ram! Kindly do not take recourse to such a stern method. Sita is absolutely pure and sublime. We declare firmly that she is as sacred as the Ganga which purifies sinners. Therefore, do not commit an enormity caught in the coils of conflicting loyalties." The people who had gathered there also said : "Dear lord! Sita is indeed sublime : Kindly do not subject her to any ordeal. We declare heartily that she is the greatest woman in the world, the noblest and the most sublime."

A mighty commotion arose among the people. All began making appeals and entreaties to Shri Ram. The fire ordeal described by Sita filled the people with fear and anxiety and sent shudders through their veins but Shri Ram unwilling to yield to those entreaties and appeals said in a firm voice :



“Beloved people ! Do not you attach any value to your own words ? You censured Sita spreading scandals and rumours against her. Though she was absolutely innocent, her character was stained by your scandals and rumours and she became a laughing-stock of the city. Though she was the empress of a vast empire, she became an object of derision and calumny and now you are declaring that Sita is sublime. I wonder how Sita who according to you was then guilty and polluted could become sublime and unsullied. You yourselves used to say, “How could Sita remain pure having been in Ravana’s palace for such a long time ? Ravan, who is lusty would not have allowed Sita to remain pure.” These scandals were spread by you. When that is so how can you say today that Sita is noble ? In the same changeful manner, you may say sometime later, “No. No. Sita is not pure.” Who can prevent you from saying such things ? Therefore, in order to convince you fully of her purity and in order to prevent all future doubts and fears regarding her character, I have decided to subject her to the fire-ordeal. In the presence of all of you, she will enter blazing fires.”

“No. No. Dear King ! Kindly do not commit that enormity,” all the people said in a voice full of anguish.

“No. That is impossible. Sita will go through the fire-ordeal. On account of your insistence and on account of the false accusations made by you against her, I abandoned her and sent her to the terrible forest of Simhaninad. Today, I will subject her to the fire ordeal so that her chastity may be proved.”

At once, the news that Sita would go through the fire ordeal spread throughout the city of Ayodhya like wild-fire. Everyone said the same thing, “Sita will enter fire tomorrow and prove her purity before the people.” The members of the royal family were stunned to hear this news.

Shri Ram ordered his men :

“Let a large pit three hundred feet long and three hundred feet wide be dug. It must have a depth of about twelve feet.

Then fill the pit with sandal wood." Accordingly hundreds of men dug the pit. Meanwhile Sita was staying in a beautiful cottage in the garden of Mahendrodaya. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Shatrughna, Lav, Kush, Hanuman, Bhamandal and the others remained in the garden. Shri Ram's heart was torn with grief and repentance. Lakshman was deeply plunged in thought. Lav and Kush were cheerful thinking "Our mother is sublime and this will be proved by the ordeal." Sugriv, Hanuman and others were lost in thoughts relating to the terrible war they had fought against Ravan. "The sublime Sita, for whose sake we fought the war staking our lives, will enter fire tomorrow and we will have to be mute and helpless witnesses to that heart-rending spectacle. We can do nothing to prevent it. What a mockery of fate this is!"

While the pit for the ordeal was being dug in the Mahendrodaya garden, in another part of Ayodhya, a great muni was absorbed in deep spiritual austerities facing great impediments. He was carrying out spiritual austerities to destroy his karmas.

King Harivikram was ruling over the northern valleys among the Vaithadhya mountains. He had a son by name Jayabhushan. When Prince Jayabhushan reached the proper age the king performed his marriage with eight hundred beautiful princesses.

One day, he noticed his wife Kiranmandala and his maternal uncle's son Hemashik lost in sensual delights. His anger shot up to the high skies. Checking his anger, he began to carry out a deep self-scrutiny but his anger did not abate. In consequence, he banished Kiranamandala and adopted the path of *Samyamdharm*.

In this manner, there arose a bitter animosity between Jayabhushan and Kiranamandala. After her death, Kiranamandala was born as a *Rakshasi* (demoness). Once Jayabhushan Muni during his travels happened to come to the city of Ayodhya. He was staying outside the city. He, having freed himself from all passions and desires, was always engaged in meditation, *Kayotsarg* and profound spiritual contemplations.

The muni began a special kind of meditation. Kiranamandala who despised the muni came to that place searching for him. As soon as she saw him, her animosity flared up. She began to cause many perilous impediments to him.

But the soul that retains its awareness inspite of impediments; that retains its equanimity even in calamities; that carries out meditation and lofty contemplations with deep absorption will attain *Kevaljnan*. Jayabhushan muni remained unshaken by the impediments caused by Kiranamandala. In consequence, he attained supreme knowledge and enlightenment. He attained *Kevaljnan*. When Indra, the king of gods came to know that Jayabhushan muni had attained *Kevaljnan*, he came down to Ayodhya accompanied by countless gods and goddesses to celebrate the event. The heavenly beings saw the pit that was being dug in the *Mahendrodaya* garden. Within a moment by virtue of their divine powers, they understood the situation. They at once entreated Indra :

“O you god of gods! Look there! The noble lady Sita is going to subject herself to the fire-ordeal in order to prove her chastity and purity and to free herself from the reproach on her noble character. Yet she is noble and sublime.”

Indra, at once ordered his commander : “Go at once to Ayodhya and protect Sita. She is sublime. Here I will be making arrangements to celebrate the event of the mahamuni’s attainment of *Kevaljnan*.”

Indra organised a magnificent celebration to proclaim the greatness of the muni. The maharshi sat on a golden lotus and delivered a lofty discourse. Indra was delighted with it. The commander sent by Indra set off accompanied by countless heavenly beings to protect Sita from that perilous ordeal.


The night ended and the day dawned.

The pit was filled with sandal wood. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Lav, Kush and many other kings and princes sat on the platform. On the other platforms built on the other sides, the

people of Ayodhya sat. The divine sage Narad and the teacher Siddharth kept looking on from the sky.

Just then, Shri Ram said in a resounding voice, "Set fire to the sandal wood." Within a few moments, the sandal wood was set on fire. At once sky-high flames rose from the pit.

Sita sat alone away from others absorbed in meditation. She was lost in a meditation upon the *parameshti* and the *Namaskar mantra*. Shri Ram kept glancing at Sita and at the flaming fire absent-mindedly. His heart shuddered with a strange fear. He began to think.

"Oh ! What a calamitous situation have I created ! I know very well that Sita is a gem of the purest lustre. She will enter the fire smiling. Just as the ways of fortune are strange the ordeal also is going to be unique. At the same time, it is also painful. Sometimes human beings have to endure death-blows and so Sita also..'.  


Shri Ram suddenly screamed with fear. He cursed himself. He fell into deep thought. His love for Sita rose like a spring in his heart. He said to himself, "My dear Sita faced countless difficulties, when she and I were in the forest. I left her alone and Ravan abducted her in a deceptive manner. Hearing the censure of people I abandoned her and today I am subjecting her to the fire-ordeal."

While Shri Ram was thus lost in thought, Sita proceeded towards the fire.

Sita had put on white dress. Her face was calm and serene. Her chastity had filled her with courage and confidence. She was absolutely fearless. Sita stood near the flaming fire with her eyes closed. She meditated upon the lord with deep devotion.

The commotion among the people abated. There was silence everywhere. All were in great fear and anxiety. Just at that time Sita said in a resounding voice :

“O you great gods that rule over the universe ! If I have at anytime in my life desired the company of any other man except that of Shri Ram, may the god of fire burn me to ashes and if I have not desired any other man except Shri Ram let the flaming fires be extinguished at once. Let there be coolness in the place where now fire is burning.”

Then she closed her eyes and remembered the *Namaskar Mahamantra*.

The next moment, she leaped into the flaming fires.

But even before Sita leaped into the flames, the divine commander sent by Indra had extinguished the fires. A miracle had occurred. Even as Sita leaped into the fire the pit miraculously changed into a lake full of cool water. A vast and magnificent lotus appeared on the waves of the lake. It had been created by gods. At once, Sita sat on the lotus.

She was like Mahalakshmi, the goddess of wealth seated on the lotus.

Joy and jubiliations filled the atmosphere. People began to glorify Sita as a goddess. Their cries of jubilation reverberated in the high skies. They shed tears of joy but the cool and fragrant water of the lake instead of remaining still began to whirl violently. There arose a flood in the lake. The water assuming the shape of a monstrous wave began to roll forth. A terrible noise rose everywhere.

Within a few moments, the water flowed violently upto the platforms. Fearing that they would be drowned, the people began to cry in agony. The Vidyadhars leaped into the skies but the human beings could not do so. How could they save their lives? They began to make humble entreaties to Sita. They knew that only Sita could save them from death.

“O you goddess ! Kindly save us from death.”

Sita was still in meditation. Hearing the agonised cries of the people she opened her eyes. Seeing the perilous condition

of the people Shri Ram and Lakshman were filled with fear. Sita checked the fury of the waves by touching them with her hands. The gods and goddesses tamed and calmed the waves as desired by Sita. Within a moment, the lake became serene and countless fascinating lotuses appeared on it.

Narad and Siddharth were greatly delighted. They heaved a sigh of relief.

The divine beings declared, from the skies, "Ah! This is the power of absolute chastity. This is the power of Sita's unexampled purity!"

The cries of joy and jubilation issued by the people reverberated in the farthest horizons. Sita's fame spread through the three worlds.

Lav and Kush were greatly delighted and elated. They shed tears of joy and they were overwhelmed with joyful emotions. The two brothers looked at each other; stood up and leaped into the lake. Swimming across the water, they approached Sita. Sita embraced her sons affectionately and took them into her lap. Lav and Kush sat near her. All the men and women who saw this extraordinary sight were filled with joy and elation. Shri Ram and Lakshman were delighted to see this extraordinary sight.

Shri Ram accompanied by Lakshman, Shatrughna, Bhramandal and Sugriv approached Sita. All offered their highest veneration to her and adored her unexampled chastity. Shri Ram who was filled with repentance and shame could not look at Sita straight.

His eyes which sparkled with love and affection were also filled with grief and repentance. He said in a soft voice.

"Dear Sita! People in this world are by nature fond of spreading scandals and rumours. Caught in the coils of those scandals, I abandoned you. You were left alone in a dreadful forest abounding in wild beasts. Dear Sita! You are alive now because of your unexampled chastity. You had to experience inordinate mental agony and anguish. I caused great anguish

to you. Added to all that, I also compelled you to go through the fire-ordeal. Your supreme chastity has been now proved beyond doubt. Even gods and goddesses enthusiastically came to your rescue but dear Sita! Please pardon me. I seek your forgiveness for all the agonies I caused you. Kindly forget my blunders and pardon me. Now, come on! Get into the *Pushpak Viman*. The people of Ayodhya are eager to receive you with honour and veneration."

All shed tears on hearing the words of Shri Ram but Sita remained calm and serene. Slowly her serene face grew serious. It was evident that she had made some determination. She was thinking of renouncing the *samsar*.

"Dear Lord! You are not to blame for what has happened; nor are the people to blame. Whatever unpleasant things occurred, they occurred on account of my sinful karmas. I should have committed some sinful karmas in my earlier *janmas*. It is only because of my sinful karmas that you had to punish me thus. You are not at all to blame for anything. You are absolutely faultless and perfect."

But I have decided to destroy the eight karmas and I do not want to be caught in the snares of karmas again. I do not want to fall into the whirlpool of worldly life again. I do not want to depend upon *punyakarmas* also. When you brought me from Lanka to Ayodhya, I thought of relying on my *punya-karmas*. At that time, I thought, "My sinful karmas have ended" but oh! I was deceived in thinking so. This is definitely the mockery of fate. As long as the *jiva* keeps wandering through the four states of existence karmas keep agitating it. Therefore, I have decided to adopt the path of *samyam* in order to attain deliverance from these karmas."

The very next moment, Sita descended from the lotus. She pulled off her hair with her hands and returned to Shri Ram all her ornaments. Shri Ram stood utterly stupefied. Dumb-founded, he kept looking at Sita with wide-open eyes. Lav and Kush were stunned by their mother's decision. They could not think of saying anything.

Shri Ram was overwhelmed with grief. He experienced deep anguish. He fell down unconscious. Sita went to Jayabushan muni even before Shri Ram could regain his consciousness.

She saluted the muni and humbly entreated him thus ;  
“Revered Lord ! Kindly initiate me into *Samyamdharm* and help me to cross the ocean of samsar.”

The great muni gave the *Deeksha* to Sita. She became a *Sadhvi* and he entrusted her to the great *Sadhvi*, *Suprabha* so that Sita might carry out her spiritual endeavours under her guidance.

Sita began to carry out austere spiritual endeavours such as meditation, spiritual contemplation to destroy her karmas and to attain liberation.

Lakshman and the others remained there to help Shri Ram to recover his consciousness.

Lav and Kush saluted their mother with great veneration.





## CIX

### IN THE SPIRITUAL REFUGE OF THE KEVALJNANI

Sita's determination to receive initiation into the *Samyam-dharma* took Shri Ram and others by surprise. No one thought that she would renounce the *samsar*. This was an absolutely unexpected event. Sita did not stop at declaring her decision. She at once pulled off her beautiful hair and placed it in Shri Ram's hands and then met the Mahamuni and received the *Deeksha*. All these things took place in a few moments. When Shri Ram heard her words, he fell down unconscious. His grief knew no bounds. Lakshman, Shatrughna, Vibhishan, Sugriv, Hanuman and the others were filled with anguish.

This was not an ordinary event. No one thought that Sita would take such an unexpected decision. After Sita proved her chastity by means of the fire-ordeal in the presence of Shri Ram and the citizens of Ayodhya, she became totally detached. She discarded all her attachments and hatred. There could be no hatred when all attachments had been discarded.

Shri Ram suddenly became unconscious. Lakshman and the others tried to do whatever they could to help him regain his consciousness. Sugriv, Vibhishan, Bhamandal and others went away with Sita. Sita received the *Deeksha* from Jayabushan muni in accordance with the scriptural prescriptions. Sugriv and others saluted Sita and returned to Ayodhya.

Soon after recovering his consciousness, Shri Ram looked around and said in an agonized voice :

"Where is my dear Sita ? Whither has she gone ?" His eyes searched for Sita but Sita was not there. He saw only a large

number of people around him and birds flying in the sky. No one said anything. All were looking towards Shri Ram in utter stupefaction. All were shedding tears. They were all filled with anguish. There appeared anger on Shri Ram's face. He suddenly cried out in anger,

“O you Vidyadhars ! O you men ! O you birds ! If you love your lives, at once show me my dear Sita; otherwise this will be the last day of your lives. Sita might have pulled off her hair; that does not matter. Where is she ? Tell me at once.”

No one said anything. All were silent. Who could say anything ? Shri Ram angrily looked around. Lakshman was sitting nearby with his eyes fixed on the ground and with his head bowed in deep grief. The tears were streaming from his eyes. Holding Lakshman's hand Shri Ram said in a voice stricken with grief;

“Dear Lakshman ! At once, bring my bow and arrows. Bring my quiver which contains my ferocious arrows. I will set off in search of Sita. Why are all these people in such grief and desperation ? When my sorrow is boundless, they do not seem to realise my feelings. But I do not mind it.” At once, Shri Ram took up his bow and arrows.

Lakshman could not restrain his sorrow when he saw Shri Ram's condition. He bathed Shri Ram's feet with his tears; and held Shri Ram's feet sobbing. A few moments passed thus. Then he said in a tone of detachment.

“Revered brother ! What are you going to do ? All those who have gathered here are your humble servants. They are ready to carry out your commands and you are asking them for the whereabouts of Sita. But please do not forget this truth. Just as you abandoned Sita, inspite of knowing that she was absolutely innocent, pure and sublime, she too out of her concern for her spiritual welfare, has renounced the worldly life. She has discarded all worldly pleasures and enjoyments. She pulled off her hair in your presence and received the *Deeksha*

from Jayabushan muni. Sugriv, the King of Kishkindha, Bhamandal, the valiant were witnesses to this. They were present there. The Mahamuni Jayabushan attained *Kevaljnan* only a little while ago. Therefore, giving up your grief, please make arrangements to celebrate this great event of his attaining *Kevaljnan*. Dear brother! Sita has taken the five great vows and is pursuing the supreme path of *Samyamdharm*. Just as she was an ideal woman, now she is an ideal *sadhvi*, an example to be emulated by others."

Shri Ram kept looking at Lakshman with fixed eyes. After thinking over the matter a little, he realised the truth in Lakshman's words. Within a few moments, his agitation and anguish disappeared. He grew calm and composed. Lakshman's words kept ringing in his ears, "Sita renounced all the pleasures and joys of life voluntarily." Shri Ram exclaimed, "Oh! She has renounced me also; has she? This is natural. I once discarded her fearing social censure and now she has renounced me also. Of course, I knew very well that she was absolutely innocent. Yet I discarded her. Oh! How many years have passed since then? How can she retain love and attachment for me after so many years? I was all in all for her but she has renounced everything. She has done the right thing. It is absolutely natural that she should do so."

After being silent for a while, he said addressing Lakshman, "Sita has done the right thing in receiving the *Deeksha* from the muni. Under those circumstances, she could do nothing else."

Just then, Sugriv came forward a few steps; bowed to Shri Ram humbly and said, "Dear Lord! Bhamandal and I returned from there."

"How far is that place from here?"

"Dear Lord! It is not very far. Only a little while ago, the great muni attained *Kevaljnan*. Gods and goddesses, Gandharvas and Kinnars gathered there and organised a magnificent celebration. Sita received initiation into *Samyamdharm* from

that great muni. We returned after saluting the great *sadhvi*, Sita”.

“Let us also go there.”

The members of the royal family were happy to see that Shri Ram had regained his composure. There was a great change in the atmosphere. The people who had gathered there experienced a feeling of new joy. All got ready to proceed to the place where Jayabushan muni was staying.

Shri Ram at once ascended his chariot. Lakshman also sat in the same chariot. All proceeded towards the *ashram* of Jayabushan muni situated in the Mahendrodaya garden. Shri Ram and Lakshman bowed to the great muni. All were supremely happy when they saw the great muni. The great muni was absorbed in delivering a discourse. Shri Ram sat down to hear the discourse.

The spirit of renunciation pervaded the atmosphere. Shri Ram, Lakshman and the other members of the royal family were happy. They were moved deeply by Sita's exemplary spirit of renunciation. They too began to look into themselves. They too began to realise the futility of *samsar*. All seemed to have become averse to the pleasures of worldly life. Sita's renunciation impelled all to think that worldly pleasures were fleeting and futile.

The great muni was explaining the four states of existence in the *samsar* and the joys and sorrows of *samsar* and he was also discussing the causes for those joys and sorrows. He was explaining to them how joys and sorrows come successively in the *samsar*. He said “In the cycle of birth and death, neither joys nor sorrows are permanent. They depend upon the *karmas* of the *jivas* and if there is anything permanent, it is only salvation”. He was saying that spiritual austerities would lead to spiritual elevation and salvation. He, in his discourse said that people should carry out spiritual austerities and practise virtues like non-violence and self-discipline to destroy the bondages of *Karmas*. He also pointed out that only *Bhavya jivas*

could carry out those endeavours and that the *Abhavya* jivas could not carry out those spiritual endeavours and even if they carried out those endeavours, they could not attain fulfilment. He added "Therefore, the jivas should practise such virtues as self-discipline and self-sacrifice in order to destroy the passions of worldly life." After hearing the discourse, Shri Ram said humbly, "Revered Lord! Kindly tell me whether my soul is *Bhavya* (noble) or *Abhavya* (not noble)."

"Dear King! Your soul is undoubtedly sublime. Moreover, you will attain *Kevaljnan* in this life and you will attain *Moksha*", said the muni predicting Shri Ram's future. All the members of the congregation were greatly delighted to hear this. Shri Ram said again;

"Revered Lord! It is said that salvation can be attained only if we pursue the path of *Samyamdharm* and *Samyam* means renunciation and self-discipline but I am not thinking of renouncing worldly life. I cannot renounce worldly life. In fact, I cannot discard my attachment for Lakshman. When that is so, how can I . . . .?"

"O you King." When the Karmas of earlier lives emerge to the surface, the jivatma has to experience their fruits. You possess the merit of Baladev. Therefore, you have to enjoy the delights that are pre-destined in the case of a Baladev. Of course, some Karmas are such that their fruits have to be experienced directly. For example, you have to enjoy the delight of being loved by your brother, Lakshman. The jiva has to experience the fruits of *Nikachitkarma*. Therefore, you cannot entertain thoughts of renunciation until you experience the fruits of certain Karmas but when you have experienced the fruits of those karmas you will naturally think of renunciation. In consequence, you will adopt *Charitradharma* and attain *Moksha*" said the muni.

"But Revered Lord! When I look back at my past life and when I think of my present life, I feel that I may never think of renouncing worldly life. I think it is impossible for me to, adopt the path of renunciation."

“You are absolutely right. When the sky is covered with dark, dense clouds and when cyclones and tempests are raging we feel that the sun may not shine again. At present, your mind and heart are enveloped in the dense clouds of Karmas. That is why, you are now unable to think of renunciation but when those clouds disappear, your soul will shine out in all its splendour. Dear King! A time will come in your life when you will renounce everything. All the Karmas of your earlier life will be destroyed in this life and you will attain *Moksha*.”

Shri Ram felt supremely happy to hear this. He saluted the muni and then proceeded to meet Sita who was now a Sadhvi. Sita who was now a Sadhvi sat deeply absorbed in meditation. She had closed her eyes. She was travelling away from this world towards the splendour of spiritual perfection. Shri Ram saluted her and returned to Ayodhya. Shri Ram experienced a new joy and elation. He became calm and serene.

The news that Sita had renounced wordly life spread throughout Ayodhya like wildfire. The young and the old were impatient to see her. Everyone began to adore Sita. Large crowds of people thronged the garden where Sita sat in meditation. The people of Ayodhya saw Sita who was now a Sadhvi and saluted her. They thought of endeavouring to attain spiritual elevation. The tradition of the royal family of Ayodhya was to renounce everything. This tradition had been in existence since the time of Lord Rishabhdev but Sita's renunciation surprised not only the people of Ayodhya but all Vidya-dhars. They said, “Sita for whose sake Shri Ram killed Ravan has now become a Sadhvi”.

Shri Ram spent the whole night thinking of Sita's renunciation. He could not get a wink of sleep that night.

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## THE EARLIER JANMAS OF SHRI RAM AND SUGRIVA

The people of Ayodhya were profoundly moved by the spiritual discourses of Jayabushan muni. Thousands of people sat there hearing the discourses of the muni. They desired to brighten their lives by means of spiritual endeavours. Shri Ram and the others came there on the second day to see the great muni. After the discourse ended, Vibhishan said in a humble voice "Revered Lord! In your discourse, you said that in this life all relationships are determined by Karmas. Even the relationships of love and friendship and the feelings of hatred arise on account of Karmas. I have a doubt regarding certain points. Kindly clear my doubts."

- (1) On account of what Karma did such a sensible and heroic person as Ravan abduct Sita ?
- (2) On account of what Karma did Lakshman kill Ravan ?
- (3) Sugriv, Bhamandal and I have great love and regard for Shri Ram. Which Karma is the cause for this attachment ? When and under what circumstances did we gather that Karma?

"Revered Lord! You are omniscient. You know the past, the present and the future. You are a lord of many sublime spiritual attainments. Nothing of the past or future is concealed from you. You know all the jivas and all substances of all times. Therefore, kindly tell us about our past lives."

Vibhishan's questions filled all with eagerness. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Sugriv, Lav, Kush and others were equally eager to know the past. It is natural that they should desire to know

the mysteries of their earlier janmas from the great muni. Man has a natural desire to know everything about his past janmas.

Acharya Jayabushan visualised the past and tried to reveal it thus.

“This is a matter that relates to immemorial times.

Once there was a city by name Kshemapur in the Bharat-kand.

A merchant by name Nayadutt lived in that city. His wife was Sunanda. In course of time, she gave birth to two sons. They were named Dan Dutt and Vasu Dutt. A brahmin family lived in the neighbourhood of Naya Dutt's house. The head of the family was Yagnavalkya. He was very intimate with Dan Dutt and Vasu Dutt.

Another merchant by name Sagar Dutt lived in that city. His wife was Ratnaprabha. They had a son and a daughter by name Gunadhar and Gunavati.

When Gunavati grew up to be a damsel of beauty and grace, she was like a flower blooming in the garden of Sagar Dutt's house. Sagar Dutt began searching for a suitable bridegroom for her. Suddenly, he thought of Dhan Dutt the elder son of Naya Dutt. He felt that Dhan Dutt was suitable as a bridegroom for his daughter from every point of view. In consequence, he placed his proposal before Naya Dutt. Naya Dutt heartily welcomed the proposal. Accordingly, Gunavati and Dhan Dutt were betrothed.

But Destiny played its sport. What should not have happened, occurred. A wealthy merchant of the city by name Shrikanth placed before Gunavati's mother Ratnaprabha the proposal that he would give her enormous wealth including gold coins if she gave her daughter to him in marriage. Ratnaprabha was fascinated by the offer. So, she agreed to give her daughter in marriage to Shrikanth. Sagar Dutt had no knowledge of this development, but Yagnavalkya the friend of Dhan Dutt somehow came to know of it. Finding a suitable opportunity, he said to Dhan Dutt, “Dear friend! You may not get Gunavati”.



“Why ?” said Dhan Dutt greatly surprised and shocked.

“Oh you mad fellow ! Gunavati’s mother has agreed to give her to Shrikanth in marriage. She is giving away Gunavati who is the very embodiment of virtues to Shrikanth in exchange for wealth.”

“What do you mean ? I do not think that she would thus break her promise.” Dhan Dutt’s brother said indignantly.

“This is certainly a breach of promise; and a fraud ! but what is it that we can do about it ?” Yagnavalkya said angrily.

“I will never allow this to happen. I will not allow Gunavati to marry Shrikant. I will surely send Shrikant to the abode of death” Vasu Dutt thundered.

After discussing the matter for a while, the three parted. Vasu Dutt decided to kill Shrikanth and made a plan to carry out his decision. Accordingly, that very night when Shrikant was returning home from the temple, suddenly Vasu Dutt attacked Shrikant and killed him. But even while Vasu Dutt was attacking Shrikant, Shrikant also attacked Vasu Dutt and he too died.

For the sake of a woman, Vasu Dutt and Shrikant killed each other. After their death, in their next Janma they were born as animals in a forest.

When Ratnaprabha the mother of Gunavati came to know that Shrikant and Vasu Dutt had killed each other, she became greatly agitated. Sagar Dutt in his anger rebuked Ratnaprabha severely, and heaped upon her ignominious insults. Gunavati greatly excited by the tragedy that had occurred on account of her, committed suicide. After her death, she too took birth as an animal in the same forest. Even there, Vasu Dutt and Shrikant fought against each other to secure Gunavati.

Their death had occurred in their early Janmas because of their attachment for Gunavati. The same situation arose in this Janma also. Shrikant had died because of his desire to

marry Gunavati and Vasu Dutt also had died because of his decision to prevent Gunavati from marrying Shrikant. Those attachments and hostility of their early Janma arose in them in this Janma. In consequence, as soon as they saw Gunavati in the form of an animal they began to fight against each other and ultimately they killed each other. Carrying the same attachments and animosities they thus passed through many Janmas.

And Dhan Dutt! He of course became really mad. The death of Vasu Dutt and the suicide of Gunavati filled him with boundless agitation and anguish. In his agitation, he went away from his house and began aimlessly wandering through forests. In his madness, he kept wandering from place to place. One day when he was extremely hungry he happened to enter a garden and there he saw some sadhus. He begged them for food.

“O you noble man! We are Sadhus. We do not keep food with us. Moreover this is night and during nights we do not keep food with us since we do not eat food in the nights. You too should not eat food in the night. Ah! Yes, you should not even drink water during night times. During night times, countless jivas arise in food and water but they are invisible and if we eat food and drink water in the night we will be committing violence.” One of the Sadhus said in reply to Dhan Dutt’s entreaty.

“But I am extremely hungry. I am unable to live; therefore O you great Muni, kindly give me some food” said Dhan Dutt.

“You are right, but it is a great sin to eat food in the night. Please wait till morning. The sun will rise within a few hours. People experience many agonies in their life but they do not complain against their misfortunes generally. Therefore, you too try to bear with your adversity a little. Please remember that the fruit of patience is always sweet and pleasant. Seek the refuge of Dharma. Only Dharma can give you protection in your adversities”.

The Muni's words filled Dhan Dutt with a new feeling of serenity. In the morning, the Muni explained to him the duties of a Shravak. Dhan Dutt humbly accepted the Shravak Dharma and spent the remainder of his life in accordance with the principles of Shravak Dharma. After his death he was born as a heavenly being in the *Saudharma* heaven.

On account of the noble and elevating influence of the Sadhus and of his own spiritual endeavours he was able to get rid of his excessive attachment for Gunavati and his animosity against Shrikant. He discarded his attachments and hatred. His heart became an ocean of equanimity. In consequence, he was born in the heavenly world and remained there for countless years experiencing inordinate joys and delights.

We cannot divine the ways of Destiny which seems to take a malicious or mischievous delight in sporting with the lives of human beings. Dhan Dutt who was disappointed in his desire to secure Gunavati, feared the samsar and attained deliverance from it while Vasu Dutt who committed a terrible sin for the sake of his elder brother had to fall into the bottomless abyss of worldly existence and keep wandering there. Dhan Dutt attained the heavenly state of existence while Vasu Dutt had to experience inordinate anguish and agitations in hell and in the animal state of existence.

After the span of his life in heaven ended, Dhan Dutt was born in the city of Mahapurnagar. He took birth as the son of a merchant by name Padmaruchi. His father and mother were highly cultured and religious. In consequence, he acquired even in his childhood, sound spiritual training, excellent virtues like kindness and compassion. He was always ready to remove the anguish of any jiva. Even after he entered the phase of youth, he was free from infatuation, pride and arrogance. One day, he went on horseback towards the place where his cattle were grazing. On the way, he happened to see an old bullock which was on the point of death. He was greatly moved to see it. He could not bear with the decrepit bullock. He alighted from his horse; he went silently towards the bullock and recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra* in its ear.

*Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* made the bullock turn inwards towards its soul. Of course, the bullock could not understand the *mantra*; nor did it know the efficacy of the *mantra* but on account of the efficacy of the *Mahamantra*, the bullock after its death was born as the prince of the royal family of the same city. After the bullock died, Padmaruchi made arrangements for its burial and returned home. Several years passed after this event.

The Prince was named Vrishabhadwaja. He grew up in the lap of luxury and prosperity and he entered the phase of youth. He specially liked horse-riding. One day, while riding on his horse he happened to go to the place where he had died as a bullock.

As soon as he saw the place, he remembered his earlier janma. The enlightened have rightly said, "Every place has its extraordinary power and importance!" The prince stopped there. He felt as if thunder-struck, when he remembered his earlier janma. He visualized the scene in which he had died as a bullock. He thought, "I was a weak and sick bullock and I was about to die. At that time, the rider came on horseback; noticed me; alighted from his horse; approached me, sat near me and recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra* in my ears." He clearly visualized the face and form of the rider. He was a handsome young man, the very image of kindness and compassion.

He was greatly agitated by these reminiscences of his earlier life. He felt greatly fascinated by the face of the stranger who had bestowed upon him that great benefaction, on account of which, he could attain the human state of existence. He felt certain that the great man must be living in that city but it was not easy to find him in that large city. He made a determination; "Somehow or the other, I will search for him and I will find him", and he thought of a plan. Accordingly, he got a Jin temple built at the place where he had died as a bullock and he got a magnificent picture painted on the wall of the temple. The picture depicted that scene of his earlier Janma in which he had died as a bullock". The bullock was dying'. . A deco-

rated horse stood nearby and the great man sat near the bull reciting *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* to it". Such was the picture.

He instructed the guards of the temple to keep a careful watch and if anyone made any special comments on the picture, they should convey to him detailed information about the person and his comments. He instructed them to keep this a secret.

Time was passing. Days followed nights and nights followed days. The prince was impatiently waiting for seeing his benefactor. His desire was fulfilled one day.

Once Padmaruchi visited the temple. After worshipping the Lord, he noticed the picture on the wall. His amazement knew no bounds. He thought "This is a picture of a unique event of my life. I recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra* in the ears of the bullock. This man in the picture is undoubtedly myself. I wonder who got it painted. What might have been his purpose in getting this picture painted here?" He fell into deep thought. When he could not understand how the picture came to be painted there, he tried to find out the details from the guards. The guards requested him to stay there for a while and sent information to the Prince Vrishabhadwaj about the stranger. As soon as he got the information, the Prince came there hurriedly. He felt greatly delighted to see Padmaruchi. He recognised his face. He amiably said, "Noble man! What do you know about this picture?"

"Dear Prince! It was I who recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra* in the ears of the bullock which was dying but I am unable to understand who got this picture painted after so many years and what purpose he had in getting this picture painted here."

The prince saluted Padmaruchi and said "O you benevolent man! I was that bullock in my earlier janma. I attained the human state of existence on account of the efficacy of the *mantra* which you recited. You bestowed upon me this benefaction. If you had not recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra*, I

should have been wandering in the animal state of existence". Padmaruchi was stupefied to hear this. He could not believe his ears but who can conceal the truth? The picture itself was a proof of what had occurred.

"O you noble man! You are my first spiritual head. You are my Lord and I adore you. In fact, I got this temple built here and this picture painted here only to find you. Once I happened to come here and I remembered that event of my earlier janma. Therefore, kindly take over my vast kingdom and also allow me to spend the remainder of my life at your feet. You are the Lord of all that belongs to me", said the Prince with overflowing veneration.

"Dear Prince! All this is the result of the efficacy of the *Namaskar Mahamantra*. It is not the result of my deeds or your deeds. We shall be the dearest of friends", said Padmaruchi overwhelmed with joy and from that day, they became bosom friends and each had a great affection for the other. On account of Padmaruchi's persuasion, Vrishabhadwaj became a *shravak* and undertook the twelve vows of *shravakdharma*. They lived happily for a long time and after their death they were born in the second heaven.

In course of time, Padmaruchi, after ending his span of life in the heavenly world was born as a prince named Nayanand in the city of Nandavartan Nagar situated in the Vaithadhya mountains. After having led a princely life for a long time, he adopted the path of *Samyamdharm* and became a *sadhu*. After his death, he was born in the heavenly world called Mahendra.

After ending the span of his life there he was born as a Prince by name Shri Chandra in the city of Kshemapuri situated in the Kingdom of Mahavideh. After ruling over his country for a long time, he received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* from a muni by name Samadhigupta. Later he was born in the heavenly world called *Brahmalok*.

After having completed the span of his life there, he was born as a son of King Dasharath of Ayodhya in Bharat. He is Shri Ram”.

Vibhishan, Sugriv, Lav, Kush and the others were listening to the discourse of Jayabushan muni with deep concentration. All were overwhelmed with joyful emotions when they heard the stories of the various janmas of Shri Ram. Vibhishan again said humbly, “Revered Lord! Padmaruchi, in course of time, was born as Shri Ram but what happened to Vrishabhdwaj? Where is he now?”

“Dear King! Vrishabhadwaj passed through many janmas and now he is among us as Sugriva.”

Then all realised the reason for Sugriv’s extraordinary attachment and amity for Shri Ram. All shed tears of joy.

“But dear Lord! What happened to Gunavati and Vasu Dutt? What happened to Shrikant? Kindly tell us the stories of their janmas.”



## CXI

### SITA'S POORVAJANMA

“Dear Vibhishan ! Like Dhan Dutt and Vasu Dutt, Shrikant also passed through many janmas. He had to experience the fruits of his Karmas through several janmas. Of them, I will mention only the last ones.

There was a beautiful city by name Mrinalkand. King Shambu was ruling over the city. His wife Hemavati was a woman of extraordinary beauty. In course of time, Shrikant was born as Hemavati's son. He was named Vajrakanth.

Vasu Dutt also passed through many janmas and was born in the city of Mrinalkand. King Shambhu's court-priest was Vijay. He was a great scholar. His wife was Ratnachoola. Vasu Dutt was born as her son and he was named Shribhuti. He was a man of a serene temperament and of a plain nature.

Gunavati was born in the same family and was named Vegavati.

In this manner, Shrikant, Vasu Dutt and Gunavati were born in the city of Mrinalkand. Their attachments and hatred continued unabated. Mysterious are the ways of Destiny. If any jiva realises this truth, he would never develop hatred for anyone.

When Vegavati entered the phase of youth, she grew very arrogant. She was extremely insolent and haughty. She was arrogant because of her unexampled beauty and her birth, “I am the daughter of the court-priest. No one in the city is so beautiful as I”. She thought thus always. On account of such thoughts, she became haughty and insolent. Once, she saw a



mahamuni carrying out meditation in a garden outside the city. A large number of devotees had gathered there. All were offering their salutations to the muni but Vegavati began scoffing at the mahamuni. She said addressing the congregation.

“Oh! Why do you salute him? I am sure that you do not know the truth about him. If you knew it, you would not have honoured him thus. I once saw this Sadhu enjoying sensual pleasures with a woman. He is a hypocrite. He has sent away the woman and here he is carrying out a hypocritical meditation. He is a wolf in the sheep-skin. He is really a sinful fellow who has put on the guise of a sadhu and you offer him thoughtless veneration. Oh! what a funny thing!”

Vegavati's words had an immediate effect on the people. They thought that the daughter of the court-priest would not utter lies and there must be truth in her words. In consequence, within a few moments, there appeared a great change in the atmosphere. The people got ready to beat the muni. Those who were formerly adoring the muni now began to abhor him. All began to repudiate the muni. All raised slogans condemning him. A commotion arose among the people.

Vegavati's joy knew no bounds. She was greatly elated. She said aloud, “Why do you keep looking at him? Beat him; he is not a muni. He is a hypocrite, a wicked fellow, a mean fellow and a slave to sensual cravings.” All began to beat the muni.

This is the nature of the samsar. It abounds in various kinds of peculiarities, ironies and agonies. The muni was absolutely innocent. He had not seen Vegavati before, nor had he conversed with her at any time, let alone provoking her. Yet, she behaved like his bitter enemy. The muni was a man of unexampled celibacy and spiritual excellence. Yet Vegavati condemned him and declared that he was a hypocrite. He became a victim to many impediments. He had to experience inordinate agony and anguish. Vegavati intoxicated with wealth, power and youth did not realise that in future, she would have to experience terrible anguish as a result of her ignoble action.

This is the ignorance of jivas. They in their ignorance do not think of the consequences of their ignoble actions and propensities. Ignorant jivas gather sinful Karmas and keep wandering through the 84 lakh forms of life in the samsar. On account of her ignorance, Vegavati also courted this spiritual ruin. She did everything she could to disgrace and denigrate the muni.

The muni was a man of exemplary character. He did not budge an inch. He made this determination. "Until my innocence is established, I will not leave this place. I will remain here in meditation".

This is an eternal truth. Even gods and goddesses salute and venerate the great man who possesses spiritual excellence and who is absorbed in spiritual austerities. The goddess presiding over the place would not bear with the treatment that was given to the muni by the people. She was greatly incensed. By means of her extrasensory perception, she realised that Vegavati was the cause for this calamitous situation. She decided to punish her severely and made her bright white face, black and ugly. Her complexion also changed. She became completely black and ugly.

Noticing the change that had taken place in Vegavati's appearance, the people became stupefied. They felt as if the ground beneath their feet was sinking. They said in agitation;

"Vegavati! Why has this change appeared in you? You are black and ugly. What happened to your extraordinary beauty and grace?"

"Ah! Have I become black and ugly? No! No! This cannot happen", said Vegavati with horror.

"Indeed, you have become black and ugly."

The news of the transformation in Vegavati's appearance spread like wildfire throughout the city. The news reached the ears of Shribhuti also. He came running; and saw his daughter who had become black and ugly and turned away his face in contempt.

The people explained to him what had happened. When Shribhuti came to know that on account of Vegavati, the noble muni had to experience agony and anguish, he became furious and said in burning anger.

“O you wicked creature ! What have you done ? You have made a false accusation against the great muni and he has become an object of ridicule. You have stained his name but still you are not worried about your wicked action. People rightly say, “As we sow; so we reap”. You have reaped the bitter fruit of your wicked action. Look into a mirror and see how black and blighted your face has become !”

Vegavati began to weep aloud when her father chid her thus and beat her in anger. She said sobbing, “Dear father ! I have committed a great blunder. The muni is absolutely innocent. I in my ignorance and infatuation made a false accusation against him. I caused inordinate impediments to him. I am ashamed of my sinful action.”

“If you have realised your blunder, at once, seek the refuge of the muni. Beg for his forgiveness and declare that he is innocent. At once, atone for your blunder. Otherwise, I will not allow you to enter my house”.

Shribhuti's harsh words opened the eyes of Vegavati. She realised her great blunder. She at once, went to the muni; sat at his feet and said aloud :

“Revered Lord ! You are absolutely innocent. I on account of my ignorance and arrogance made a false accusation against you. I committed the blunder blinded by the intoxication of youth and beauty. I am absolutely ignorant. I am a sinner. Therefore, O you treasure-house of forgiveness, kindly forgive me and deliver me from my sin. You are indeed, a great sage”.

Vegavati's pitiable utterances brought about a change in the atmosphere. There was serenity again. The muni completed his meditation and blessed Vegavati saying, “*Dharmlabh* (may you attain spiritual prosperity)”. The people who repudiated the muni a few moments before now began to adore and vene-

rate him. They rushed forward to salute his feet and to have a glimpse of his sublime face.

This is the way of the world. People condemn a man at one moment and the very next moment, they commend him. At one moment, they adore him and the next moment they abhor him but sadhus and saints do not care for praise or blame. Adoration does not elate them and denigration does not depress him. They retain their equanimity under all circumstances. They always remain absorbed in spiritual contemplation. Generally, the world looks at the external aspect of a person's life and judges him on that basis. The munis who are fully aware of the ignorant ways of the world remain undisturbed by the way in which the world treats them. They experience neither joy nor sorrow and remain calm and serene.

Vegavati became a Jain Shravika. She acquired mental firmness and emotional equanimity on account of the awakening that the muni brought about in her. Her infatuation disappeared and she grew wise and sensible. The Mahamuni preached to her lofty spiritual doctrines with a feeling of equanimity and impelled her to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. The hearts of munis are generally plain and magnanimous. They always give and they never receive anything.

Vegavati, of course, became a noble shravika and she became beautiful again but an unexpected calamity descended upon her.

Vegavati's beauty and physical grace had made many youngsters sleepless with infatuation. If Vegavati merely glanced at them, they felt thrilled and delighted. But they could not do anything about it. Once prince Vajrakant happened to see her. The very sight of her filled him with infatuation. He said to his guard ;

"Do you know who this beautiful damsel is ?"

"Dear prince ! She is the daughter of our court-priest. Her name is Vegavati. She is unmarried," the guard said smil-

ing. He looked at the prince with fixed eyes and tried in vain to probe the prince's innate feelings and thoughts.

Prince Vajrakant could not get a wink of sleep that night. He kept turning on his bed from side to side thinking of Vegavati. The thoughts relating to Vegavati caused him great excitement and agitation. Vegavati became the angel of his sweetest dreams. He became impatient to secure her. Since she was the daughter of the court-priest, it was easy for him to secure her. Therefore the next morning, he sent a messenger to the court-priest Shribhuti with the message that he must meet him at once in his chamber.

Accordingly, Shribhuti appeared in the chamber of the prince.

“Shribhuti ! Will you grant a wish of mine ?”

“Dear Prince, I will surely give whatever you ask for, if it is within my power to give it. Whatever I have belongs to you.” Shribhuti spoke in a plain manner but he was not aware of the ignoble desire of the Prince.

“Shribhuti ! You are our beloved court-priest. Therefore, I am sure that you will certainly give me what I am going to ask you to give me. If you grant my wish, I will bestow upon you enormous wealth. I desire the hand of your daughter in marriage. I desire to make her my queen. Will you give your consent to this proposal of mine ?” Shribhuti was stupefied to hear this. He had never dreamt that the prince would desire his daughter's hand in marriage. He fell into a deep conflict. How could he give any reply to the Prince ? He was silent; but he had to give a reply. He could not avoid giving a reply; so after thinking for a while, he said;

“Dear Prince ! I cannot say anything now because before saying anything to you, I have to discuss the matter with Vegavati and her mother.”

“You can discuss the matter with them but you must give me a reply soon. Remember ! You should not reject my propo-

sal. You must give your consent to it. Even if you do not agree to it, I will somehow secure her. This is certain. Therefore, think well and give me a reply soon."

Shribhuti saluted the Prince and went away. There arose in his mind thoughts of hostility, worry and revenge like violent whirlwinds. There arose in his mind a violent feeling of anger but what can a poor man do? He was completely helpless. In consequence, his feeling of revenge became transformed into a deep agitation. He reached home in deep mental agitation. Seeing her father in a mood of deep mental agitation, Vegavati said;

"Dear father, why do you look so deeply worried?"

"Dear daughter! When the protector himself turns a destroyer, what can the poor people who take shelter under such a man, do? Our Prince himself is behaving meanly. What can we the poor people who take shelter under such a man, do? Our prince himself is behaving meanly, what can we do? We are his poor dependants".

જાઈનેસાઈટ

"But father! Why is the Prince behaving meanly? What has he done? Why is he displeased with us?" said Vegavati in agitation. For a moment, Shribhuti watched the beauty of his daughter and he also thought of the pious life she was leading as a Shravika. Vegavati said again in a voice full of agitation.

"Dear father! Why is the Prince angry with us?"

"He wants Vegavati".

"What did you say?" She stared at her father with wide open eyes. Her amazement knew no bounds. She too had seen the prince many times. The prince was fat and he was not a man of enlightenment; so she had never even thought of him as a prospective husband. She began to shudder with a nameless fear.

"But what did you say?" said Vegavati in a voice shaken with emotion.

"I told him that I would discuss the matter with you and your mother".

"Dear father, I will never marry him."

"Dear daughter! I too do not like your marrying such an ignoble man; yet...."

"Father! What do you wish to say?"

"Dear daughter! He has not asked for your hand in marriage in a respectable manner. He has commanded me to surrender you to him and you know no one can do anything against the obstinacy of a child, or a woman or a king."

"Your meaning?"

"Somehow or the other, he wants to secure you".

Shribhuti's words were full of agitation. Vegavati was filled with fear. She fell at the feet of Shribhuti. She was shaken with fear and anguish and her eyes were streaming with tears.

"Dear daughter! Do not worry. I have thought of a plan to save you from this calamity. We can leave the city at once and go away to some other place."

"Yes, father. We shall do so", Vegavati said in a voice shaken with emotion.

Shribhuti returned to the Prince. Soon after seeing him, the Prince said, "Shribhuti why have you come alone? Where is Vegavati?" His eyes were full of lust. His sensual passion hissed out like a cobra. Hearing the shameless words of the Prince, Shribhuti began to boil with anger. Even before Shribhuti could say anything, the prince said.

"Shribhuti! I want Vegavati. Bring her at once here. I will bestow upon you enormous wealth".

Shribhuti could not restrain his anger. With all his might, he hit Vajrakant's face. Vajrakant's jaws broke and hot blood

began to stream out. Like a wounded lion, the Prince pounced upon Shribhuti. Shribhuti had no weapon with him. The Prince attacked Shribhuti with his sword. He cut off Shribhuti's head.

Leaving Shribhuti's body there, the Prince went straight to his house. Vegavati was alone in the house. Her mother had gone out. The Prince rushed into the house and began shouting.

"Vegavati ! Vegavati ! Where are you ? I have come to take you with me to my palace ! His authoritative voice resounded throughout the house. When Vegavati who was at that time resting in the second storey of her house heard the stranger's voice she was shocked. She at once came down. When she saw the Prince standing there, her voice was choked with fear. His eyes were full of lust and passion. Seeing this, she began to shudder with fear. She feared that some calamity might occur. The prince put forth a few paces towards her and extended his hands to embrace her. Vegavati screamed aloud :

"My dear father !"



The wicked Prince was not moved to pity even by her horrified cry. His arrogance manifested itself in a monstrous form. He said in a thundering voice, "O you lass ! Be silent. Why do you call upon your father ? He has already reached the abode of death but you need not fear anything. I will make you the queen of my heaven. Come on". Vegavati moved back in fear. She went upstairs but the Prince followed her into that chamber even before she could shut the door. After entering the chamber, he bolted the door from inside and seized her. Vegavati's loud screams reverberated everywhere. She folded her hands and said in a humble voice "Kindly do not come near me. Kindly allow me to go out. I am your sister", but the wicked Prince ignored her appeals and entreaties. He lifted her bodily; threw her on the cot. With one hand, he covered her mouth and with the other, he began to play with her body. What should not have happened, occurred. All her endeavours to keep him off failed and the wicked prince robbed her of her chastity. Vegavati lost her chastity. She felt greatly distressed. Her father had already died. Her mother was not to be seen.



She was absolutely helpless. But a woman has two images. One of an angel; the other of a venomous cobra. If she loves a man, she will be an angel to him and if she despises a man, she will be a venomous cobra. This was true in respect of Vegavati also. When the wicked prince used force against her, she assumed the form of a dreadful cobra. She cursed Vajrakant thus, "O you wicked fellow. You have robbed me of my chastity. I am now helpless. In my next janma, I shall be the cause of your miserable death."

Vegavati's dreadful curse sent shudders through Vajrakant's veins which shot to the brims of his being. He began to shudder with fear. On account of fear, he released her from his clutches. He pushed Vegavati aside as if he was trying to push away a cobra to avoid being bitten by it.

Vegavati could not continue to live. She found life unbearable, yet she did not think of committing suicide. She approached a great Sadhvi called Harikantashri and received initiation into the *Charitradharma* from her. She spent the remainder of her life in spiritual austerities and after her death, she was born in Bramhadevalok as an angel. After having ended her life there, she was born as Sita".



## CXII

### THE EARLIER JANMAS OF LAKSHMAN AND OTHERS

Shri Jayabhushan muni continued his discourse. Shri Ram, Lakshman, Vibhishan, Sugriv, Lav, Kush and others were listening to his discourse with deep concentration and were experiencing great delight. As soon as they heard the story of Sita's earlier *janmas*, they imagined the earlier janma of Ravan. Yet out of curiosity, Vibhishan said :

“Revered lord ! What happened to Prince Vajrakant ?”

“Noble man ! Prince Vajrakant had to pass through many *janmas* to experience the fruits of his sinful Karmas. He was born in the animal world and he also had to go to hell and experience inordinate torture. After a long time, by some good chance, he attained the human state of existence as the son of a brahmin. He was named Prabhas. After he reached the phase of youth, once he met a great Rishi called Vijayasen. He became very intimate with Vijayasen muni. He learnt from him the mysteries of Dharma; renounced worldly life and became a Sadhu. Vajrakant who was none other than Shrikant had to face spiritual ruin and had to go to hell also. After that, countless years later he attained the human state of existence and was born as a brahmin. He met a muni and received *Deeksha* from him. You know that is the story of the bewildering powers of Karmas.

Once Prabhas muni happened to see an extraordinary sight.

Kanakaprabha, the Vidyadhar King was travelling through the sky on his way to Sametshikhar. When he saw the extraordinary pomp and splendour of King Kanakaprabha, he desired

to enjoy worldly delights. This desire for worldly delights which had been latent in him manifested itself outwardly. Prabhas muni who had attained great spiritual excellence, within a moment fell into the snares of attachments. The desire for royal splendour and enjoyments arose in the great muni. Prabhas muni had carried out many spiritual austerities. He had faced many agonies and impediments in his life. He had also attained great knowledge. He knew very well that he could fulfil his desire by virtue of his spiritual excellence. So, he made a firm determination, "As a result of my spiritual excellence, I should become a great King like Kanakaprabha and must enjoy inordinate prosperity and splendour. I will become a great and prosperous King like him and I will also attain knowledge and spiritual propensities which will make me an outstanding hero in the three worlds".

Prabhas muni after completing the span of his life was born in the third heaven.

In course of time, after the span of his life ended in the third heaven, Vajrakant took birth as Ravan, the mighty King of Lanka".

"Revered Lord ! Kindly tell me about my earlier janmas". Vibhishan said with evident enthusiasm.

"You know Yagnavalkya was a neighbour of Dhan Dutt and Vasu Dutt and a great friend of theirs. He, wandering through many Janmas, is Vibhishan now. That is yourself".

"But Gurudev, what happened to Shribhuti who was killed by Vajrakant. Where was he born after his death ? Where is he now ?"

"O ! that Shribhuti... ' At the time of his death he kept reciting the *Namaskar Mahamantra*. Therefore he was born in the heavenly world and after completing the span of his life there he was born in Supratishapur as a Vidyadhar by name Punarvasu.

Once Punarvasu happened to go to a certain area called Pundrikvijay. Tribhuvanand was the ruler of Pundrikvijay.

He had a beautiful daughter by name Anang-sundari. She at that time happened to be playing sports in a garden outside the city. By chance Punarvasu went to that garden. The two saw each other and fell in love with each other at the first sight. Punarvasu stood stupefied at the sight of her infatuating beauty. In the same manner on seeing Punarvasu, who was like the god of love in appearance Anang-sundari also became infatuated with him. They became infatuated with each other. Love is a mysterious thing. We cannot say when it arises in the human heart.

Punarvasu was determined to secure Anang-sundari. Therefore he thought of abducting her. At the same time Anang-sundari also desired to enjoy the sweetness of love in the company of Punarvasu. But there was one great impediment. Anang-sundari was the daughter of a Vidyadhar emperor and abducting her was not an easy thing. It was as difficult as climbing the peaks of the Himalayas. But Punarvasu also was not an ordinary Vidyadhar. He too was a hero of outstanding valour and abilities.

Once finding a suitable opportunity he abducted Anang-sundari. He took her into his airship and flew away.

As soon as Anang-sundari's father, Tribhuvanand heard about the abduction of his daughter, he sent his army to chase the abductor to capture him. A terrible war broke out in the sky between Punarvasu and Tribhuvanand's army. Single-handed Punarvasu fought against the large army. The war became more and more dreadful. Just then an unexpected calamity occurred. Anang-sundari fell off the airship and she was caught in the midst of the thick and leafy branches of trees. Neither Punarvasu, nor Tribhuvanand could find her.

Punarvasu who was greatly grieved by the separation from Anang-sundari did not return home. He approached an enlightened Muni and received the *Deeksha* from him and became a Shraman. He carried out severe spiritual austerities and bore with various kinds of impediments. But why? Merely for the sake of Anang-sundari. After his death he was born in the heavenly world. And after having completed the span of

his life there, he was born as a son of King Dasharath of Ayodhya and was named Lakshman."

After having described the early Janmas of Lakshman, the Mahamuni paused for a few moments. Lakshman was greatly amazed and delighted to hear the stories of his early Janmas. He began to think deeply about his attachment for Anang-sundari in his Purvajanma. He said out of natural curiosity.

"Dear Lord ! What happened to Anangsundari afterwards?"

She fell off the airship suddenly but she did not fall on stones or in valleys or in rivers or oceans. But she fell into the branches of huge trees and remained caught among the intertwining branches. Of course she became unconscious. But the cool breezes of the forest helped her to regain her consciousness. After regaining her consciousness she managed to reach the ground and began wandering in great anguish thinking of her lover Punarvasu. But Punarvasu desiring to become reunited with her received initiation into the *Sadhudharma*. So how could he meet her in the forest. For a long time she kept wandering through the wild forest crying "Punarvasu". After recovering her composure a little she decided to stay in a safe place she began carrying out spiritual austerities but she could not, of course, forget Punarvasu.

On account of the severe spiritual austerities she carried out, her tender and beautiful body became weak and withered like a fallen leaf. Her physical beauty faded away and she seemed to be a mere skeleton. There had also come about a great change in her mental and emotional propensities. One evening Anangsundari sat near a beautiful cataract deeply absorbed in thought. She had begun a fast. She was determined to destroy her Karmas and so she absorbed in a deep meditation on the Paramatma. Just then there came floating on the water a terrible python.

Anangsundari sat deeply absorbed in meditation. How could she know that the messenger of death had approached her. The python opened its large mouth and saw Anangsundari's

feet as she sat on a stone. The python began swallowing Anang-sundari and within a few moments it swallowed her. But Anang-sundari was absolutely unaware of what was happening to her body. Therefore she did not experience any kind of agitation or anguish. The python swallowed her fully but yet she remained absorbed in meditation. Therefore, after her death she was born as a goddess in the second heaven. The jiva who has even the smallest attachment for his or her body experiences agony and anguish and such bodily agony and anguish brings about sorrowful contemplations. We carry out spiritual austerities only with the purpose of discarding attachments for the body and the world. Therefore, when some adversities or calamities occur to us in the physical world, we should not give way to anguish and we should not lose our equanimity. When death swallows us like that python, we should remain absorbed in spiritual meditation and self-scrutiny. Anang-sundari, remained undisturbed. What an extraordinary spirit of detachment she had !

“O King ! That Anang-sundari is Vishalya whom Lakshman has married.”

When Vishalya heard the story of her *poorvajanma*, she was greatly thrilled and delighted. She glanced at Lakshman and bent her head shyly.

Bhamandal sat near Vibhishan. Desiring to know the story of his *poorvajanma*, Vibhishan said to the muni.

“Revered Lord ! Kindly tell us the story of Bhamandal’s *Poorvajanma*.”

“Vibhishan ! Bhamandal himself knows the story of his *poorvajanma*. A long time ago, he heard the story of his *poorvajanma* from an enlightened muni. Yet to satisfy your curiosity, I will narrate the story.

“Gunavati had a brother by name Gunadhar. After having wandered through many janmas, he was born as Prince Kundal-mandit. In that janma, he led the life of a noble Shrivak and died. The same jiva in course of time became Sita’s brother. Bhamandal !”

“But, revered lord! You have narrated the story of Bhamandal very briefly.”

“Vibhishan! I will narrate the story of your earlier lives in detail. That will satisfy your curiosity.”

“Revered Lord! You have bestowed a great compassion on us. Otherwise, how could we ever know the stories of our earlier lives. Kindly narrate the stories of the earlier lives of Lavan and Ankush.” Lavan and Ankush were sitting in front of Vibhishan. They were experiencing great delight, hearing the stories that the muni was narrating. The two brothers sat spell-bound deeply absorbed in the stories that the great muni was narrating but when they heard Vibhishan questioning the muni about their earlier lives, they too became eager to hear that story. They glanced at each other revealing their joy and eagerness. Vibhishan placed his hands on the heads of the brothers affectionately.

“Noble man! Once there was a prosperous city by name Kakandi. A brahmin by name Vamadev lived in that city. His wife was Shyamala. They begot two sons who were named Vasunand and Sunand.

One day, when the two brothers were at home, a muni came to their door for *Madhukari* (food). On that day the muni had to end his fast which had lasted a month. Vasunand and Sunand received him with great veneration and gave him excellent food.

What an extraordinary efficacy of benevolence! The two brothers after their death were born as *Yugaliks* (twins). They were by nature, simple, amiable and serene. After their death, they were born in the second heaven. After completing their heavenly existence, they were born again as princes in the city of Kakandi. They were born as the children of King Rativardhan and Queen Sudharshana. They were named Priyankar and Shubankar. In course of time, they became Kings and then they adopted the path of *Charitradharma*.

As shramans, they carried out excellent spiritual austerities and after their death, they were born in the heavenly world

called Graiveyak. After ending their heavenly existence, they were born in this world as Lavan and Ankush."

On hearing this story, Lav and Kush felt greatly delighted. They looked towards their teacher, Siddharth. They said expressing their curiosity.

"Revered Lord! What is the cause for our teacher's attachment for us?"

"Dear Princes! Siddharth, in his earlier life was your mother. When you were born as Priyamkar and Shubankar, your mother was Queen Sudarshana. She after passing through many janmas is now your teacher, Siddharth".

On hearing the discourses delivered by the great muni, there appeared in the minds of all the listeners, the spirit of renunciation. "The samsar is a maze. Our relationships in the samsar are strange and changeful. It is really beneficial to discard this changeful and transient samsar. We should adopt the *Samyamdharm* and attain spiritual perfection."

The commander Kritantavadan was overwhelmed with joy. Tears fell from his eyes. He stood up; saluted the muni and said in a humble manner.

"Revered Lord! Kindly bestow your grace upon me. After hearing your discourses, I have developed an aversion to the joys and pleasures of the samsar. Therefore kindly initiate me into the *Sadhudharma* and help me to cross the ocean of samsar. Show me the way to destroy my karmas and to attain *Moksha*."

"Kritantawadan! Your desire is noble and commendable. Therefore, it will be fulfilled."

Kritantavadan saluted the muni with great devotion and received the *Deeksha*. The citizens of Ayodhya received from the muni instructions regarding various vows and austerities and decided to follow them.

Shri Ram and others saluted the muni and proceeded to see Sita who was now a Sadhvi. Sita sat deeply absorbed in



meditation. On seeing her, Shri Ram thought, "Oh! Sita has a tender body. I wonder how she can bear with heat, cold and rain. Will she bear with them with a feeling of equanimity? Moreover, she has to practise self-discipline. This is a hard task. I wonder how she will carry it out. Ah! Sita is so noble that even Ravan could not sully her. Sita has a firm mind. She has the firmness to carry out a task which she undertakes. She will..." Shri Ram was greatly agitated. He could not stay there long. He saluted Sita and returned to Ayodhya accompanied by Lakshman.

The radiance of faith, devotion and discipline brightened the heart of everyone.



## CXIII

### THE SWAYAMVAR IN KANCHANPUR

The wheel of samsar kept revolving. Countless jivas kept passing through various states of existence in consonance with the movement of the wheel of samsar but there are some jivas who move in the opposite direction, take a road not taken by others and attain deliverance from samsar. Some jivas floating on the waves of samsar analyse and scrutinise it, retaining mental equanimity. Some lament over misfortunes. Some are absorbed in amusements and delights. Some discuss those events and some forget them and after sometime again keep floating on the waves of samsar.

Sita and the commander Kritantavadan adopted the *Charitradharma*. They moved against the current of samsar and began traversing the path of spiritual elevation. These events became the subject matter of endless discussions among the citizens of Ayodhya. Some commended their sublime self-sacrifice and renunciation. Some experienced anguish at the separation from them and some also began gossiping about those events, saying "Well! What could she do? She had to receive the *Deeksha*. Ram has caused great anguish to her. He caused anguish to many".

This is a tradition of the samsar. All do not praise a noble action but all condemn an ignoble action. This tradition has been going on in the samsar.

Days passed. Only the memory of Sita remained in the magnificent and sky-high palace of Ayodhya. Kritantavadan carried out spiritual austerities in his attempt to attain the heavenly state of existence. Sita carried out severe spiritual

austerities in order to attain spiritual elevation. Nearly sixty years passed thus. She kept progressing on the path of spiritual perfection.

Shri Ramachandra, Lakshman, Lavan and Ankush were absorbed in carrying out the administration of the Kingdom in an excellent manner. Of course, after Sita became a Sadhvi, Shri Ram remained aloof from all the administrative activities. He remained detached. Lav and Kush were assisting Lakshman in the administration of the Kingdom. Lakshman also begot able and noble sons. His eldest son was named Shridhar. After his sons reached the proper age, he celebrated their marriages with beautiful and learned princesses. Lav and Kush treated their cousins with heartfelt love and affection but sometimes a feeling of jealousy arose in the hearts of Shridhar and his brothers.

Their jealousy was caused by the extraordinary affection that Lakshman had for Lav and Kush. "Father loves Lav and Kush more than us". This feeling made them jealous. Outwardly they were cordial and friendly with Lav and Kush but in their hearts they had no love or affection for them.

\* \* \* \*

The Vaithadya Mountains !

The City of Kanchanpur !

Kanakarath, the Vidyadhar King had two daughters by name Mandakini and Chandramukhi.

The two daughters were beautiful and possessed exemplary virtues. As soon as they stepped on the threshold of youth, Kanakarath began searching for suitable bridegrooms for them. In spite of all his efforts, he could not find suitable bridegrooms and he was in great despair. One day, he took his daughters near him and said to them in a voice full of distress.

"Dear daughters ! Do you know how much I am worried about you ?"

“Dear father ! Why are you worried about us ?” They said with evident curiosity.

“We have been searching for suitable bridegrooms for you but all our efforts have failed. If some possess excellent virtues, they do not have an attractive physical appearance. If some possess handsomeness, they do not possess excellent virtues or heroism. If some are heroic, they are not high-born and if some are high-born, they do not possess fame and prosperity. So, I am in great despair. But I do not want you to marry ordinary young men. I want you to marry young men who possess all virtues, heroism, abilities and who are high-born”. Their old father stroked their heads with affection. His eyes welled up with tears on account of grief and agitation. Mandakini sat stupefied. Her heart experienced great anguish. She began grieving over the situation. After thinking for a while, she said to her father.

“Dear father ! You yourself advised us to leave everything to fortune and Destiny and now why are you grieving thus ?”

“But, dear daughters ! My agitation is that on account of my old age, I am unable to do anything for you.”

“But your daughters are capable in every respect. You need not worry unnecessarily.”

“What can I do for you, children ?”

“Kindly arrange a swayamvar for us. Extend invitations to all kings and princes. We will ourselves choose our partners. What is destined will occur. We will get husbands according to the decrees of Destiny. Please do not worry about this matter.”

Chandramukhi also liked Mandakini's idea. King Kanakath accepted Mandakini's suggestion. He sent for his Chief Minister and gave him the necessary orders.

“Dear Chief Minister ! Please arrange a swayamvar for my daughters. If they choose proper bridegrooms, I will carry out my duty of celebrating their marriages. After that, I will have

to engage myself in spiritual endeavours to attain spiritual progress”.

“Dear Lord ! Your orders shall be carried out. I will make arrangements for the swayamvar at once so that our princesses may choose proper husbands”.

The Chief Minister went away after saluting the King. The King felt greatly relieved as if a heavy burden weighing on his mind had been taken away.

\* \* \* \*

The royal court of Ayodhya was packed to its capacity. Shri Ram and Lakshman sat on their thrones. Lav, Kush, and the other princes sat in their respective thrones. The court was discussing matters relating to the administration of the Kingdom. Just then, a guard entered the court and said in a humble voice.

“May the King be victorious !”

“What is the matter ?”

“My Lord ! A messenger sent by Kanakarath, the Vidyardhar Emperor is at the door. He desires to meet you”.

“Bring him in at once”.

The guard went out and within a short time brought Kanakarath’s messenger. Kanakarath’s messenger had been fascinated by the magnificence of Ayodhya.

The splendour and pomp of the royal court stupefied him. As soon as entering the court, he bowed to Shri Ram and Lakshman and sat in a throne meant for guests.

“I hope King Kanakarath is well”, Shri Ram said looking towards the messenger.

“O you greatest of men ! King Kanakarath is well and prosperous and desires to hear that you are well and prosperous. He has sent me on a special purpose”.

“Noble man! We desire to know the purpose on which the Vidyadhar King has sent you here.”

“O you greatest of men! Our king has two daughters by name Mandakini and Chandramukhi. He has arranged a swayamvar for them. He has invited all kings and princes to this swayamvar. He has sent me to invite you and your royal family to this swayamvar.”

“We feel grateful to King Kanakarath for having extended this invitation to us but what is the use of our attending the swayamvar. Ah! Yes. I will send our princes and the other members of the royal family to the swayamvar.”

“Dear Lord! The Vidyadhar King desires amity with you. So, his desire is that you too must attend this swayamvar and accept his hospitality”.

Shri Ram glanced towards Lakshman and sensed Lakshman's feelings and gave his consent to attend the swayamvar. Lakshman instructed Lav, Kush, Shridhar and other princes to get ready to go Kanchanpur. Lakshman had one hundred and fifty sons. He instructed them all to get ready for the journey.

On the appointed day, Shri Ram and the others sat in the *Pushpak Viman* and proceeded towards Kanchanpur.

Countless Vidyadhar Kings and Princes had arrived at Kanchanpur. All the relatives and friends of the royal family also had arrived. King Kanakarath extended a hearty welcome to them all.

A magnificent swayamvar was arranged.

Mandakini and Chandramukhi were greatly happy. Their attendants gave them detailed information about every King and prince that came to attend the Swayamvar. They were happy to hear all this. Sometimes, they were jovial and sometimes, they were serious and sometimes they felt thrilled to hear such things and sometimes they felt eager to see those Kings and princes. When Shri Ram's *Pushpak Viman* arrived at Kanchan-

pur, all experienced a great joy and jubilation. Their joy knew no bounds. King Kanakarath felt greatly elated to see Shri Ram, Lakshman, and others who accompanied them. He extended to them a hearty welcome. Even the attendants and companions of the two princesses were delighted to see them. They were overwhelmed with joyful emotions. They kept staring at them with admiration forgetting themselves. When they came to themselves, they approached Mandakini and said, "Dear Princess! The princes of Ayodhya have arrived".

"Many Kings and princes have arrived".

"But the princes of Ayodhya excel all the others in valour and in appearance. They are radiant young men of outstanding abilities". The attendants described the appearance and qualities of the princes of Ayodhya.

"Now only one day remains. You yourselves will see them in the Swayamvar hall. They are renowned for their valour, and heroism and they belong to the great Ikshwaku dynasty. Now, there is one more important point to be mentioned."

"What is it?"

"Natural attraction. There should be a natural attraction between the bride and the bridegroom. There should arise love in their hearts for each other. Otherwise, their marriage will be meaningless and their married life will be fruitless".

"How can we know whether there is such mutual love between the bride and the bridegroom?" The attendants probably got this opportunity to know this truth.

"They should experience a sweet thrill at the very first sight. At the very first sight, they should experience a sweet delight which shoots like a flash of lightning to the brims of their being. They should be overwhelmed with joy and elation" Mandakini whispered into the ears of an attendant and she bowed her head in shyness. The attendant could not contain herself. She went away from there. Mandakini and Chandramukhi were lost in sweet dreams relating to the princes of

Ayodhya. The artists and artisans of the Vidyadhar Kingdom decorated the swayamvar hall in a magnificent manner. It shone with a supernatural splendour. Kanakarath's joy knew no bounds.

The day of the swayamvar arrived. The attendants decorated the princesses with ornaments and garments in such a manner that if they looked at their images in a mirror, they would not recognise themselves. Countless Kings and princes sat in the hall clad in their best apparel. All sat in their seats.

Shri Ram and Lakshman sent the princes into the hall. They themselves did not attend the swayamvar. They had come to Kanchanpur only because of King Kanakarath's insistence. The princes Lav, Kush, Shridhar and others entered the hall and sat in the thrones meant for them. The pavilion looked heavenly with a large number of Kings and princes. At the right time, King Kanakarath stood up and extended a hearty welcome to all to the swayamvar. Then the Chief Minister stood up and said in a dignified voice.

"O Kings ! O princes ! I welcome you all to this Swayamvar on behalf of the King and the citizens of Kanchanpur. I wish to announce that this swayamvar has been arranged for the princesses Mandakini and Chandramukhi as desired by our King. The two princesses will enter the hall soon and choose their bridegrooms. They will garland the princes they choose for their husbands. Many of you will have to be disappointed but you are all men of great culture and refinement and you know the principles relating to a swayamvar. No one can break those principles".

Soon the two princesses appeared in the swayamvar hall. First, they saluted their father Kanakarath. He bestowed his blessings upon them and instructed them to garland the young men, they chose for their husbands. Accordingly, under the guidance of an old and experienced woman of the royal family, the swayamvar began. The princesses stood before every King and prince for a few moments and heard from their guide all details about him and then the train moved forward. This



went on for a long time. At last, the princesses stood before Lav and Kush. Their guide gave them details about the princes. But she had already noticed that the princesses had been thrilled by the sight of Lav and Kush. Mandakini garlanded Lav and Chandramukhi garlanded Kush. All clapped their hands. The swayamvar hall reverberated with the cries of joys and jubilation. Kanakarath's joy knew no bounds. Joy and jubilation filled the atmosphere.

But the two hundred and fifty sons of Lakshman left the hall suddenly. They were full of indignation. They felt that they had been disgraced. They were determined to adopt any means to secure the princesses. When they left the hall, the spies of Lav and Kush were shocked. They followed them and then they informed Lav and Kush of their reactions and plans: "Dear princes! Shridhar and his brothers are terribly angry with you. They are burning with anger and a sense of shame".

"Who has insulted them?" Lav and Kush said with natural surprise.

"The princesses Mandakini and Chandramukhi insulted them. They rejected them and garlanded you. Therefore, they feel that they have been insulted and are planning to fight against you". Lav and Kush were greatly worried. They did not like this development. After a little while, Lav said breaking the silence.

"Why should they be angry at all? Moreover, they are our brothers. They should not think of fighting against us. We cannot fight against them. It is not all proper. Moreover, there should not arise any differences or dissensions between us. Just as our parents are united, we too should be united".

"True. They are our brothers. Therefore, we should try to console them and persuade them to give up the idea of fighting a war". Shridhar's spies heard what Lav and Kush said and were stupefied. Realising the lofty feelings of Lav and Kush, they ran to meet Shridhar. Shridhar and his brothers were getting ready for a war but on hearing what the spies said, they became cool. Shridhar was astonished.

“What did you say? Do really Lav and Kush love us so much? They are indeed great. We are mean in thinking of fighting against them. In our ignorance we could not realise that it was improper to fight against our brothers. Fie upon our mean thoughts! We could not realise the impropriety of fighting against our brothers”. Shridhar threw away his weapons repenting his decision to fight a war. In a few moments, their animosity changed into amity and their anger changed into the agony of repentance.

“Ah! How wonderful this samsar is! We were so mean as to think of fighting against our own brothers. Our parents, Shri Ram and Lakshman love each other greatly and we have become so mean as to entertain thoughts of animosity against our brothers. This is indeed bad. All this is the cruel drama of Karmas. Karmas cause such calamities. They make us behave improperly. Therefore, we should endeavour to root out our Karmas”, said Shridhar and advised his brothers to renounce the samsar and to carry out endeavours to attain spiritual elevation. All agreed to Shridhar’s suggestion. Then they went to meet Lav and Kush.

They fell at the feet of Lav and Kush and begged for their forgiveness. Lav embraced Shridhar affectionately. Their brothers discarded all their differences and embraced each other with heartfelt affection.

“Dear brother! We are indeed mean. We are ignorant. You are wise and magnanimous. Kindly forgive us!” said Shridhar sobbing.

“Do not say so, Shridhar! To err is human but if we repent our blunders, they are no more blunders. But what blunder have you committed? Well. Whatever might have happened, we have nothing but love and affection for you. We wish for your welfare. After all, we are brothers and there cannot appear any differences among us.”

“Dear brother! We feel extremely grateful to you for your love and affection. We have decided collectively to adopt the

path of *Charitradharma* shown by the Paramatma. Brother! This Samsar is such that man forgets himself and commits blunders, knowingly or unknowingly. Generally, passions arise from sensual desires and cravings. Hence, sensible people should first discard their sensual desires. That is their first duty. So, we have decided to secure the consent of our parents and then to adopt the path of *Sadhudharma*. We are determined to fight against our Karmas and to destroy them and we wish to realize the soul and to attain Moksha”.

The eyes of Lav and Kush welled up with tears. A depressing silence pervaded the atmosphere. Then, Lav said in a voice shaken with emotion.

“Oh you noble young men! You are indeed blessed. You are determined to pursue the thorny path of self-discipline and self-sacrifice. Yet we feel grieved to realize that we have been the cause for your mental agitation. We request you to pardon us and when the right time comes, to guide us on the path of *Samyam*.”

Then, they set off to meet Shri Ram and Lakshman. All saluted them with heartfelt veneration. Shri Ram and Lakshman did not know anything about the dissension that had arisen among their sons. They were happy thinking of the heroism of Lav and Kush.

The princes narrated to them the events that had taken place. Shridhar went forward a few paces and bowed to the feet of Shri Ram and then said in a grief-stricken voice.

“Revered Lord! An unpleasant event has changed into a happy event. We have become detached from the samsar. We have lost all interest in the pleasures and delights of samsar and we believe that we can experience boundless serenity only in the pursuit of the *Charitradharma*. Therefore, O you great benefactor! Kindly permit us to pursue the path of *Samyamdharma*.”

Shri Ram began to stare at them with amazement and astonishment. On the one hand, Lave and Kush had won the

hands of two beautiful princesses in the swayamvar and on the other, Shridhar and his brothers were determined to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. Shri Ram looked towards Lakshman. Lakshman had fixed his eyes upon the ground. Shri Ram said in a resounding voice.

“Lakshman !”

Lakshman was shocked on hearing Shri Ram’s call and looked towards him. He made a sign suggesting that Lakshman should give a reply to the princes. Lakshman said in an elevated voice :

“Dear brother ! You may give them what instruction you deem proper.”

Shri Ram gave his consent to the decision of the princes to adopt the *Charitradharma*.

In consequence, Shridhar and his brothers received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* from the great muni, Shri Mahabal.

जैनम् अस्ति शासनम्

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## CXIV

### BHAMANDAL'S DEATH

Bhamandal had been staying in Ayodhya for some days. How could he have peace of mind without offering his adoration to Shri Ram and Lakshman ? How could he have any peace of mind if he stayed away from Lav and Kush ? Once he sat in the balcony of the palace and was narrating, to Lav and Kush, the thrilling story of the war against Lanka. They spent a long time thus. Just then, suddenly remembering something Lav said :

“Dear uncle ! We have not been able to see our mother for a long time. We desire to meet her and to seek her blessings. I do not know where she is staying”.

“Yes uncle ! We should meet our mother and obtain her blessings. I always think of her and I desire to see her and to bow to her feet”, Kush said endorsing Lav's statement. For a moment, Bhamandal looked at his nephews with fixed eyes. He could easily realise that the princes were eager to meet their mother who was wandering somewhere in far off forests. He could see that they were visualising their mother wandering about in forests. They were eager to meet their mother and to adore her feet. Their filial devotion and affection were evident on their faces.

“Why not ? We shall surely go in search of her. We shall go together. Even I desire to meet her and offer my veneration to her. Actually, your suggestion is absolutely proper. Otherwise, after our visit to the Vaithadya region, I should have forgotten or I might not have thought of seeing her.” Bhamandal said looking towards the horizon. An idea suddenly occurred

to him. It appeared in the form of a question; "Sita has adopted the path of *Charitradharma*. It was natural that she should develop a spirit of detachment with respect to Shri Ram but how could she discard her attachment and affection for her sons? She loved her sons so much that she could not bear with even a moment's separation from them. How could she forget her sons?"

"Uncle! What are you thinking of?"

Bhamandal's thoughts were interrupted. He woke from his silent thoughtfulness. He looked at Lav with fixed eyes and said: "Nothing. You get ready for the journey. We will surely set off in search of Sita."

"But where are we to go? We do not know where she is staying. We do not know her whereabouts".

"It does not matter. We shall search for her. We will surely find her". Lav and Kush began making preparations for the journey. Bhamandal went to Shri Ram. He informed Shri Ram of the matter. Shri Ram ordered the *Pushpak Viman* to be got ready. He said that Lav and Kush might set off accompanied by the other members of the family. Moreover, Bhamandal found out from the city-heads where Sita was at that time. He learnt that Sita was travelling on foot towards Mithila.

Bhamandal accompanied by Lav and Kush set off towards Mithila. Within a short time, the *Pushpak* began flying over the beautiful Kingdom of Mithila. They made enquiries and found out the whereabouts of Sita and then they proceeded towards the place where Sita was staying at that time.

Sita was staying in a beautiful garden with a number of fellow sadhvis. She was carrying out meditation and spiritual studies with absorption. Lav, Kush, Bhamandal and others approached Sita and saluted her. Sita blessed them all. With great humility they sat near her and made polite enquiries. Seeing her withered body and face, Lav said in a voice full of anguish.

“O you revered one ! Are you suffering from any disease or any physical ailment ? Actually your body is withered and weak.”

“We cannot attain spiritual progress without causing the body to grow withered and weak on account of spiritual austerities. We have to exercise a restraint on our body and our senses. In order to attain imperishable spiritual felicity, we have to discard the momentary sensual pleasures” Sita said explaining the change in her appearance.

“But is not the body, the primary means to carry out spiritual endeavours ? Is it not necessary to keep the body sound and healthy ?”

“Lav ! Our attachment for the body is the greatest impediment on the path of *Moksha*. The attachment for the body and the senses entangles the *jiva* in passions and sensual cravings. Therefore, spiritual austerities constitute the right means to discard our attachment for the body. The body is created not merely for physical enjoyments but also as a means to carry out spiritual endeavours. Therefore, spiritual austerities constitute the most efficacious means to attain spiritual elevation”.

“But revered mother ! You have renounced the world and adopted the path of *Samyam* and when that is so where is the need for carrying out severe spiritual austerities ?”

“Dear child ! When we renounce the *samsar* and worldly life and adopt the *Charitradharma*, we lose all our attachment for relatives, wealth and worldly delights but the body remains with us; doesn't it ? It is absolutely necessary to discard our attachment for the body. If we do not discard the attachment for our body, we cannot escape from the snares of sensual passions and the consequent anguish. Therefore, it is necessary that we should discard our attachment for the body. The tender and sweet words uttered by Sita rendered Lav and Kush silent and spell-bound. They admired their mother's spiritual excellence. She taught them the way to spiritual elevation. Lav,

Kush and others saluted their mother and other sadhvis and returned to Ayodhya.

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Soon after returning to Ayodhya, Bhamandal approached Shri Ram. Shri Ram made enquiries regarding Sita's welfare. Bhamandal said politely : "Oh you revered one ! The revered Sadhvi Sita has been carrying out severe spiritual austerities in consequence of which she has grown withered physically. She is always engaged in her endeavours to attain *Moksha*. Oh ! what a severe and unperturbed life she has been leading ! She is totally detached from all worldly objects; and is not blackened by any passions. In fact, she has made her human state of existence fruitful. Bhamandal could not restrain his tears of joy. Shri Ram heard Bhamandal's words with deep absorption. He visualized Sita; and thought deeply about the situation.

"Revered lord ! In fact, I too feel magnetically drawn towards a life of detachment and renunciation. Only then can the human state of existence be a step towards spiritual perfection" Bhamandal said; and he began looking towards the sky in an intensely emotional manner.

Shri Ram kept looking at him for a while. He said nothing. Bhamandal went away to the palace of Lav and Kush. After food, he sat conversing with them but a great commotion was raging in his mind.

"Now dear children ! I wish to fulfil a desire of mine. After that I will receive initiation into the *Sadhudharma* and lead a sinless life". Bhamandal said suddenly.

"What desire is it, dear uncle ?"

"For some years. I have been desiring that we should establish our supremacy over the entire Vaithadhya region. We should conquer the entire Vidyadhar world and then I will adopt the *Charitradharma*".

"Uncle ! This is not at all impossible for you. You have such mighty and heroic allies as Vibhishan, Sugriv, and Hanu-



man. Our father Shri Ram, our uncle Lakshman and we are here to assist you. You find out and fix up an auspicious day and we shall set off on our campaign” Lav and Kush showed their readiness to assist their uncle in achieving his objective. Bhamandal felt greatly elated on hearing what Lav and Kush said. He began to wander about in the world of dreams and said “Dear Lav! Actually, there are not many heroic Kings in the Vaithadhya region. Those who are ruling over the area are spending their time in leisure and sensual pleasures and enjoyments. They are steeped in a stupor of sensuality. Therefore, we are going to win an easy victory. Moreover, when we have the support of Shri Ram and Lakshman and when such heroic Kings as Vibhishan, Sugriv are on our side, we need not at all fear failure.”

Bhamandal made a plan to establish an imperial sway over the Vaithadhya region. He explained his plan to Lakshman also. Similarly, he discussed the matter with Sugriv who had come to Ayodhya on a visit. All assured him of their help and support in his endeavour. Bhamandal's enthusiasm increased a hundred-fold. After having stayed in Ayodhya for a short while, he set off to Ratanupur. He carried out secret discussions with his ministers and decided upon launching a campaign against the Vaithadhya region.

Sometime passed thus.

Bhamandal was absorbed in making arrangements for launching a campaign against the Vaithadhya region.

Once Bhamandal kept walking to and fro in the balcony of his palace and kept looking towards the sky as if to probe its mysteries. All of a sudden, there appeared in his imagination the image of Sita. He began to think, “What an extraordinary kind of life she is leading! Such a life helps us to attain oneness with the Paramatma. I too desire to lead such a life but before that I must become the emperor of the Vaithadhya region. I must achieve unopposed sway over the area and then I will surely receive the *deeksha* and become a Shraman and will try to conquer my senses by means of severe spiritual austerities.

I will carry out spiritual austerities with deep absorption with an unshakeable firmness of mind. I will destroy my Kashayas. I will endeavour to attain deliverance from my Karmas. Only then will my highest aspirations be fulfilled."

While he was thus absorbed in deep contemplation, a terrible calamity occurred. Suddenly a thunder-stroke hit him and he fell down like a severed tree. A commotion arose in the palace.

Even before any treatment could be given to him he had died.

The guards came running to him but what could they do? The news of his death spread like wild-fire everywhere. The queens came running and lamenting. The ministers also came there at once. Thousands of people gathered to witness the calamitous occurrence. They were all steeped in grief. The news of Bhamandal's death reached Ayodhya at once.

"Bhamandal died! He died hit by a thunder-stroke!" Shri Ram, Lakshman, Lav and Kush and others who heard this, were stupefied. All sat in the *Pushpak Viman* and reached Ratanupur. They experienced great anguish at the sight of Bhamandal's dead body. All the Kings of Vaithadhya also were present at that time. Vibhishan, Hanuman and Sugriv also were present.

One radiant light of the time was thus extinguished. Bhamandal's funeral ceremony was carried out with royal honours. After his death, Bhamandal took birth as a Yugalik (twins — one male and female) at a place called Devakuru.

Devakuru is an extraordinary place. It is absolutely free from attachments and hatred, passions and sorrows; excitements and elation.

Generally yugaliks after their death take birth in the heavenly world.

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## HANUMAN'S NIRVAN

The time of wars had ended. Life in Bharath was fearless and peaceful. There was no sign of violence anywhere. Emperors and kings were engaged in carrying out their administration with the purpose of securing peace and prosperity for their people. Spiritual heads were engaged in delivering discourses to inspire people to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. Political policies and administrative measures were based on lofty, spiritual doctrines. Besides, possessing political freedom people were also free to carry out their spiritual endeavours.

The examples of king Bharath and Sita who had adopted the *Charitradharma* exercised a profound influence on the whole of Bharath. Countless people adopted the *Sadhudharma* and began to lead exemplary lives. The people led a life of peace and felicity. A sublime culture based on self-sacrifice, self-discipline and self-abnegation flourished everywhere.

Hanuman was carrying out his duty of ruling over the vast Kingdom of Hanupur. Sometimes he used to visit the sacred shrines situated on the Sammet Shikhar, to attain spiritual serenity but Bhamandal's sudden death impelled him to turn inwards and to probe the mysteries of the self. Sometimes he was lost in reminiscences of the past and sometimes he was lost in contemplations on the future. Whenever he got an opportunity to meet enlightened men, he heard their discourses with great delight, and contemplated on lofty spiritual doctrines.

Generally, he used to visit holy places. He forgot himself on those occasions in worshipping and glorifying the Lord. It was a spiritual transformation in Hanuman. Hanuman who

once fought heroically in wars was now engaged in spiritual activities. Once, he went to the Meru mountain on a pilgrimage. When he was returning from there, he happened to see the sun setting in the west. For a while, he stopped his airship in the sky; and kept looking at the setting sun. It was not merely seeing the setting sun. The situation symbolized a thought that had been in his mind for a long time.

“The sun rises in the morning; and sets in the evening. Now, the sun is setting. Does it not show that all worldly things are transient? Does not this suggest that worldly life is fleeting, transient and momentary? Hence, our attachment for this transient worldly life is illusory. Hatred for something that is transient also is illusory because this world is changeable and transient. Even the thoughts and feelings of men are changeable. All things are changeable. The Lord has expounded the truth about this life. The sun symbolizes the worldly life. The sun rises and sets regularly. Thus, he symbolizes the cycle of birth and death. Actually, only now have I fully realized this eternal truth. Why should I continue to rule over my Kingdom? What purpose does it serve? For whose sake should I carry out these duties? What is the use of remaining in the samsar? I have enjoyed the delights of worldly life. I have enjoyed sensual pleasures. Now, I should become an *Anagar*. I shall become a *Sadhu*. I shall discard all my attachments. I shall carry out meditation in some mountain cave, in solitude and realize the pure form of my soul. Only this is really beneficial to me”.

The sun had already set. Darkness had enveloped the world. Hanuman again began flying in his airship and soon reached Hanupur. As soon as he entered the palace his Queen-consort, Lankasundari extended a hearty welcome to him. At the sight of her lord, the queen was overwhelmed with joyful emotions. Hanuman changed his dress; and sat on a throne, Lankasundari sat near him. She looked towards her lord and said :

“Dear lord ! I hope you had a happy journey”.

“Yes. My journey was happy and comfortable. Moreover, today's pilgrimage has inspired in me the desire to renounce

the Samsar. Do not people say. 'Pilgrimages bring real progress'. Dear queen ! I have decided to renounce the worldly life".

"Dear Lord. You are absolutely right. Pilgrimages do bring progress, and help us to cross the ocean of samsar. Until we cross the ocean of Samsar, we cannot attain Moksha", said Lankasundari.

"Dear queen ! Now, I shall renounce the worldly life and adopt the lofty path of *Charitradharma*. I have lost all my attachments for the Samsar".

When Hanuman said this. Lankasundari looked straight at him for a moment. She trimmed the light; and made it burn brighter. She noticed in the tender face of Hanuman the feeling of renunciation. Rather stunned by her lord's sudden decision to renounce the samsar she sat silent thinking deeply. Of course she had been observing carefully, for sometime past, the spiritual transformation that had been taking place in her lord. She had found that he had developed a spirit of detachment with respect to worldly delights; and was engaging himself in spiritual endeavours with deep absorption. She made a decision and said.

"My lord ! If you are renouncing the samsar, I too will do so. I too desire to renounce the samsar".

"Dear Queen ! Your decision is quite proper. It is absolutely right that we should renounce the transient pleasures of the samsar in order to attain the eternal and ineffable felicity of *Moksha*".

Their conversation ended; and Lankasundari went into her chamber. Hanuman slept as he kept meditating on the *Pancha Parmeshti*.

The next day, Hanuman sent for his Chief Minister; and informed him of his decision. He also instructed him to make speedy arrangements for the coronation of the Prince. At the same time, he also sent messages to his friends, allies and subordinate Kings informing them of his decision.

The news that Hanuman and Lankasundari were adopting the *Charitradharma* spread like wildfire everywhere. Everyone who heard the news felt stupefied and shocked. The other queens came running to meet Hanuman and Lankasundari. They too expressed their desire to adopt the path of *Samyam*.

The various kings who received the message came to Hanupur. Nearly seven and a half thousand kings and princes gathered at Hanupur. On an auspicious day the prince was crowned the King of the country with all grandeur and eclat. Just at this time Acharya Dharmaratnasooriji and Sadhvi Lakshmiavathi who were travelling on foot in the area with a large number of disciples arrived at Hanupur.

There was a serious reaction in the Vidyadhar world against Hanuman's decision to renounce the samsar. There was an excited reaction. The whole atmosphere was filled with excitement and enthusiasm. All saluted the feet of Hanuman. Countless Vidyadhars gathered at Hanupur to witness the initiation of Hanuman into *Sadhudharma*.

Hanuman went to the garden accompanied by the members of the royal family to meet Dharmaratnasooriji. After saluting him with devotion he sat at his feet. The Gurudev greatly pleased with Hanuman's devotion bestowed his blessings upon him. Then folding his hands humbly Hanuman said.

"Oh you ocean of compassion. I have lost all interest in the joys and delights of the samsar. I have no attachment for worldly prosperity and happiness. I am eager to carry out endeavours to attain permanent spiritual felicity. My soul was awakened when I saw the setting sun. Therefore, kindly bestow upon me the precious gem of *charitra* and help me to cross the ocean of samsar. Kindly lift me out of the morass of mundane miseries." Hanuman made this humble entreaty to the great muni. The muni said.

"Oh you noble man! Your decision is absolutely right. What you have said about the samsar is true. The human state of existence is meant to be used for spiritual elevation. My

aspiration for you is that your desire for spiritual elevation may be fulfilled”.

Hanuman was overwhelmed with joyful emotions. He saluted the Gurudev and returned to his palace. He ordered his ministers to organize spiritual activities in all the temples in the city. He ordered the release of all prisoners. He made elaborate arrangements to give gifts of money, food and clothes to the needy and the indigent.

Just then, a profoundly significant event took place.

All the seven hundred and fifty kings and emperors who had come to Hanupur to witness the *Deeksha* ceremony gathered together. All were contemplating on attachments and renunciation. They had all been moved deeply by Hanuman's renunciation. One question kept agitating them,

“Can we not attain deliverance without self-sacrifice ? What cannot be achieved if we attain mental and spiritual purity ?” They met Hanuman. Hanuman received them with honour. Then they all went to the garden and sat down in the cool shadow of trees. All were serious and silent. Looking at them with fixed eyes Hanuman said in a serene manner.

“I am supremely happy to see you all here. I hope you are all hale and hearty.”

“Oh you great man ! We are all hale and hearty on account of your amity and affection. We are happy but some questions have been agitating our minds and so we are in deep agitation and worry. Kindly suggest a solution to our problem. Only you can solve our problems and deliver us from the snares of our worry and agitation”.

“Dear friends ! Kindly let me know what your problem is. I will try according to my light to suggest a solution to it.”

“Dear King ! We heartily approve of the statement of the revered Gurudev that Jivas must carry out spiritual endeavours to attain *moksha*. We fully agree with the Gurudev on this

point. But is it absolutely necessary to renounce the samsar in order to attain *moksha*?" said Shwetakirti, the Vidyadhar king of Mahendrapur.

"Dear Shwetakirti! I am not abandoning the samsar but I am deeply disgusted with the samsar. I find it unbearable. Self-sacrifice is not a mere doctrine but the desire for self-sacrifice naturally arises in men. The human mind discards those things in which it has no interest and which do not fascinate it. I am unable to remain in the samsar because a strong desire has appeared in me to realise the pure and permanent form of the soul. The forest and the places of solitude have been calling me. Their call keeps ringing in my ears continuously. My objective is to realise the Paramatma. I desire nothing else."

"Dear King! What you say is true, but is not the dislike for samsar a kind of hatred! Will not this hatred impede your endeavours to attain liberation from attachments and hatred?"

"O King! The samsar should be renounced. It is absolutely despicable. It is a natural reaction in us to adopt towards an object an attitude that is in consonance with its nature. There is nothing wrong in this. It is absolutely necessary to despise what is despicable and to like what is beneficial. This kind of attitude brings about equanimity and equanimity helps the soul to achieve perfection" Hanuman's words cleared the doubts of those Kings and princes. When their doubts were cleared and when their problem was solved, they developed a greater enthusiasm. Their faces began to shine resplendent. Soon Shwetakirti spoke in a resounding voice representing all the kings who had gathered there.

"O you great man! We wish to follow your example. We too would like to pursue the path of *Sadhudharma*. What you said cleared all our doubts and problems."

All clapped their hands approving of what Shwetakirti said. The atmosphere reverberated with the cries of victory that they issued.



“You are indeed blessed. We shall pursue the path of *Charitradharma* and carry out endeavours to attain salvation. We will attain spiritual progress. At the same time, we would have set to others a lofty example of renunciation and self-sacrifice.”

Hanuman welcomed the decision of the Kings and congratulated them upon their decision, Shwetakirti stood up and said.

“O you lord of compassion! We are determined to adopt the *Sadhudharma* along with you but we require some time for it. We have to inform our relatives and friends of our decision. We have to inform our ministers of our decision and request them to crown our sons Kings in our places. We have to hand over our Kingdoms to our sons. Therefore, if the day of our initiation is postponed a little, it will be highly convenient to all and it will take place without any impediment.”

King Shwetakirti's suggestion was absolutely proper. Therefore, Hanuman gave them a week's time. The meeting ended. Every King sent information to his ministers by his messenger and soon the news of the decision of the Kings and princes reached their Kingdoms. Large crowds of people gathered at Hanupur. The relatives and friends of all the Kings came to Hanupur.

Hanuman conveyed to Acharya Dharmaratnasoori, the information relating to the decision of the seven hundred and fifty Kings to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. The Acharya bestowed his blessings upon them and agreed to carry out the initiation ceremony, a few days later.

The families of all the Kings arrived at Hanupur. Each King explained to his family his decision to renounce the samsar and in consequence, the queens of all those Kings decided to renounce the samsar and in consequence, the queens of all those Kings decided to adopt the *Charitradharma*.

“How great is this relationship between the husband and the wife! How unique! They shared and enjoyed worldly delights and now they decided to share spiritual delights too. They all

developed a contempt for sensual pleasures. It was indeed a golden age! Within a few moments, all the queens got ready to receive the *Deeksha*.

"If our lords adopt the path of *samyam*, we too will adopt it. How can a wife remain in the samsar when the husband has become a sadhu?" Ah! Women rivalled men not in worldly enjoyments but in seeking spiritual delights through renunciation and what a spirit of dedication! The real felicity of life lies in this kind of sublime relationship.

The decision of those Kings and queens to renounce the samsar became a lofty example for the entire world. The people heartily congratulated them on their decision and wholeheartedly glorified the commands of the lord.

On the appointed day, the *Deeksha* ceremony began. Hanupur was magnificently decorated. Hundreds of satellite towns appeared around Hanupur. The Vidyadhar sculptors and architects constructed magnificent rest houses over a vast area. Large masses of people came to see the Kings and Queens who were renouncing the samsar and all the pleasures and joys of worldly life. They felt blessed when they saw those great souls.

The day fixed for the *Deeksha* ceremony dawned. The *Deeksha* procession started from the magnificent palace of Hanupur. Seven hundred and fifty chariots carrying the kings and queens began moving in the procession. As a part of the celebrations, the Vidyadhar musicians played on various musical instruments. The melodies reverberated in the atmosphere. Soldiers on elephants, soldiers on horses and infantry followed the procession adding dignity to it. A large number of Vidyadhars seated in airships flew over the city and showered flowers upon the procession. The procession reached the garden.

"May Bhagwan Munisuvrat Swami be victorious".

"May Acharya Dharmaratnasoori live long!"

"May those who are receiving the *Deeksha* become immortal!"

These cries of jubilation and glorification reverberated in the atmosphere. At the end of the procession, Hanuman and Lankasundari approached the Acharya; saluted him; and stood near him. The Kings and Queens entered the pavilion. The initiation ceremony began at an auspicious hour.

The seven hundred and fifty Kings and Queens got ready to receive the *Deeksha*. They pulled off their hair and showed their determination to renounce the samsar. The land of Hanupur was hallowed by the great *Deeksha* ceremony.

The Acharya recited the relevant mantras, put holy sandal powder over their heads and gave them the *Deeksha*. The cries of jubilation, resounded in the high skies. After the initiation ceremony was over, the people who had gathered there saluted the sadhus and sadhvis with heartfelt devotion. After that Sadhvi Lakshmiyati set off from Hanupur followed by her disciples. Acharya Dharmaratnasoorishwar also set off on his travels accompanied by the new munis and his other disciples. Within a short time, all the people left the garden.

Kings became sadhus.

Queens became sadhvis.

The whole universe was stunned by this event. Hanuman carried out severe spiritual austerities and attained *Moksha*.

When Shri Ram heard that Hanuman had become a sadhu, he fell into deep thought.

"Why did Hanuman adopt the *Charitradharma*? Why did he discard the pleasures of samsar? What caused him anguish? He has renounced wealth and prosperity, peace and happiness and has adopted the hard path of self-discipline. Hanuman is not wise in taking this step". Such thoughts and feelings arose in the mind of Shri Ram. Why did he entertain such thoughts and feelings? Why did he think of ridiculing Hanuman. He too was destined to attain *Moksha* in that life and it was but the mockery of his Karmas. Already Bharath and Sita had adopted the *Sadhudharma*. At that time, he had not entertained such

thoughts but now his mind was shaken when Hanuman became a Sadhu.

In the *Saudharma* heaven Indra visualized by means of his extrasensory perception, the conflict that had arisen in the mind of Shri Ram and he felt stupefied. He began to think. "O Shri Ram is a *charamashariri*! This is his last janma and he is making fun of *Charitradharma*. This is really amazing. He himself is going to adopt *Sadhudharma*. He is going to adopt the *Charitradharma* and he will attain *moksha* by destroying his karmas. When such is the case why is Shri Ram the very image of spiritual excellence making fun of Hanuman! Oh! What a mockery of Karmas this is! He is being shaken by his Karmas. Yes, I now remember it. The root-cause for this is his attachment for Lakshman. It is on account of that attachment that he is unable to think of renouncing the *samsar*. What a deep attachment exists between the two brothers! It is indeed unique and unexampled".

Seeing that the *Saudharma* Indra was deeply absorbed in thought, the gods, who were present in his court, said.

"O you king of gods! What are you thinking of so deeply? Has any problem arisen in your mind?"

"O you gods and goddesses! I visualized Shri Ram's mind by means of my *Avadhijan* (extrasensory perception). I have visualized the conflict that is raging in his mind and I have scrutinized it. I have found out that Shri Ram does not like Hanuman's action of adopting *Charitradharma*."

"Why?"

"Shri Ram's attachment for Lakshman is preventing him from entertaining thoughts of renunciation. His extraordinary attachment for Lakshman is an impediment on his way. That attachment will not allow him to think of renunciation of *samsar* and it will not allow him to entertain any thought of renunciation".

"What an extraordinary kind of attachment!" the heavenly beings were astonished. Their wonder knew no bounds. There

appeared a curiosity in the minds of two heavenly beings. They decided to test the strength of that attachment. They did not reveal their thoughts to anyone but came down to earth to carry out the test.

Testing the reality of attachment !

What a mad endeavour ! What a fool-hardy step ! That was an attempt to interfere with the lives of others.

That is why, the enlightened people declare that the samsar is futile and meaningless.

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## CXVI

### LAKSHMAN'S DEATH

Testing the strength of attachment !

This is really amazing !

Friendship and attachments of that kind should not be subjected to a test by a friend and now here is the case of two gods who wanted to test the strength of the attachment that existed between Shri Ram and Lakshman. We should not try to test and evaluate the friendship or love that exists between two persons but we can try to find out how deep their attachment is for each other. This test must be intended to find out how much grief a man experiences when he is separated from his dear friend.

We cannot see friendship and attachment with our eyes. Friendship and love are beyond sense-perception. Our eyes or ears or nose or tongue or touch cannot perceive love and friendship. Friendship is but a feeling of the heart. When that is so how can we perceive the feeling of amity that others have for each other. Undoubtedly, sometimes from their outward action, we can find out their feelings which are subtle and ordinarily imperceptible.

The two heavenly beings came down to earth with the plan of testing the attachment that existed between Shri Ram and Lakshman. They decided to use Lakshman's palace as a centre of their activities and to observe carefully his reactions relating to that attachment.

They were both gods. They possessed divine power. They had the power of giving a shape to their desires and designs. So, they arranged a magical situation.

Lakshman was absorbed in amusements and delights in his palace. He sat on his throne and was engaged in a jovial conversation. Just then, he heard a heart-rending lamentation. Even as he was wondering what it was, he found that the hundreds of Queens in his harem and their attendants were lamenting loudly. They seemed to be experiencing great grief. Their hair had fallen over their shoulders. The tears were streaming from their eyes and they were beating their chests and they were repeatedly saying, "O Ram! O Padma, 'O Ram! What have you done? What has happened to you? You have died prematurely. What will happen to the world? Who will take care of this world now?" A great commotion had arisen in the palace. The palace was reverberating with the cries of their anguish and grief. The whole atmosphere was filled with grief and gloom.

Lakshman stood stupefied. His eyes were wide open with horror. His mind became a total blank. He began to cry, "Has my dearest friend died? Has the pillar of my life collapsed? Has my dear brother gone to the other world? O you wicked god of Death! What have you done? The god of Death has taken away my brother leaving me in utter darkness and I am still alive. Fie upon my life! I too will join him. Alas! O Ram! What has happened!" Lakshman's voice was choked with grief. He could not speak a single word; nor could he think of doing anything. Suddenly his heart stopped beating and the bird of his life flew away from his body. He died on the spot.

Lakshman died by merely hearing that Shri Ram had died. What a tremendous effect of Karmas! Who can prevent the Karmas from exercising their power?

When the divine beings saw that Lakshman had died, they found that the ground beneath their feet was shaking. They began to shudder with fear. They felt stunned and in great grief they kept looking at each other.

"O what a calamity has occurred on account of us! We have unnecessarily committed a great blunder. We have destroyed the very pillar that supported this world. We have destroyed

the very life of Bharath. Oh ! What has happened. How can attachment be tested ? Oh ! What an unwise step we took ! This calamity would not have occurred if we had believed the words of Indra, or this greatest man of the world would not have died an untimely death thus if we had adopted another method to test his love for Shri Ram. O ! What will happen to Shri Ram when he comes to know of Lakshman's death ? How would this news affect him ? Can he bear with the separation from his brother Lakshman ? Shri Ram has an extraordinary and unexampled love for Lakshman. He will be surely stunned by this event". The two divine beings were steeped in grief and began to shudder at the thought of what might happen in the future".

Surely the test of friendship and attachment was carried out but what was the effect of it ? It was evident that the attachment between Ram and Lakshman was unexampled and extraordinary but what was the effect of the test ? Where was the need for carrying out this test ? Who would carry out such a terrible test ? If we interfere with the lives of others without thinking of the effects of such an interference, such calamities do occur.

The two divine beings filled with grief and anguish repenting their action of trying to test the nature of the attachment between Ram and Lakshman returned to heaven. Within a few moments, the magical illusion disappeared but the terrible effect of the trick remained. When the Queens saw Lakshman lying dead, they were stunned and their hearts began to palpitate. Their eyes were filled with gloom.

Their lamentations filled the atmosphere with gloom.

"Dear Lord ! What has happened to you ? Why are you sitting on the throne motionless and still ? Please, speak out. Please say something to your dear Queens". The grief-stricken Queens touched Lakshman's body. But Lakshman had died. The loud lamentations of the Queens reverberated throughout the city. The news of Lakshman's death spread throughout the city like wildfire. Shri Ram hearing the lamentation at once came there. He saw Vishalya weeping like a helpless child and said,



“What has happened? I am alive and brother Lakshman also is alive. When that is so why this lamentation?”

Suddenly his eyes fell on Lakshman's dead body lying on the throne. He was thunder-struck and cried aloud.

“Dear brother Lakshman! What has happened to you? Why are you sitting mute and motionless thus? Are you afflicted with some dreadful disease? Please speak out. There are remedies for maladies. We will give you expert medical treatment. Do not lament unnecessarily. O you Queens! I have sent for the best doctors in Ayodhya to attend on Lakshman”.

All the ministers gathered in the place. The Chief Minister had already learnt that Lakshman had died but he found it difficult to inform Shri Ram of the truth because Shri Ram would not believe that Lakshman had died. Therefore, he sent messages to Vibhishan, Sugriv, Shatrughna and others to come to Ayodhya, so that all might be ready for any eventuality. First of all, Shatrughna came from Mathura. He was filled with anguish when he saw Shri Ram. He already knew that Lakshman had died and that nothing could be done in the situation but it was not easy to comfort Shri Ram who was in great anguish.

Of course, Shatrughna, Vishalya and all the others knew that Lakshman had died but they did not know the cause for his death. How could they know it? Only three knew it; the two divine beings and Lakshman. Lakshman's sudden demise filled everyone with bitter anguish. Everyone shed tears of grief.

Large numbers of the citizens of Ayodhya thronged the courtyard of the palace to pay their last respects to Lakshman. Thousands of Vidyadhars, Kinnars and Gandharwas came and landed at Ayodhya. The cloudless sky was covered with airships. When they came into the palace they found that Shri Ram had not yet realised fully the truth that Lakshman had died.

A tremendous commotion arose in every nook and corner of the universe on account of the sudden demise of Lakshman. Shri

Ram was sitting on Lakshman's throne. He said caressing the head of Lakshman, "Dear brother ! What has happened to you? I wonder what disease has made you unconscious. Please speak out" and then looking towards the Chief Minister, he said aloud;

"Why have you not sent for doctors ? Why have they not came yet ?"

"Dear lord ! Have patience. I have sent for the best doctors. They will be here in a few moments with the most efficacious medicines".

Within a few moments, an experienced doctor arrived. Shri Ram holding the doctor's hands said.

"Dear doctor ! Look here ! Please see what has happened to my brother Lakshman. He is mute and motionless. I do not know what has happened to him."

The physician examined Lakshman's pulse and discovered that Lakshman had already died but he found it difficult to reveal the truth. So, he made a pretence of examining Lakshman's eyes, hands and legs and forehead and then he took out some medicines and smeared them to Lakshman's head, chest and feet.

The treatment went on for nearly two hours but bitter disappointment had to be faced by Shri Ram. If medicines could bring back the life of a dead man, who would die in this world ? Obviously, the treatment was fruitless. Then the Physician said, "Your Highness ! I can do nothing. Eventhough I used the most efficacious medicines, there is no hope of Lakshman's recovery".

Shri Ram ordered that all able and expert physicians, magicians and occultists should be brought at once. Accordingly, the Chief Minister sent for the ablest physicians, magicians and occultists. The magicians and the occultists began to recite mantras which were intended to bring about a miraculous cure. The magicians did everything in their power to make Lakshman come back to life. Time passed. None of the efforts succeeded

in making Lakshman live. At the end, they expressed their helplessness. Then came the occultists. They too carried out their experiments but Shri Ram's patience ended. He said;

"Be cautious! Carry out your experiments with great care, See that your efforts do not fail. If you succeed in your efforts, I will give you a Kingdom as the gift".

The Queen-mother Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha came there. Everyone hoped that Lakshman might come back to life. All kept watching the rituals of the occultists but even after a long time, their rituals produced no effect. Shri Ram screamed in anguish, "O you occultists and tantriks! Have you also failed to cure Lakshman of his malady? What happened to your occult power? You used to boast of your power. Is this your skill of which you used to boast?"

The *tantriks* and occultists failed in their endeavour and went way. Then Shri Ram said addressing the astrologers.

"O you astrologers! Please tell me what has happened to Lakshman". But the astrologers stood silent. They did not have the courage even to look towards Shri Ram.

The Chief Minister saluted the feet of Shri Ram and said in a humble voice, "O you treasure-house of compassion! All our physicians, magicians, occultists and tantriks have failed totally. There is no one who can cure Lakshman of his malady.

Suddenly, Shri Ram swooned. Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha cried out in anguish, "Dear son! Dear child!" All the attendants of the harem began to weep bitterly. Vibhishan, Sugriv, Shatrughna and others tried to help Shri Ram to regain his consciousness.

A little while later, Shri Ram regained his consciousness. He saw Lakshman's body and then placing his head on Lakshman's chest, he began lamenting loudly. His lamentations filled the atmosphere with gloom. Who could console Shri Ram? No one could say anything. All were silent and still. All were in grief. Nobody could console the others.

Lav and Kush who had gone to distant lands returned to Ayodhya. They came running into Lakshman's palace and stood stupefied when they saw Lakshman's body. They stood petrified like stone-images. The entire palace reverberated with the lamentations of the royal family and of the others. Shri Ram, Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha lamented loudly over Lakshman's death.

Lav and Kush watched Lakshman's dead body for a few moments and then began to weep bitterly. Holding on to Lakshman's body, they said; "Oh Revered uncle! You have made us helpless. Where are you? Could you not remain alive until we returned to Ayodhya? Who will give us inspiration and protection in the future in our difficulties? Without you life is meaningless for us".

The whole city of Ayodhya was plunged in grief. Lamentations were heard in every nook and corner of the city. It was as though the whole city was plunged in an ocean of grief. The entire universe seemed to be grieving over Lakshman's death.

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## CXVII

### THE NIRVAN OF LAV AND KUSH

The bondage of *Moha* (infatuation) is a terrible one.

*Moha* (infatuation) has a tremendous effect on jivas. Though Lakshman had died, Shri Ram could not believe it. Nobody had the courage to tell Shri Ram that Lakshman was really dead. He was still thinking that Lakshman had not really died and that he could not die. He was completely overwhelmed with the darkness of *Moha* (attachment). His attachment for Lakshman had made him blind to realities. Dark clouds of grief covered the city of Ayodhya. The countless kings and princes who came there were grieved by Lakshman's death and by Shri Ram's anguish which had taken away his wits. There was no sign of any attempt made to carry out Lakshman's funeral. Shri Ram could not keep away from Lakshman's body even for a moment. Shri Ram continued to believe that Lakshman was still alive and that he could never die.

One day passed thus.

The second day also passed. The city of Ayodhya appeared desolate like a burial ground. No one took a bath, and no one thought of carrying out their routine activities like worshipping the lord. No one thought of food or drink and no door was opened. The merchants closed their shops and the workers stopped their work. The streets and alleys of Ayodhya became desolate and silent. Street-dogs kept yelling on the streets.

Shatrughna, Lav and Kush were in great grief. Vibhishan and Sugriv were deeply agitated. Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha were plugged in grief. But they wondered how long Shri

Ram would keep embracing Lakshman's dead body. They wondered when Shri Ram would realise that Lakshman had died. Who could console Shri Ram? He was not prepared to hear any words of comfort and consolation. He would believe the words of the man whom he loved more than Lakshman but there was no such person. Vibhishan, Sugriv, Shatrughna, Lav and Kush sat helplessly around Shri Ram who sat placing Lakshman's body in his lap. Shri Ram again and again looked at the body of Lakshman and clung to it.

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The *Moha* that lies in the mind of a person delivers another from infatuation. The attachment of one man makes another man detached and disinterested.

What is required is the knowledge by means of which one can scrutinize the phenomena of this world. Moreover, one also requires a knowledge of *tatvas* by means of which one can evaluate the events that take place in this world.

Shri Ram's infatuation (*Moha*) impelled Lav and Kush to think deeply about life. Shri Ram's excessive attachment impelled his sons to think of renunciation.

Lakshman's death and Shri Ram's attachment and agitation produced a deep effect on the tender minds of Lav and Kush. The two brothers returned to their palace in bitter grief. Their radiant faces had become wan and withered. They lost all interest in worldly prosperity, royal splendour and sensual delights. After a little silence, Lav placed his hands upon the shoulder of Kush and said :

"Dear Kush ! What a cruel sport of Destiny this is ! Mother did the right thing in renouncing the *samsar* and in adopting the *Charitradharma*. No one in this world can conquer disease and death. No one can conquer even one of them. Otherwise, our uncle Lakshman would not have left us thus. No, he would not have left us but he has gone away suddenly. He was not suffering from any disease. Yet he died leaving all this royal wealth and splendour behind. It was he who created this splendour.

Ah! He went away leaving behind even our father who is so greatly attached to him. Oh! In the absence of our uncle, Ayodhya appears bleak and blighted". Lav's eyes welled up with tears. Kush began sobbing like a child.

"Kush! Dear brother! Do not give way to grief. What is the use of weeping now? Munisvratswami has explained the true nature of samsar. Death is inevitable. The jiva that is born must die but caught in the confounding snares of *Moha*, we forget this vital truth about love. Death does not agitate human beings. They are agitated by attachments. Did you not see the condition of our father? How agitated he is! How deeply grieved he is! Who can cause that grief to him? It is attachment that has caused such a terrible grief to our father. Attachment is a terrible bondage. This world honours and glorifies our father as a god and even such a great man is experiencing terrible anguish at the separation from his brother. That is why we say, strange are the ways of Karmas. Mysterious are the ways of Karmas.

The two brothers kept looking at each other probing each other's thoughts and feelings.

"Dear brother! You are right. Just as death is inevitable, birth after death is also inevitable in this samsar. Is it not so? How long should we keep wandering through this maze of birth and death? Instead of that, why should we not carry out spiritual endeavours to be delivered from this cycle of birth and death? Nobody can defy death and if we die before we attain spiritual purity, we will have to face countless calamities", Kush was serious and thoughtful. His eyes had grown red with weeping. He was speaking with great difficulty. Lav saw in the eyes of Kush, the spirit of detachment while his words embodied the desire to carry out spiritual endeavours.

While the whole city of Ayodhya was plunged in grief, Shri Ram's sons were immersed in deep spiritual contemplations. "Just as Death has suddenly devoured our uncle, it will devour us also at sometime or the other. Death will surely overtake us. We have not yet made the necessary preparation for our

journey to the other world, and we have to look for provisions. Without provisions, we will have to wander aimlessly. We will have to take birth again. Again birth; and again death. This eternal cycle will go on endlessly. Death will devour everyone. Therefore, we should at once become aware and vigilant and we should commence the necessary spiritual austerities and endeavours."

He kept thinking of this endlessly. He could not get a wink of sleep. And who slept in those days of anguish? Lakshman's untimely death had made everyone sleepless. Lav and Kush spent three sleepless nights.

"Kush! Now, we should not delay even for a moment. We should at once renounce this samsar which is fruitless and futile; and begin spiritual endeavours to attain spiritual purification."

"Dear brother! You are absolutely right. I too have lost all my interest in this samsar. We should follow the example of our revered mother and get rid of the bondage of birth and death. We should attain spiritual perfection and thus we should find a lasting solution to the problem of the cycle of birth and death". Kush said giving vent to his innate feelings. But his face was covered with the clouds of agitation.

"Will our father give his consent to our decision?"

"Consent? Most probably he will not give his consent in this situation. But on that account, can we remain in the samsar?"

Kush fell into deep thought on hearing Lav's words. Then Lav said.

"We have to pursue the path of Moksha; and a mountain of calamities has fallen upon us. In this time of adversity, instead of relying on others' opinions it is better to take our own decision. Our father who loves us greatly will never give his consent; and when he gets over his anguish caused by his brother's death; and when he regains his composure, he too will not remain in the samsar even for a moment. He will not



have any interest in the samsar. worldly delights, prosperity and splendour in the absence of Lakshman. This palace and this prosperity will only cause him anguish" Lav forecast the future of Shri Ramchandra in an impartial manner. He had this doubt and a truth lay concealed in it. The separation from Lakshman caused the greatest anguish to him and as soon as his deep attachment for Lakshman disappeared, he would surely renounce the samsar. In the absence of Lakshman, the samsar would appear fruitless and meaningless to him. Lav knew this truth very well. Therefore, suddenly a new idea arose in his mind.

"Kush! Let us suppose that our father will not consent to our becoming sadhus. In that case, should we remain in the samsar? Can we remain in the samsar? Please, think about this point deeply and even this is a truth that we are not disrespecting our father. We can never think of disrespecting our father, who is the greatest of men. Moreover, it is also a fact that in his present mental state, he will not give his consent. Therefore, the best thing is to place before him our decision and to go away. We shall abandon Ayodhya and pursue the path of *Samyam*, in order to obtain a lasting deliverance from the samsar.

Kush stood at the window of his palace. Lav also did the same thing. This window generally revealed to the beholder, the beauty and the magnificence of Ayodhya but on that day, it revealed the darkness of sorrow that had enveloped the city. It revealed the deep gloom and anguish that enveloped the city. Lav and Kush were silent and still but their minds were not. Their eyes were fixed on the city of Ayodhya but they were not observing the grosser and larger aspects of the city; on the contrary, they were probing its subtleties. Sometime passed thus. Lav stroked the shoulders of Kush and said in a serious voice.

"There lies in our souls a denser darkness than the darkness that we see enveloping the city. Our souls are full of the darkness of ignorance. In the darkness of ignorance, a jiva cannot see the truth about the world and naturally he develops attach-

ment for something that should be discarded and despises something which is beneficial. We should light the lamp of spiritual knowledge which alone can dispel the darkness of ignorance and brighten our souls", Kush heard all this silently. The words of Lav sounded pleasant and agreeable to him. Every word uttered by Lav seemed to be emerging from the depths of his consciousness. They were not merely words or sentences spoken out mechanically but rays of radiance that could awaken a spirit of renunciation in the listener. Nothing could impede the path chosen by the two brothers. Of course, Lav and Kush were married. They had Queens in their harem but they began to feel that wives family and relatives were but illusory images seen in a dream. They could not be impediments on their path; nor could they shake their determination. In this manner, the third night also passed.

Shri Ram did not take food or drink; did not take a bath; did not carry out any routine spiritual activity. He continued to keep holding Lakshman's body. Kausalya and the others were greatly worried. Vibhishan, Sugriv and the other friends of Shri Ram were agitated. One question kept arising in their minds, "What shall we do? How can we console Shri Ram? How can we make him realise the truth?"

Vibhishan and Sugriv experienced boundless worry. They had a great responsibility on their shoulders. They had an extraordinary attachment and love for Shri Ram. That attachment had continued through countless janmas. They also knew very well how Shri Ram continued to lament over the disaster that occurred to Lakshman in the war when Ravan released the divine weapon called *Amogavijaya* which rendered Lakshman unconscious. At that time Lakshman came back to life on account of Vishalya, who came there in time. In fact, Shri Ram had decided to enter fire along with Lakshman. So, they were worried that Shri Ram might commit some such unpleasant action. A man who is enslaved by attachments would not hesitate to do anything. At once, Lav and Kush went into the palace. They prostrated before him with filial devotion and sat near him. A few moments passed thus. There was silence in the Chamber. After a while, Lav said in a humble voice;

“Revered father! We have come to make an entreaty to you. We have been stunned by our uncle’s death. We fear this futile and fruitless samsar. We may die any moment. Therefore, human beings must be always spiritually aware and carry out endeavours to attain deliverance from this samsar; therefore, revered father! Kindly give your consent to our decision to renounce the samsar. We have decided to adopt the *Charitradharma* following the example of our revered mother and make our lives fruitful. We cannot live separated from our uncle. We are greatly grieved. The horrid nature of the samsar has filled us with fear and disgust for it.” Kush said endorsing Lav’s entreaty.

The two brothers stood up.

They prostrated before Shri Ram.

And then they went away from Ayodhya for good. They went away discarding the city of Ayodhya and all their attachments and infatuations. They developed a spirit of absolute detachment. Fortunately, they met in a forest a muni by name Amritagosh. They received the *Deeksha* from him and then they began carrying out spiritual austerities. Finally, having destroyed their karmas, they attained Nirvan.

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## CXVIII

### ATTACHMENT — INSANITY

Shri Ram swooned. Vibhishan and the other friends of Shri Ram were stupefied to see this.

Kausalya, Sumitra and the others were greatly agitated. The Queens of Lav and Kush and the other members of the royal family were stunned by this event. Everyone said the same thing, "What is this? What is this sudden decision to adopt the *Charitradharma*?" All were plunged in deep anguish. They could not give vent to their overpowering grief. Some thought thus! In such a situation as this, when Emperor Shri Ram is in deep grief and anguish, is it proper on the part of the sons to discard their father and to adopt the *Charitradharma*? Lav and Kush should not have done so".

Others thought, "Lakshman's dead body is lying in the palace. All are plunged in anguish. They have been shedding tears incessantly. Is it the time for adopting the *Sadhudharma*? How far is it proper on the part of Lav and Kush to discard all attachments and go away thus at such a time? What they have done is not proper".

Some others thought thus, "Oh! What a wonder! This is real renunciation. Those youngsters have realised and visualised the truth about Lakshman's sudden demise. They with their intellectual incisiveness have realised that life is transient and without a moment's delay, they have renounced the samsar. Blessed are the sons of Sita. Blessed in their devotion for the Paramatma! How full of the spirit of renunciation they are! They are like beautiful lotuses growing up from the dirty slime! The citizens of Ayodhya were stupefied by the

sudden demise of Lakshman and the sudden renunciation of samsar by Lav and Kush". All this was like a dream, the very thought of which filled them with a nameless fear. Shri Ram's extraordinary attachment for Lakshman and his consequent anguish had agitated the minds of the people. The ministers stunned by the events kept watching them in utter stupefaction. In such a situation, who could console the grief-stricken ones? All were plunged in grief. The events that had taken place in the royal family had filled everyone with anxiety and anguish.

How is this samsar and how are its ways? Even the family of Shri Ram, the greatest of men that ever lived in the tide of times was not free from vicissitudes. Even that family had to pass through sun and shade; joys and sorrows; elations and depressions. If we take a bird's eye view of the events that took place in Shri Ram's life, we find that his life was full of vicissitudes; ups and downs; joys and sorrows, conflicting with each other and confounding him.

After Shri Ram regained his consciousness, he began sobbing.

"Dear brother. Have I insulted you at any time? Why have you become so silent? You have never been angry with me thus any time. Because of your sudden silence, Lav and Kush discarded me forever and went away from me. Yet, you do not speak a single word. I do not know what sin I have committed that all have been reproving me thus. You have left me in the midstream of life and joining them all, you too have reproved me. You have slighted me".

Shri Ram began lamenting like an insane person talking incoherently. The anguish of all increased. Vibhishan, Sugriv, Shatrughna and the others gathered near Queen-mother Kausalya who had grown old and decrepit. Kausalya who was once the radiant queen of Ayodhya had faced many calamitous situations in her life and her face had grown bleak and blighted.

Shri Ram going away to the forests with Lakshman and Sita; King Dasharath's renunciation and death; Shri Ram's

abandonment of Sita; Lakshman's lamentations; Sita's action of adopting the *Samyamdharm* and to crown all Lakshman's sudden demise and Lav and Kush adopting the path of *Charitra-dharma* and now Shri Ram's insanity caused by excessive attachment — all these things had plunged her in deep anguish. She began to shudder with agony but she could not say anything.

Of course, even today, she was the supremely powerful woman in the vast empire of Ayodhya. She was the queen-mother but she had no joy; she had no peace of mind; she had no happiness. The whole universe might have deemed her a supremely happy woman. The world might have deemed her a supremely fortunate woman but how deep was her soul's agony. She had grown prematurely old on account of the successive separations from her nearest and dearest relatives.

When Vibhishan and the others saw her withered face closely, their eyes welled up with tears. After being silent for a while and composing himself a little, he said in a voice full of agitation.

“Revered mother; we must somehow or the other console Shri Ram and make him realise the truth that Lakshman is no more. What has happened cannot be altered and his condition is worsening day by day. He should make him realise that Lakshman is no more and that no power in this universe can alter this.”

Kausalya looked towards Vibhishan with eyes full of anguish. She knew very well that Vibhishan and the others were greatly agitated over Shri Ram's condition. She said in a weak voice.

“What you say is true. I am also deeply agitated over Shri Ram's condition but who can console him? Who can make him realise the truth? It is impossible to make him realise the truth. All of you together try to console him. He may see the truth” and the Queen-mother wiped her tears with the edge of her sari.

“Revered mother; Can't you console him and make him see the truth?”

"I ? No. Dear Sugriv; it is not possible for me to console him. As soon as I see him, my heart breaks in anguish. When I see his anguish, my voice becomes choked with grief. So. only you should console him", Kausalya said in an anguished voice.

Vibhishan glanced towards Sugriv and Shatrughna; made a decision in his mind and said in a serious tone. "Why should we not join together and make an appeal to Shri Ram ? We shall try to console him". But of course, Vibhishan found it difficult to give expression to his idea. He was doubtful of the success of his attempt. He knew very well that when a person is in anguish caused by attachments or hatred, nobody can console him and make him see the truth.

Yet Vibhishan, Sugriv and Shatrughna decided to make the attempt. This is one special feature of human nature. Though we know that a person cannot be consoled, we try to console him. If this is not attachment, what else is this ?

The three approached Shri Ram, Shri Ram had taken Lakshman's body into his lap and was caressing him. He looked towards Vibhishan and others. His eyes were full of anguish. He was in deep distress. He had been successful in sending to the abode of death, such mighty heroes as Ravan fighting against them but he was utterly incapable of making Lakshman regain his life. How helpless and powerless man is ?

"O you ocean of compassion ! Kindly have a little patience. You are a man of outstanding nobility. It is not proper for you thus to give way to anguish. Seeing your agony we are experiencing deep agitation. Dear Lord ! Please discard the dead body of Lakshman and issue orders for his funeral. Dear Lord ! Kindly realise that Lakshman has reached heaven".

Vibhishan made this humble entreaty to Shri Ram. Suddenly, his eyes welled up with tears. As soon as he heard Vibhishan say that Lakshman had reached heaven Shri Ram became furious. His face grew red with anger. He screamed aloud.

"Vibhishan, what did you say ? Have you become mad ? You wicked man ! Can't you see that Lakshman is still alive ?

If you want to perform a funeral, perform the funeral of your brother and your other relatives. All of you fall into the funeral fire and die". Shri Ram went into another palace carrying Lakshman's body on his shoulders.

Shri Ram's insane talk filled Vibhishan, Sugriv and Shatrughna with despair. They met in Shatrughna's palace. The ministers also were invited to the meeting. The Chief Citizens of Ayodhya and the state officials were also invited to the meeting. All gathered in Shatrughna's palace. All were in a state of gloom and anguish. All were grieved by Lakshman's untimely death. But Shri Ram's anguish and his attachment for Lakshman had filled them with greater grief. Even the administration of the Kingdom had grown loose.

"We tried our best to console Shri Ram and to make him realise the truth but he has not realised that Lakshman is no more. We are unable to do anything. No plan occurs to us. Darkness has spread everywhere. We are unable to find a way out of this calamitous situation. We cannot perform Lakshman's funeral until he discards Lakshman's body".

"What you say is true. Shri Ram's attachment for Lakshman is extraordinary and unbreakable. He cannot live even for a moment without Lakshman." The Chief Minister said endorsing the opinion of Shatrughna.

"But what can be done now ? The people of Ayodhya are full of sympathy for Shri Ramachandra and the members of the royal family", said the city-chief expressing sympathy for Shri Ram and the members of the royal family.

"It is useless to try to console Shri Ram. We have to act with discretion until he realises the truth that Lakshman is no more. I see no other way", said Vibhishan, looking towards the Chief Minister.

"What could be done in that situation ? What is the extent of man's power ? The condition of every jiva is determined by his Karmas. No one can change it. In such cases, after all efforts have been made, people should resign themselves to Destiny.



Only then can they find peace of mind. Vibhishan, Sugriv and the other heroes sat helpless while Shri Ram kept walking from one palace to the other carrying Lakshman's dead body.

The insanity of excessive attachment !

How deep; how pitiable and how heart-rending it is !

There appeared no sign of Shri Ram's recovering from insanity. He took Lakshman's dead body into the bathroom and give it a bath. After that, he smeared to the dead body various kinds of perfumes. He ordered his men to bring delicious food and to place it near Lakshman's body and like a mother feeding her child, he tried to feed Lakshman.

Sometimes, he took Lakshman's body into his lap and kissed his forehead with overflowing affection. Sometimes, he placed Lakshman's body on the bed and covered him with excellent blankets. Sometimes, he kept talking to Lakshman's dead body. He put questions to Lakshman and he himself answered them and sometimes, he stroked Lakshman's body with affection.

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Vibhishan, Sugriv and Shatrughna saw this insane behaviour of Shri Ram and were filled with deep grief. Sometimes, the tears streamed from their eyes and sometimes, even in their grief, they experienced a kind of delight when they saw Shri Ram's excessive affection for Lakshman and sometimes they were deeply agitated by the sight. No king could think of leaving Ayodhya since Shri Ram was in such a state of anguish. Vibhishan remained in Ayodhya. Sugriv also settled down in Ayodhya. Shatrughna gave up his idea of returning to Mathura and was engaged in rendering service day and night, to Shri Ram. Hanuman was spending his time in spiritual austerities. Bhamandal had died. Lav and Kush had been travelling on foot as mendicants.

Time was passing. Month after month passed.

About six months passed thus but no change appeared in Shri Ram's condition. He was continuing to behave in the same insane manner. The news of his insane behaviour spread

throughout Bharath. The news spread also throughout the Vidyadhar world. All those who heard it decided to visit Ayodhya.

Shri Ram was a *Charamshariri* (one who will not again be born in the samsar). He was going to attain *moksha* in that Janma. So, everyone was shocked and amazed by his tremendous attachment. But no one knew that such a deep attachment exists, between Baldev and Vasudev; that when one dies, the attachment continues for six months unbroken and unshaken. How *Moha* or infatuation made even a *Charamshariri* dance to its tunes! How it enslaved him! But it cannot prevent him from attaining *Moksha*.

This was a calamitous situation in Shri Ram's life. It was the decree of destiny that he must face it and pass through it.



## CXIX

### SHRI RAM'S AWAKENING

Samsar !!

It is an indisputable truth that the samsar is futile and perishable. In this samsar, one exploits another's weakness or helplessness. One derives benefit from another's agitation. This proverbial statement was true in this case also. Some Kings of the Rakshasa dynasty planned to exploit Shri Ram's helpless condition. Some Vidyadhar Kings also joined their conspiracy. They thought, "We should make the fullest use of this opportunity. Now the Kingdom of Ayodhya is in a state of anarchy since Shri Ram is neglecting his imperial duties. Now that Shri Ram is plunged in grief, there is no one to protect the Kingdom or to defend it. Lakshman is no more. Lav and Kush have adopted the *Sadhudharma* and Shri Ram has become insane. When such is the situation, why should we not at once invade Ayodhya and capture it? We cannot get a better opportunity than this to occupy Ayodhya."

Shri Ram had no enemies when he was able and active but now friends became foes. Foes who were pretending to be friends began to show themselves to be what they actually were. In this world, who can be without enemies? As long as a man is strong and capable, his enemies hesitate to reveal their true feelings but as soon as a man becomes weak and powerless, foes who were pretending to be friends soon reveal their true nature. Indrajit's sons and Sund's sons decided to invade Ayodhya and to kill Shri Ram and they gave commands to their armies to get ready for a war. A Vidyadhar King who was malicious also joined them.

The Vidyadhars are supreme masters of various kinds of powers. They are masters of extraordinary mesmeric powers. So, it would not take much time for their invading Ayodhya. Within a short time, the enemy armies surrounded Ayodhya. The people of Ayodhya never even dreamt that such a disaster would descend upon the city. They never thought that when the city was steeped in grief, an unexpected calamity would befall it but in this *samsar* every day unexpected and even inconceivable events occur. This is the nature of the *samsar*. The enemy armies arrived at Ayodhya in large numbers like vast clouds of locusts. The gate-keepers became careful and closed the main gates of the city. Some soldiers were posted on the fort to face the enemies who were planning to break into the fort.

The guards of the city at once ran to the palace. Shatrughna, Vibhishan and Sugriv were sitting there. The guards of the city said.

“May the King be victorious ! Dear Lord ! Last night when the day was about to break enemy armies arrived and laid a siege to the city of Ayodhya. We shut the main gates of the city and posted soldiers on the fort to guard it. It is not yet known, who the enemies are and with what purpose they have invaded Ayodhya.”

The three Kings were stupefied to hear this. Greatly incensed by the news, Shatrughna spoke in an angry voice;

“Have the enemies attacked Ayodhya now ? How is it possible evenwhile Shri Ram, the mighty hero is in Ayodhya ? Has such a thing happened ? How could it happen ? Who has the ill-luck of courting defeat and decimation ? Who could think of doing such a wicked thing ? Go and inform our commanders to make urgent preparations for the war and find out who the enemies are.”

The guards of the city returned. Shatrughna looked towards Vibhishan and Sugriv. They looked greatly agitated. “Who may be the enemy ? Who had the wickedness of planning to take

advantage of this situation, when Ayodhya is steeped in grief. But the enemies do not know that Ayodhya is not without defenders and that there are heroes who can safeguard the city."

"Oh ! The enemies do not probably know that Vibhishan the valiant is here and that Sugriv is here to render service to Shri Ram. Undoubtedly the enemies have been foolish in planning to take advantage of this situation when Shri Ram is plunged in grief." Sugriv said angrily. Vibhishan was lost in deep thought. Shatrughna looked towards him and said,

"Dear King ! What are you thinking of so deeply ?"

"Dear friends ! I am thinking of this point. Fortunately, we have got an excellent opportunity. Why should we not make use of it for our benefit ?"

"Dear King of Lanka ! I am unable to understand you. Please stop speaking in riddles. Tell us plainly what you mean so that we too may know your plan."

"Why should we not make use of this situation to free Shri Ram from his attachment for Lakshman ? We shall inform Shri Ram of the fact that enemies have invaded Ayodhya. At once, he will get over his attachment and will get ready for a war. He will at once pounce upon the enemies". Vibhishan suggested an intelligent and infallible plan.

"Vibhishan's plan is excellent. We shall approach Shri Ram and convey to him the news of this sudden invasion", Shatrughna said endorsing Vibhishan's plans enthusiastically. Just then, the Chief Minister came there. He was panting for breath. Pausing a little, he said : "Dear King ! What will happen now ? The enemy armies have surrounded the city of Ayodhya. People are filled with fear. I am unable to think of anything to avoid this disaster". The old Chief Minister was shaking with fear and agitation.

"Dear Chief Minister ! Be calm. When we three are here, why should you worry about anything ? Why should the people of the city fear anything when we are here to safeguard them ?

The city of Ayodhya is not defenceless. It is not without capable defenders. If they attack the city, we will decimate them. Do not worry". Shatrughna consoled the Chief Minister and sent him away. Then the three kings went to meet Shri Ram. Shri Ram was still in the same insane condition.

Shatrughna respectfully saluted him and said in a humble voice :

"Revered brother! A serious situation has arisen in Ayodhya. We have come to consult you on that matter."

"What is the matter? Has any physician arrived who can cure Lakshman of his malady?"

"O you greatest of men! No physician has come but enemies have arrived with vast armies and have surrounded the city. The main gate of the city has been closed. The citizens filled with fear are running helter-skelter".

At once, Shri Ram became furious. His face grew red with anger. Flames of anger flashed out of his eyes. His loud voice resounded everywhere.

"What did you say? Have the enemies surrounded Ayodhya? Do not they know that Ram is still alive? Brother Lakshman may be afflicted with a malady; but Ram is capable and healthy. Get ready my chariot and place in it my mighty bow, *Vajra-varth*. I will myself go and destroy the enemies".

At once, Shri Ram stood up. Looking at Lakshman's dead body for a few moments, he said in deep anguish.

"At least, now, you speak out. Dear Lakshman! Some enemies have invaded Ayodhya planning to take advantage of this calamitous situation. They have challenged me to a fight. Yet you are silent and still. Very well! Do as you like but I will not keep quiet. I will take you into the battle-field. When my bow sends a resounding noise; when there will be a clangour of swords; and when mighty weapons produce reverberating noises; and when the enemy soldiers cry aloud in agony, you

will wake up." Shri Ram set out to the battle-field carrying Lakshman's body on his shoulders.

The chariot was ready in the courtyard of the palace. Shri Ram sat in the chariot with the body of Lakshman in his lap. Sugriv was driving his chariot.

Shatrughna's chariot was proceeding on one side of Shri Ram and on the other side Vibhishan's chariot was proceeding. A vast army followed them.

The citizens of Ayodhya showered flowers on Shri Ram from balconies and roofs delighted with his decision to fight against the enemies; but they shed tears when they saw Lakshman's dead body. The chariot proceeded slowly and reached the main gate of the city.

Shri Ram gave his commands.

"Open the gate!"

As soon as the gate was opened, the chariot dashed out towards the battle-field like a lightning. The armies also followed the chariots.

The enemies saw Shri Ram and other heroes arriving with a vast army. They were standing ready for a fight. Shri Ram, pulled the string of *Vajravarith* and the sound sent shudders through the sky. The whole universe was stupefied by the tremendous noise.

When Jatayu who was in the heavenly world called Mahendra saw this by means of his *avadhijnan* he felt stupefied. He visualized Shri Ram standing in his chariot with Lakshman's dead body and making a tremendous noise by pulling the string of his bow. At once, Jatayu came down to earth with some other heavenly beings. When heavenly beings came out into the sky, the whole firmament became resplendent with their heavenly radiance. The enemies were greatly shocked and amazed to see this change in the atmosphere.

The heavenly beings saluted Shri Ram and said;

"Dear lord! You kindly return to your palace. We will fight against the enemies". Just then Vibhishan and Sugriv alighted from their chariots and came near Shri Ram. When the enemies saw Vibhishan they bowed their heads in shame and stood aside. As soon as Indrajit's son saw his grand-father he turned his head away in shame.

He did not know that heavenly beings had come to assist Shri Ram; and that Vibhishan and Sugriv were at Ayodhya; and that they would stand by Shri Ram.

In consequence, they decided not to wage a war; and ordered their soldiers to leave the battle-field. They sat in their airships and returned home, but their minds were torn with countless conflicts. They began to scrutinize their innerselves.

"Oh! What have we done? What a foolish thing we did in planning to fight against Shri Ram? And what was the purpose of our fighting? We had forgotten that Lakshman's funeral had not yet been performed. And invading Ayodhya? How mean we were in planning to take advantage of Shri Ram's insane condition! How wicked we were in making such a plan? Ah! We did not even think of our grand-father Vibhishan! How could our grand-father keep away from Shri Ram when he is in this condition? Naturally, he is staying at Ayodhya. We never thought of this. Ah! This samsar is strange in its ways. The Jivas in this samsar are always agitated by mundane desires and sensual cravings. They are always agitated by countless passions. Attachments and hatred fill the hearts of Jivas in this samsar. What would our grand father Vibhishan think of us? How can we face him now? When we saw him we were filled with a deep sense of shame. Oh! What a mean thing we did in invading Ayodhya!"

The sons of Indrajit and Sund did not return home. On their way they happened to meet a great Muni by name Ativeg. The princes who were profoundly repentant sought refuge at his feet and received the *Deeksha* from him. The Rakshas princes who set off with the purpose of conquering Ayodhya became Shramans and took the path of self-conquest.



What an amazing transformation ! What a profound repentance and what an excellent atonement !

\* \* \* \*

Shri Ram turned his chariot back but instead of going into the city, he stopped in the garden outside the city. The beauty of the garden fascinated him, and he began watching the glories and graces of the garden with joy and elation. There was a magnificent palace in the garden. He stayed there for some days.

Jatayu saw Lakshman's dead body. He also noticed Shri Ram's insanity and then he endeavoured to bring about a spiritual awakening in Shri Ram. He had an attachment for Shri Ram in his earlier life. Jatayu also was deeply agitated by Shri Ram's anguish and insane behaviour. At the same time, Vibhishan, Sugriv and Shatrughna entreated Jatayu to free Shri Ram from his attachment and insanity.

Jatayu promised to do his best and began his endeavours. This event took place one day. Shri Ram sat on the bank of a pool in the garden and was giving a bath to Lakshman's body. Just at that time, Jatayu put some manure on a rock and planted a lotus-creeper there.

Seeing this, Shri Ram said;

"O you fool ! What are you doing ? Can a lotus plant grow on a rock ? You are wasting your time in doing this futile job".

Jatayu went away but again he came back and began grinding sand apparently to get oil. Shri Ram said angrily : "Undoubtedly you are the greatest of fools in the world. How can you get oil by grinding sand ? Your efforts are bound to fail. Stop this stupid action". Jatayu made a third attempt. He began to water trees that had gone dry. Angered by this, Shri Ram said;

"What shall I say ? You are indeed an idiot. Can you ever make a dry tree put forth flowers and fruits by watering it ? What is the use of delivering a discourse to a stone ?"

Then Jatayu approached Shri Ram and said arching his eyebrows in an ironical smile.

“Ah! How intelligent you are! Knowing all this you are carrying about a dead body. Is it not sheer foolishness? You too discard this foolish attachment”.

Hearing the words of Jatayu, Shri Ram stared, at him and embraced Lakshman's dead body again and again. Shri Ram shouted angrily; “O you wicked fellow! Why do you say such inauspicious things? Get away from my sight. Do not try to deceive me by your tricky talk”. Jatayu was disappointed. He was greatly agitated by Shri Ram's insane condition but another heavenly being joined Jatayu.

Kritantavadan had adopted the *Charitradharma* and after his death in this world, he had taken birth in heaven. He visualized Shri Ram's condition by means of his extrasensory perception and he also saw that Jatayu was making and he at once came down to earth in order to bring about spiritual awakening in Shri Ram. After consulting Jatayu, he made a new plan.

Accordingly, Kritantavadan assumed the form of a human being and began wandering about in the garden carrying the dead body of a woman and lamenting loudly. Shri Ram also was wandering in the forest carrying Lakshman's dead body. One was carrying his dearest brother and the other was carrying the dead body of a woman. Shri Ram looked at Kritantavadan with unwinking eyes and said;

“O you pilgrim! Are you mad? Why are you carrying the dead body of a woman? Please realise that the woman is dead”.

“O you ignoble man! Do not say such inauspicious things. She is my dearest love. Why are you carrying about that dead body? If you can realise that my love is dead why don't you realise that your brother also is dead?”

“Am I carrying a dead body?”

“What else are you doing? You have been carrying the dead body for the last six months”. He placed the dead body of the woman on the ground and within a moment he assumed his original form and said in a humble voice.

“I am Kritantavadan. By virtue of my spiritual austerities, I attained existence in the heavenly world and this is Jatayu who is also a heavenly being”.

“Are you speaking the truth? Is my dear brother Lakshman really dead?”

“O you great man! Lakshman died several months ago.” Shri Ram heaved a deep sigh and placed Lakshman’s body on the ground. Vibhishan, Sugriv, Shatrughna and others came there. Lakshman’s body was cremated there with royal honours. The two heavenly beings returned to heaven.



## THE GREAT DEPARTURE

Shri Ram's insanity ended. Lakshman's dead body was cremated. All regained their peace of mind. The days of anguish and agitation ended. Vibhishan and other kings were relieved of their agitation and all regained their mental serenity. But Shri Ram's mental state had assumed an unexpected form. A tremendous transformation had taken place in him. Of course, his attachment and insanity had ended. His attachment for the samsar also ended. He realised that the samsar was meaningless and futile and in consequence, he turned his eyes inwards. His mental eyes opened. He began to contemplate on his soul with concentration. His soul seemed to say "O man! Deliver me from the bondage of Karmas. Make me pure and perfect".

As long as the bondage of Karmas is unbroken, man remains entangled in the confounding tangles of ignorance, infatuation worldly joys and sorrows. Karma is not an imaginary thing. It is a pudgal (an inert atom). The karma paramanu as long as it is a part of the soul causes various mental and physical activities and propensities. These Karmas are eight in number, namely :

- (1) Jnanavaran
- (2) Darshanavaran
- (3) Mohaniya
- (4) Antaraya
- (5) Nam
- (6) Gotra
- (7) Ayushya
- (8) Vedaniya.

It is these Karmas that bring about anger, pride, deception, avarice and other sinful propensities in the jivas. They bring about false values in the minds of people. They make jivas weep or laugh. They can make jivas experience pleasure or pain. They create in jivas fear and disgust. They also create

sensual desires and sensual cravings. Therefore, people should begin to destroy Karmas by destroying first the Mohaniya Karma. As soon as the Mohaniya Karma is destroyed, the other karmas become weak and powerless.

If man is determined he can destroy Mohaniya Karma. In order to destroy Mohaniya Karma, he must carry out spiritual endeavours to attain *Samyakjnan*, *Samyakdarshan* and *Samyak-charitra* (the right knowledge, the right faith and the right character). At the same time, there should be a convenient and conducive atmosphere to carry out those endeavours and in order to achieve those objectives human beings must renounce the samsar and adopt the *Charitradharma*. This is inevitable. Jivas can carry out endeavours to destroy Karmas only by adopting the *Charitradharma*. Therefore, Shri Ram decided to adopt the *Charitradharma*. When man develops total detachment for the samsar, this lofty aspiration arises in his mind.

Shri Ram at once sent for Shatrughna. Shatrughna came at once; saluted Shri Ram and stood near him. Shri Ram stroking his head affectionately said, "Dear brother! I have lost all interest in the samsar. I have no attachment for anything. Everything appears futile and pointless. Therefore, I wish to install you on the throne of Ayodhya and to adopt the *Sadhudharma*".

Shatrughna stood stupefied on hearing the words of Shri Ram. He found it difficult to say anything. He fell into deep thought.

"Dear Shatrughna! What are you thinking of so deeply? Why has your face become bleak and blighted. I will send for the Chief Minister and arrange your coronation and you have to accept this responsibility". Shri Ram said looking towards Shatrughna. Shatrughna stood silent. His eyes welled up with tears. He said in great agitation :

"Revered brother! Kindly do not say so, I do not desire power and prosperity; nor do I desire the throne of Ayodhya. When you are not here, what can I do? Kindly permit me to

remain at your feet. I too will adopt the *Sadhudharma* along with you. I cannot bear with brother Lakshman's death and with the separation from you. Therefore, kindly permit me to adopt the *Sadhudharma* along with you". Shatrughna's words shocked Shri Ram. He had not expected this reaction from him. Therefore, he was naturally shocked at his words. He kept thinking for a while. Then he realised "Shatrughna is right. Bharath has become a shraman. Lakshman is no more. Lav and Kush have adopted the *Sadhudharma* and are absorbed in spiritual austerities. I am also renouncing the samsar. When I go away from here, Shatrughna will not be happy in this palace and amidst this splendour and prosperity. This is a natural reaction. If he also desires to pursue the path of spiritual elevation, why should I stop him from doing so? Why should I place impediments on the path of his spiritual elevation?" Shri Ram's heart overflowed with compassion for Shatraughna so he said in a voice shaken with emotion.

"Dear brother! Your decision is commendable. I do not want to place any impediments on your path but we have to think of the kingdom of Ayodhya and the throne of Ayodhya".

"Dear brother! The throne of Ayodhya will not be vacant. We can install Anangdev, the son of Lavan, on the throne of Ayodhya and he is a worthy successor to the throne. He is worthy, capable and efficient. He is loved by the people. The members of the royal family also love him. Kindly permit me to remain at your holy feet."

While the two brothers were engaged in this conversation, Vibhishan and Sugriv arrived there. Shri Ram received them with honour. The two kings bowed to Shri Ram and sat down near him on the ground.

"Dear Lord! We hope you are well".

"Dear King of Lanka! In this samsar, nothing is permanent. No one can be happy forever. This life is full of vicissitudes. Joys and sorrows come in endless succession. Human beings are ground between these conflicting grind-stones. There-

fore, nobody can be really happy until his Karmas are fully destroyed. Therefore, I have decided to adopt the path of *Sadhudharma*."

Vibhishan and Sugriv stood stupefied by the words of Shri Ram. This was the first time, that they were visiting Shri Ram after Lakshman's funeral and now they heard Shri Ram declare his determination to pursue the path of *Charitradharma*. They fell into deep thought.

"I too have decided to receive the *Deeksha* along with my revered brother". Shatrughna said looking towards Vibhishan.

"What do you say? You too?"

"Yes. I have decided to remain at the feet of Shri Ram and to carry out spiritual austerities". Shatrughna said enthusiastically.

Vibhishan looked towards Sugriv. His eyes were full of anguish. Conflicting thoughts and feelings were discernible in his eyes. Looking towards Shri Ram, he said in a voice of anguish, "O you treasure-house of benevolence. I fully approve of your sublime decision but I feel rather agitated."

"What is the cause for your agitation?"

"Dear lord! I feel agitated when I think of the citizens of Ayodhya. How many calamities they had to experience within a short time! The empire of Ayodhya honours you and adores you not only as its emperor but as its only prop and support. The people had inordinate devotion for Lakshman but he passed away. Lav and Kush have gone away seeking their spiritual perfection and now you and Shatrughna are determined to renounce the *samsar* and to make the final exit from it. The people of the Kingdom will be greatly anguished by the separation from you all. I shudder to think of their anguish." Sugriv's eyes welled up with tears. His voice was choked with emotion. His face was filled with anguish.

"Dear Sugriv, unions and separations are natural in *samsar*. Those who experience delight in union, are anguished by

separations. How much was I grieved over my separation from Lakshman? How much anguish did I experience at the separation from Sita? I suffered inordinate anguish. I know that the people of Ayodhya will experience inordinate anguish, when I go away from Ayodhya. They will continue to grieve over that event for a long time but I am sure that the people of Ayodhya who adore the culture based on the principles of self-sacrifice and renunciation will certainly appreciate my decision and the throne also will not be vacant. Anangadev will be installed on the throne of Ayodhya”.

Sugriv wiped his tears with his upper cloth. Shri Ram's pleasant words filled his mind with serenity.

After being silent for a while, Shri Ram again said, “Dear Sugriv! When I visualize the endless samsar, I realise how full of changes it is. No one can remain here for ever. All things keep changing. Form and colour, splendour and prosperity, place and time, joys and sorrows, all keep changing. Kings change and the people also change. Towns and cities, gardens and forests and all things change. The whole universe is subject to the law of constant change. Therefore, whom can we love and whom can we hate?”

It seemed as though all the charm of the Muses flowered in Shri Ram's utterances. His philosophical utterances produced in Vibhishan and Sugriv lofty spiritual contemplations and their souls also experienced an awakening.

“O you greatest of men! Your words are absolutely true. Our attachments and hatred depend upon changeable objects. On account of them, jivas experience joys and sorrows”. Vibhishan said expressing his approval of Shri Ram's opinion. He looked towards Shri Ram. His face was shining with a new radiance.

“Oh King of Lanka! When attachments and hatred subside, the soul acquires awareness; and as soon as a jiva attains spiritual awareness, he begins to feel that the samsar is meaningless and futile; and he renounces the samsar. He becomes



detached. Then, he must renounce all pleasures and engage himself in the endeavours to attain spiritual perfection and to realize the pure form of the soul. That is what I am going to do. Till now, I carried out my duty of taking care of the people and now I must carry out endeavours for my spiritual progress and welfare. If I once cut off the bondages of Karma, I would have done everything desirable. After that there will not be any bondage of Karmas; and I need not fall into the tangles of attachments and hatred and I will be totally delivered from the cycle of birth and death.

Now, I realize that Sita, Bharath, Hanuman, Kritantvadan and others did the right thing in renouncing the samsar. They rendered their lives fruitful. It is an eternal truth that the human state of existence is the most suitable one to carry out spiritual austerities, and to attain *Moksha*".

Shri Ram's words expounding spiritual doctrines strengthened Shatrughna's spirit of renunciation. At the same time, there appeared the light of renunciation in the hearts of Vibhishan and Sugriv. In consequence, Vibhishan saluted Shri Ram and said.

"Oh great man ! I too will adopt the *Sadhudharma*; and will carry out spiritual austerities. I too do not desire to remain in the samsar."

"I too will join you and adopt the *Charitradharma*; and will try to attain spiritual welfare" Sugriv said overcome with joyful emotions. His face grew resplendent with the radiance of spirituality.

Shri Ram was supremely happy; he said in a voice full of affection.

"O King ! Your decision is quite proper".

"Revered brother ! Now we need not delay the coronation of Anangdev" said Shatrughna reminding Shri Ram of their plan.

"Yes, yes, you are right. I had totally forgotten it. We shall at once send for the Chief Minister and request him to make

the necessary arrangement for the coronation so that our path may be free from impediments.”

Just then Viradh came from Pathal Lanka. He bowed to Shri Ram respectfully and made polite enquiries. Shri Ram offered him an honourable seat. Just then the Chief Minister came and saluted Shri Ram. Shri Ram requested the Chief Minister to be seated. After being seated for a while the Chief Minister said in a polite manner.

“Dear Lord! I was coming to meet you when I received your message”.

“Dear Chief Minister! I have decided to renounce the Samsar and to adopt the path of *Sadhudharma*. I have already informed Shatrughna of my decision but he too is determined to follow me on the path of *Charitradharma*. Moreover Vibhishan and Sugriv also are determined to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. So, I have decided to install Anangadev, the son of Lavan on the throne of Ayodhya. I sent for you only to discuss this matter with you”.

The old Chief Minister shook nervously as he heard the words of Shri Ram. His face grew bleak and blighted and he said in a voice full of distress.

“O you ocean of kindness? What are you saying? Lakshman passed away. Lav and Kush have become Sadhus and now you too are determined to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. Will you go away leaving us in the lurch, helpless and defenceless?” At once, the Chief Minister’s eyes well up with tears and his voice was choked with grief.

“I have been a witness to the joys and sorrows of the royal family of Ayodhya from the time of King Dasharath. I have seen this family putting forth, flowers and fruits and attaining the highest level of prosperity. I am the sole witness to its splendour. And to-day? I am a mute and helpless witness to the adversities and calamities that are befalling it. Oh! I do not know what else I may have to witness. I do not know what the future of Ayodhya will be. No; dear lord! I cannot remain

here even for a moment; and I cannot bear with what has been happening. And since I am old and decrepit. I cannot even adopt the *Sadhudharma* like you. Well! Do what you deem proper. I will go away, far away to some lonely place in the countryside; and will spend the remainder of my life there meditating on the Paramatma. The Chief Minister could not say anything more. He began to shed tears. For a little while, there was silence. The atmosphere grew heavy. The heart of everyone grew heavy.

“Noble man! If you yourself give way to grief thus, what can I do? How can I console the others? You are a man of great wisdom. I can realize your agitation and anguish but you are not unaware of the tradition of the royal family of Ayodhya. Every King of the Ikshwaku dynasty renounced the worldly life to carry out endeavours to attain *Moksha*. The aim of the Kings of the Ikshwaku dynasty has been only to renounce the worldly life at the right time and thus to carry out the highest duty of the human state of existence for the attainment of *Moksha*. I am merely following their foot-steps. A separation after a union is a principle of nature. No one is an exception to this rule. Therefore, I have to take a firm decision to carry out endeavours to attain *Moksha*. I have spent a long time as a house-holder. Ah! I have been wandering through the samsar for countless janmas. How long shall I continue to wander thus? Now I want to put an end to this samsar and to break off all bondages and Anangdev who is renowned for his virtues and valour will rule over Ayodhya. I am confident that people will not have any problem under his rule. Therefore please arrange his coronation as soon as possible. Only you can carry out this task”.

In accordance with the commands of Shri Ram, the Chief Minister made arrangements for the coronation. At the same time, he also kept pondering over the endless sports of the Samsar. Shri Ram who had been plunged in grief for six months on account of the death of Lakshman was now speaking of renunciation. Shri Ram who made fun of Hanuman for adopting the *Sadhudharma* was now determined to adopt that path.

The Chief Minister consulted the court-priest and fixed an auspicious day for the coronation.

Vibhishan, Sugriv and Viradh approached Shri Ram and said humbly, "O you benevolent Lord! We too will go to our places., and inform our people of our decision to adopt the *Sadhudharma* so that others who desire to join us on our spiritual journey may do so; moreover we will also hand over our Kingdom to our sons.

"You are right. You go back to your countries and announce this, "Shri Ram is going to adopt the *Samyamdharm*a and those who want to follow him may go to Ayodhya". And dear Shatrughna you too make this announcement in Mathura and Ayodhya".

Shatrughna sent his officers to make the announcement in Ayodhya and Mathura. The news that Vibhishan, Sugriv, Viradh, Shatrughna and the other kings were also adopting the *Sadhudharma* spread like wildfire throughout Ayodhya. In consequence the leading citizens of Ayodhya called on Shri Ram. The Chief of them saluted Shri Ram and said.

"Dear Lord! We came to know that you and Shatrughna are going to adopt the *Charitradharma*".

"That is true. I have lost interest in the Samsar and now there is only one supreme endeavour that I have to carry out and I wish to carry out that endeavour and render my life fruitful. But you need not worry. I have already issued orders for the coronation of Anangdev as the King of Ayodhya. He is indeed a very capable and valiant person. He will competently rule over the country".

"But dear Lord, you can wait for sometime. Just now the people of the Kingdom have passed through a disaster. And now if you go away from us it will be another disaster".

Noble man! Now I cannot delay even for a moment. I have no interest now in worldly life. My soul has been calling me to think of it. A new spiritual awareness has appeared in me and I am determined to realise the pure form of my soul. Kindly

send me on the path of spiritual elevation with joy and enthusiasm. Unions and separations and attachment and hatred are natural in the Samsar. In the samsar the loving ones become separated. Sometimes attachments and amity go beyond limits. Sometimes there arise floods of attachment and hatred. Unions end in separations. Therefore vows have to be taken and carried out to discard the Samsar. But man has no control over circumstances. Unions and separations do not take place according to his desires because they are controlled by Karmas. Those who fall into the snares of attachment and unions have to experience anguish. This is inevitable”.

The leaders of the city were greatly astonished and delighted to hear the words of Shri Ram expressing his spirit of renunciation. His words delighted them like sweet and soft melodies. They forgot themselves enraptured by his words.

“Vibhishan, Sugriv, Viradh and many others are joining me on the path of *Sadhudharma*.”

“Dear Lord ! I have an entreaty to make” said a shravak by name Arhatdas standing up.

“What is it ?”

“Dear lord ! A great Muni by name, Shri Suvrat belonging to the order of Bhagwan Munisuvratswami, has been travelling on foot in the vicinity of Ayodhya. He is a man of extraordinary self-discipline and the very image of enlightenment and compassion. It will be very good if you were to receive the *Deeksha* from him.

“Dear Arhad ! You have greatly delighted me by giving me this auspicious news. Please meet him and entreat him to be here for sometime. After Vibhishan and the others come, we shall meet him.”

The leading citizens saluted Shri Ram and took leave of him. Then Shri Ram after his routine activities, went to his chamber and slept for sometime.

A tremendous change appeared in Ayodhya and in the sky-high mansions in the city.

Anangdev was taken aback when he heard that he would be crowned King and that Shri Ram was renouncing the *samsar*. He at once went to meet Shri Ram, in his chamber. Shri Ram was yet asleep. So, he began walking to and fro in the balcony of the palace.

Anangdev was just then stepping on the threshold of youth. He possessed a pleasing face and he was generally reticent. He had inherited the handsomeness and the attractive features of Lavan. He had heard from Lakshman many thrilling stories about the war against Lanka. From Lav. he had heard about the valiant war. he and Kush had fought against Shri Ram and Lakshman. He had heard the story of Sita's fire-ordeal. He himself had witnessed the death of Lakshman and had also been a witness to the event of Lav and Kush adopting the *Sadhudharma*. Therefore, he had developed a high regard for the *Charitradharma*.

As soon as Shri Ram woke up, he approached, bowed to him and stood near him. Shri Ram embraced him and blessed him. Then Shri Ram said to Anangdev.

"Dear Child! I hope you are well".

"Yes, revered grand-father! By your blessings".

"The Chief Minister might have told you that we are going to instal you on the throne of Ayodhya".

"I also heard that you and Shatrughna are adopting the *Sadhudharma*." said Anangdev looking towards Shri Ram.

"Anang! You know very well that life in this world is meaningless to me without Lakshman. Therefore, I have decided to pursue the path of spiritual perfection. Now, I cannot take delight in the life of pleasures led in palaces. I will derive great peace and felicity from the solitudes of forests and valleys. I have no sensual desires and I now desire the supreme peace and felicity. You will have to take care of the people with great ability and caution". Anang heard Shri Ram's words silently. He did not show any reaction. He felt that Shri Ram's decision was quite proper. He knew very well that ruling over the

country was an extremely hard task but he also knew that preparations were going on for his coronation.

On an auspicious day, Anangdev was crowned King of Ayodhya. Within a short time, Anangdev's sway extended over the entire empire.

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The great Muni Suvrat was staying in a garden outside the city of Ayodhya with his disciples. The *Deeksha* ceremony had begun in Ayodhya. The city was teeming with visitors who had come from all over the empire. The messengers who had gone to various Kingdoms returned and said to Shri Ram humbly.

"O you greatest of men! Travelling through the sky, we visited nearly one thousand cities and conveyed your message to the Kings of those cities. Everyone who heard your message was taken aback and said, "What did you say? Has Shri Ram decided to adopt *Sadhudharma*?" Not only the Kings, the princes and the queens also were taken aback to hear the message. They all said "If Shri Ram himself has decided to adopt the *Sadhudharma*, why should we remain in *samsar*? What profit do we get by leading this wordly, existence? We have experienced enough worldly happiness and delights. Yet, we have not tasted satisfaction. We get real satisfaction only when we get spiritual felicity". Saying this many people decided to adopt the *Sadhudharma*. They will reach Ayodhya within a short time and receive *Deeksha* along with you. Moreover, they have sent messages to their friends to join them on their path they are choosing. Therefore, thousands of kings and queens will renounce the *samsar* along with you and pursue the path of spiritual elevation".

Shri Ram was delighted to hear this. He said :

"Indeed, you have brought very happy news. I feel greatly delighted to hear this".

Just then the Chief Minister came and said.

"May the King be victorious! We have received the news that a great *Tapasvini* by name *Shrimati* has arrived at Ayodhya

accompanied by her disciples. She is said to be the embodiment of the spirit of total renunciation”.

“Can there be happier news than this? I hope you have made proper arrangements for their stay”.

“Yes, my lord. All arrangements have been made”.

“How full of the spirit of renunciation, were people in those days! When countless Kings and Queens were ready to renounce their worldly splendour and delights and were intent upon, spending their lives in spiritual austerities. Naturally, the people of the time were also full of the spirit of self-sacrifice. How splendid were those times!

Shri Ram, Shatrughna, Sugriv, Viradh and thousands of Kings and Queens gave gifts of food, clothing and money to the deserving in a generous manner.

Sixteen thousand Kings!

Thirty seven thousand Queens!

The *Deeksha* ceremony was arranged on a grand scale. Divine beings showered flowers upon them. To the accompaniment of sweet music, thousands of Kings and Queens set out in a procession. Many people also decided to join them on the path of spiritual elevation. Shri Ram and sixteen thousand Kings received *Deeksha* from Suvrat Acharya. Thirty seven thousand Queens were initiated into the *Sadhudharma* by Sadhvi Shrimati. Joy and jubilation filled the atmosphere.

The *Deeksha* ceremony was celebrated with all grandeur and eclat.

Anangdev the King of Ayodhya bade farwell to Muni Rambhadra and the others.

Sadhvi Shrimati also went away with her disciples.

Within the twinkling of an eye, Ayodhya was desolate. The magnificent mansions of Ayodhya were desolate. Enjoyments and entertainments, music and dances, celebrations and jubiliations ceased. Is it ever possible to imagine the condition of Ayodhya in the absence of Shri Ram?



## KING PRATINANDI'S AWAKENING

A transformation in life ! The life spent in the scrutiny of the inner soul !

The life spent in the endeavours to attain inner felicity after renouncing all the joys and pleasures; and all the splendours of the external, physical world ! Shri Ram undertook such a hard and austere life.

Causing violence to jivas; speaking falsehood; stealing; sensuality and attachment — these sinful actions should not be committed by body, mind and voice. We should not encourage others to commit those sins; and if anyone commits them, they should not be countenanced or approved. If one follows these principles, one will be totally free from agitation and anguish. One would not experience agony; and one would be free from intoxication.

What a wholesome life free from infatuation ! Shri Ram adopted this kind of life. Moving about with a bowed head; not speaking a single word without thinking deeply; leading the life of a mendicant depending on *Bhiksha* (food obtained from the houses of noble people); and being extremely cautious in one's movements so that no jiva is hurt or harmed — these ways were adopted by him. No one compelled him to observe these principles; nor was there any coercion or pressure. They were not also adopted in a mood of excitement. Shri Ramchandra surrendered his life at the feet of his spiritual head.

He totally discarded his attachment for the body; and began carrying out severe spiritual austerities with an absolute concentration. He engaged his body and mind in spiritual auste-

rities and became deeply absorbed in the endeavours to attain self-realization. He began acquiring scriptural knowledge with an incisive intellect. As the mists covering his mind disappeared it began to shine out in all its original splendour. His awakened mind assisted him in his endeavour to attain enlightenment. After having stayed at the feet of his spiritual head for sixty years, he acquired an extraordinary enlightenment.

By means of the pursuit of knowledge, he attained extraordinary spiritual powers. He became totally free from all external impediments, fears, obstacles and agonies.

By fasting for a long time, he attained a victory over hunger and thirst. Walking in the scorching sun, he developed the power of putting up with bodily discomforts. He disciplined his body by carrying out *Tapas* in biting cold. Walking about in wild areas alone, he lost all fear of wild beasts. In order to carry out lofty spiritual endeavours the body has to be disciplined thus.

Once, Shri Ramchandra sat near his spiritual head; and said :

“Oh you treasure-house of compassion ! If you permit me, I wish to carry out spiritual endeavours alone, in solitude in some mountains or caves away from the din and disturbances of this dreary world”.

“Oh ! You sublime Man ! You possess that ability. You may do so.” He bestowed his blessings upon him. Shri Ramchandra, having thus obtained the consent of his Gurudev; and having sought the forgiveness of the other Munis set off towards wild forests and mountains with the determination of carrying out extraordinary spiritual endeavours”.

A wild and dreadful forest ! The area was thorny, flinty and stony. Shri Ramachandra kept fearlessly walking in that area. He kept wandering thus with the only aim of attaining spiritual perfection. He had no other desires; no other ambitions and no other aspirations. After travelling a long distance, he reached a valley among high mountains. He went into a cave; and stood on a clean stone.

He carried out contemplations on the 'Dharma' and on the soul. He did not think of anything else.

He meditated on lofty 'Tatvas'; and contemplated on the 'Karmas' arising from attachments and hatred; on the nature of the universe; and on the severe consequences of false faith, vowlessness and passions. He was absorbed deeply in these contemplations.

Hours passed. The darkness of the night enveloped the earth; and established its sway. The night was silent. Everywhere silence and stillness reigned supreme. Shri Ramachandra's meditation was still in its early phases. Just then, in the midnight, he attained *Avadhijan* (Extrasensory perception). By means of his *Avadhijan*, he saw directly the entire universe and the fourteen worlds.

*Avadhijan* enables a person to see thus.

By means of that power, the soul can see the whole universe.

The 'Karmas' that had enveloped his power of *Avadhijan* were burnt to ashes by the power of his tremendous meditation and there arose in his soul, the light of supreme knowledge. Within a moment, Shri Ramachandra became a Maharshi possessing the power of *Avadhijan*. In the light of this knowledge, he visualized all the 'Poorvajanmas' of himself and of Lakshman. The Jiva can visualize not only the past janmas but also the future janmas, when he attains *Avadhijan*. Accordingly, Shri Ramachandra saw his earlier janmas and fell into deep thought. "In one of my earlier janmas, I was Dhan Dutt and Lakshman was my younger brother Vasu Dutt. He died in the same manner in that janma also. He died without carrying out sublime contemplations and even in this janma, he died without this preparation for his spiritual journey. The span of his life extending to twelve thousand years ended. What could the gods do? How were the gods to blame? We have to experience the fruits of our actions. He has experienced the fruits of his Karmas."

The jivas in this samsar have to experience the fruits of their Karmas thus. Oh! The divine beings came down to earth only to test the strength of our attachment but Lakshman died and he has gone to Hell.”

Shri Ramabhadra's spirit of renunciation grew severe and austere.

The events of the Samsar which a jiva visualizes after he becomes enlightened surely intensify his spirit of renunciation. The jiva visualizing the effects of Karmas discards all its attachments.

“Oh! this is the heart-rending nature of the samsar. Even a Vasudev has to rot in hell. When that is so, what is the meaning of samsar and its pleasure and what is the purpose of this samsar? Enough of this samsar and all its pleasures! Instead of being steeped in this morass, I should carry out endeavours to attain deliverance from this samsar.”

The great muni's soul was determined to attain deliverance and in consequence he became deeply absorbed in severe spiritual austerities in mountain caves, in the midst of wild forests. He began the austerity of fasting. He fasted for two days and on the third day he ate food. This was his routine.

Once, he happened to visit a city called Syandanasthal.

The great sage Shri Ramabhadra! He seemed to be the moon descending to earth.

He possessed extraordinary tenderness, and his face looked splendid. It was tremendously fascinating and was resplendent with the radiance of spiritual excellence. The news of Shri Ramabhadra's visit to the city spread throughout the city. The people of the city swayed with delight when they saw him. Thousands of people thronged to see him. They saluted him and carried out a celebration to honour him. At every door, men and women stood holding in their hands plates full of delicious dishes.

Elated by the joy and jubilation of the people, the chief elephant broke loose and began dancing, putting up its ears and trunk. It began to trumpet aloud. The whole city was filled with joy and elation.

But Shri Ramabhadra did not like such honour or such delicious dishes. He went away from those who held such food in plates.

He needed only plain food devoid of any delicious taste. Who would give him such food? Where could he get such food? He went away from every door without receiving any food.

He approached the palace.

King Prathinandi, greatly elated, saluted the feet of Shri Ramabhadra and offered him heartfelt devotion.

All in the palace had already eaten food. The remaining food lay in vessels. The king offered Shri Ramabhadra that food and Shri Ramabhadra was supremely satisfied with that offering and received it. The divine beings in heaven, by means of their *Avadhijnan* watched this event. Soon after Shri Ram received food, they caused a shower of gold flowers upon him.

The people of the city were greatly delighted to hear about this event. The king and the people entreated him to stay there but he did not agree to stay there. He was not willing to stay in a city. So, he could not comply with the request of the people and the King.

He set off towards the forest. A terrible commotion arose in his mind as he proceeded towards the forest. "What a tumultuous commotion arose in the city on account of my visit! What a large mass of people gathered to see me!"

In consequence, he made a determination with a firm and pure mind.

"If I get food in the forest I will carry out the completion ceremony, otherwise, I will continue to fast but I will never go to the city".

How full of detachment was he ! He had no attachment for his body. A man who is full of the spirit of renunciation becomes totally detached from the body. Shri Rambhadra decided to stay away from the countless devotees in the city, because the crowds of people began to disturb his spiritual concentration. Their presence seemed to sting his soul. When a man has renounced the samsar and is concentrating on his spiritual development the world seems meaningless and fruitless. The mahamuni Ramachandra had to attain deliverance from his Karmas. He had to attain victory over attachments, and hatred, so, he decided to stay in the forest and he became absorbed in meditation there. Freeing himself from all kinds of thoughts and reflections, he became absolutely absorbed in the Parambrahma. When a man has no attachment for the body, he experiences no aberrations in his mind.

This event occurred one day. King Prathinandi of the city of Syandansthal went to that forest hunting accompanied by his soldiers. The horse he was riding had been excellently trained. In fact, it had been trained to act contrary to the wishes of its rider. So, it began galloping in a direction exactly opposite to his destination. When he tried to stop it, it increased its speed.

He reached a lake by name Nandanpunya. The horse's feet sank into the rubbish on the banks of the lake.

King Prathinandi fell into deep agitation. His worry knew no bounds. Just then, his soldiers came up. They dragged the horse out of the rubbish. All were greatly tired and so they decided to rest on the bank of the lake.

Accordingly, the soldiers put up a tent there. They were engaged in preparing food. King Prathinandi bathed in the lake and then ate food with his companions. All enjoyed the dinner in the forest area.

But King Prathinandi did not know that even Shri Ramachandra was staying in the same forest. The whole forest had become hallowed by his spiritual austerities.

Moreover, it was not an ordinary day. It was the day on which Shri Ramachandra would end his fast. By means of his

extrasensory perception, he found out that the King and the soldiers were there. Therefore, at the proper time, he went there to obtain food. King Prathinandi was greatly delighted to see Shri Ramabhadra in that forest area. He welcomed Shri Ramabhadra with great honour and saluted him. Then he said, "Oh you compassionate one ! Kindly receive *Bhiksha* from me, and bestow your blessings upon us". All had eaten food. Therefore the king had to give only the remaining food and Shri Ramabhadra also desired only such food. It was an excellent coincidence. The King attained an extraordinary benefaction and Shri Ramachandra obtained food in accordance with his wish.

As soon as Shri Rambhadra received the food, heavenly beings caused a splendid shower of radiant gems. The soldiers were stupefied to see the gems scattered on the bank. Greatly delighted at what had happened, the king said to the soldiers :

"All this is the result of the efficacy of Shri Rambhadra's extraordinary merit. The Devendra himself and all divine beings render honour to Shri Ram." Therefore make your lives fruitful by seeing him." Accordingly, all the members of the royal family and the soldiers saw Shri Ram; saluted Shri Ram and experienced great joy and serenity.

"Oh, you treasure-house of benevolence ! Kindly bless us by delivering a discourse." King Pratinandi said in a humble voice.

Shri Ramachandra sat upon a stone on the bank of the lake. King Pratinandi, his soldiers and companions sat on the ground. Shri Ram began delivering a discourse, in a resounding voice.

"O ! King ! Dharma begins with faith. Every Jiva must have an absolute faith in the supreme One, in the spiritual head and in the noble Dharma. Paramatma is the name given to the soul that has conquered attachments and hatred. The noble spiritual head provides spiritual guidance to a man who always carries out endeavours to attain a victory over attachments and hatred and who leads his life in accordance with the cammands of the lord and who carries out the relevant vows. Only such

a spiritual head is noble. Dharma means the codes of conduct based on compassion and non-violence and the other principles expounded by the Paramatma. Jivas must have a firm faith in three *tatvas*.

O King anyone leading the life of a householder can undertake the following twelve vows.

- (1) One should not cause pain and violence to moving jivas. One should have compassion even for inert jivas.
- (2) One should not utter falsehood.
- (3) One should not steal.
- (4) One should be satisfied with one's own partner and should not seek sensual pleasures from others.
- (5) One should place a limit on one's worldly possessions.
- (6) One should not move beyond a certain limit in the four directions and upwards or downwards.
- (7) One should lead one's life placing a limit on the objects relating to worldly enjoyments.
- (8) One should not carry out any kind of business or occupation which is fruitless, wasteful and very sinful.
- (9) One should take a vow to carry out the Samayik and should carry it out for 48 minutes every day.
- (10) In order to remember the vows one has taken, one should carry out 10 samayiks, with equanimity on a day once a year.
- (11) One should undertake the 'Poushad Vrat'. In other words, one should fast; one should discard decorative ornaments and garments; one should observe celibacy and one should discard one's occupations on festival days.
- (12) One should take food only after giving 'Bhiksha' (food) to 'Sadhus'.



Thus, the enlightened muni explained to King Prathinandi, the twelve great vows of a 'Shravak' the breaches connected with them; the precautions to be taken and all the secrets relating to those vows in a detailed manner. The king was greatly delighted to hear this. He received the twelve great vows; he listened to Shri Ram's discourse and experienced great happiness. The king and the other members of the family saluted the great muni. Shri Rambhadra bestowed his blessings upon all and went away into the forest.

King Prathinandi praised his good fortune and returned to his city with his heart overflowing with happiness.

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## CXXII

### SITENDRA

Shri Rambhadra remained in that forest. In that desolate forest, there were countless animals and birds always moving about. Sometimes, they stood around him in great devotion and kept looking at him with fixed eyes. They spread their wings in great elation and engaged themselves in amusing sports before him; leaped about joyfully and went away. Birds singing melodiously flew over him beating their beautiful wings. The gods and goddesses presiding over the forest appeared before him; bowed to him, glorified him and disappeared. Wild lions, tigers and elephants approached him issuing loud cries of joy and jubilation and then moved away from him but Shri Rambhadra remained absorbed in deep meditation. Sometimes, he fasted for one month; sometimes for two months and sometimes for three months and sometimes he fasted for four months and carried out extraordinary spiritual austerities. He was endeavouring to destroy his Karmas as early as possible. He was absorbed in spiritual austerities. Not only that; from time to time he assumed different postures to carry out meditation.

Sometimes, he sat in the posture called *Paryankasan* and sometimes in the *Uthkatikasan* and carried out meditation. Sometimes, he stood on one foot and with hands uplifted towards the sun and looking towards the sun, he carried out meditation. Sometimes, he stood on his toes and carried out meditation and sometimes for days and nights, he stood on his heels and meditated.

On account of these spiritual endeavours and psycho-physical activities, he achieved an absolute victory over all his

actions and propensities. He began the endeavour to root out all his Karmas by means of such austerities and meditations.

After having carried out meditation thus for a long time, he proceeded towards a rock named Kotishila. That was the rock which once Lakshman had lifted and placed on his shoulders to prove that he was Vasudev.

Shri Ramabhadra began to carry out meditation on Kotishila.

Absolute detachment! This was what he achieved. He became completely detached from the external world. He attained total deliverance from all attachments and hatred.

Progressing thus step by step, he attained a lofty level of *Dharmadhyan*.

Then, he began to carry out *Shukladhyan*. He began a meditation called 'PRITHAKTA - VITARKA - SAVICHAR'. He began to contemplate on all things from the soul to the smallest atomic particle in this universe. He contemplated with a deep concentration on the scriptures especially on the fourteenth *poorva*. With a pure soul, he began to carry out an inward journey and to carry out deep contemplations on the meaning of words, the meaning of sounds and on the meaning of yogas. He contemplated on the various *dravyas* (substances), *gunas* (attributes) and *paryayas* (modifications).

While Shri Rambhadra was thus progressing in his spiritual endeavours, in the twelfth heaven a new event was taking place.

Sita! Sita carried out the *Charitradharma* with great austerity and after her death in this world, she took birth in the twelfth heaven as Devendra. Sita the empress of the vast empire of Ayodhya and the dear wife of Shri Ramachandra took birth as Sitendra in the twelfth heaven.

Divine beings possess the power of extrasensory perception. In consequence, they can visualise all the events taking place in the mortal world but of course, they have to exercise their

extrasensory perception. All of a sudden, Sitendra remembered Shri Ram. Sitendra began to think : "Where is Ram ? How is he ?" Out of this curiosity Sitendra exercised his extrasensory perception and visualized Shri Ram.

Shri Ram was not in the magnificent palace of Ayodhya but he sat on Kothishila absorbed in meditation and experiencing spiritual felicity. Sitendra was shocked to see this sight. With great surprise he said, "My dear Ram also has adopted the *Charitradharma*. Lakshman is no more. My sons Lav and Kush have adopted the path of *Charitradharma*. Shri Ram and Shatrughna have adopted the *Charitradharma*. Excellent ! Their lives have become fruitful".

The events that had occurred in Ayodhya appeared before Sitendra one by one like pictures. Then he concentrated his attention on Shri Ram. The old attachment for Shri Ram appeared again in his heart. Though, Sita had taken birth as a heavenly being her old memories of her earlier janma had not disappeared. On seeing Shri Ram, Sitendra experienced the old attachment again. He thought, "Shri Ram has risen above *Dharmadhyam* and has entered *Shukladhyam*. If he achieves success in this meditation, he will soon become a *Vitrag* and attain *moksha*. When such is the case, I will not be able to meet him again". Sitendra began to shake at the very thought of the separation from Shri Ram.

"Shri Ram must come here. Only then will he become a celestial companion to me and only then will I be able to share his love and enjoy his company for a long time but he should come here. I must disturb his *Shukladhyam*. I must impede his meditation".

How dreadful is attachment !

How full of distortions is infatuation ! Sita had renounced the samsar and had adopted the *Charitradharma*. She had carried out pure *Charitradharma*. She had broken off all her attachments for the samsar. She had carried out extraordinary austerities and meditation. Yet in a corner of her heart, her

attachment for Shri Ram remained intact. Her extraordinary austerities had not rooted out her attachment for Shri Ram. Her attachments continued in her even after a total transformation took place in her life and in her body.

This is the tyranny of attachments. This is the mockery of infatuations. In consequence, Sitendra decided to disturb the meditation of Shri Rambhadra. He decided to use some convenient impediments to disturb his meditation.

Accordingly, Sitendra went to Kothishila with a number of divine beings. He saw Shri Ram absorbed in meditation. He observed the desolate, dry and the barren area extending to great distances. He did not like the area.

Since he was a Devendra he possessed many magical and supernatural powers.

It was the beginning of the month of Magh. In a moment, Sitendra changed the wilderness into a heavenly garden. The whole area looked fascinating with green gardens and smiling fields. Cool breezes blew; and sinuous streams began to flow with a soft inland melody. The atmosphere reminded one of Nandanvan the heavenly garden.

Cuckoos began singing sweetly; and various birds also began twittering filling the air with musical sounds. Butterflies and bees of various glorious colours began flying over the area filling the air with their melodious tunes. Various flowers like the Champak, the bakula and jasmynes began bloomnig everywhere. Incense-bearing breezes blowing from the Malaya mountain filled the air with fragrance.

The god of love himself seemed to have descended to earth. Sitendra changed his form. It was as if Sita had walked straight from the *Swayamvar* hall of Mithila. She looked fascinating decked with colourful garments and splendid jewels. Several other angels also assumed human forms and appeared there. Accompanied by those damsels Sita the very image of beauty and charm moved slowly towards the Kothishila. She saluted Shri Ram who was absorbed in meditation and said :

“O Lord of my life ! My dearest lord, O lord of my heart ! Kindly open your eyes and look at me. I have come..... I am your dearest queen..... Your beloved wife. O Lord ! I have been experiencing anguish for a long time on account of the separation from you. Kindly accept your Sita. Receive her. I cannot live even for a moment without you.

Dear lord ! I committed an unpardonable blunder at that time. On account of my false pride I discarded you and adopted the path of *Charitradharma*. But later I repented my action. My repentance knew no bounds. In the game of life I lost everything and I kept shedding tears day and night. I have been spending every moment of my life in thinking of you and so I have come to meet you today. Even now it is not too late to mend matters. Kindly pardon me and receive me back.

“Do you see these Vidyadhar damsels who are with me ? They too gave me the suggestion. “Give up your *Diksha* and be a Queen as before. By your commands we too shall be Queens of Shri Ram”. Dear Lord. Acting upon their suggestion I discarded my *Deeksha* and I have returned to your holy feet and therefore do not disappoint me”.

But Sitendra's appeals and entreaties had no effect on Shri Ram. He sat deeply absorbed in '*Shukladhyan*' (Sublime contemplation) and was destroying his Karmas one by one.

Soon Sita accompanied by the Vidyadhar damsels began dancing on the Kothishila. It was a celestial dance absolutely captivating. The dance was accompanied with melodious songs. The dance and the music exercised a mesmeric impact, on the wild animals and birds in the forest. They thronged around Kothishila and began watching the performance spell-bound.

But Shri Ramachandra did not at all show any reaction. How could the dance or the music have any impact on him ? He did not see the dance nor did he hear the music since his senses and his intellect were absolutely absorbed in meditation.

If a Jiva engages all his senses, his mind and his intellect in a meditation on the supreme reality with an absolute con-

centration he will be totally unaware of the events taking place outside around him. Shri Ramchandra had been carrying out such a meditation. In the meditation called *Shukladhyan* the soul contemplates on itself, and in that state the intellect and the senses are totally annulled.

Sitendra was absorbed in dancing using all his supernatural powers and potentialities. Thus the day passed and the night began. As the night advanced the dances and the songs also gained greater and greater momentum. They began to dance in total self-forgetfulness. The third phase of the night began and ended and the fourth phase began. Shri Rambhadra entered a higher phase of *Shukladhyan* and with the fire of meditation he was destroying all harmful Karmas. He was destroying all the bondages of Karmas.

In consequence Shri Ram attained *Kevaljnan* the supreme knowledge and he became a *Kevaljmani*.



\* \* \* \*

## CXXIII

### THE ATTAINMENT OF MOKSHA

Within the twinkling of an eye, Shri Ram became a *vitrag* having conquered his attachments and hatred.

He was totally free from all attachments, hatred and infatuation and illusion.

He became omniscient; and he attained the status of a 'Parambrahma'.

He was completely free from all kinds of ignorance.

Within a moment, he could directly see the whole universe. Extraordinary knowledge of the soul manifested itself. As soon as one becomes an omniscient, one automatically becomes a *Vitrag*. As long as one is enveloped in ignorance, one continues to experience the agitating conflict of attachment and hatred.

When the soul becomes omniscient, it becomes a *Vitrag*; and becomes totally free from the cycle of birth and death. There is no question of rebirth again. The problem of being born again and assuming a body ends. The omniscient soul attains 'nirvan' and such a soul is totally free from birth and death. This state is called 'Moksha'.

It was the night of the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Magh. In the last phase of the night, Shri Ram became an omniscient *Vitrag*.

Sitendra, by means of his *Avadhijnan* found out that Shri Ram had become a *Kevaljnani*. He had attained fulfilment in his *Shukladhyan*. At once, Sitendra discarded his deceptive disguise and the magical and supernatural snare he had contrived. He discarded the form of Sita and appeared as Sitendra.



Other heavenly beings also arrived.

Sitendra's infatuation and attachment at once disappeared. There arose in his heart an extraordinary emotion of devotion. He accompanied by heavenly beings arranged a magnificent celebration in accordance with prescriptions. With his heart overflowing with devotion, Sitendra glorified Shri Ram.

Sitendra created a divine golden lotus. It possessed a unique splendour and softness. The *Kevaljmani* sat upon it. Heavenly beings stood on both sides and began fanning him with divine whisks; and some held a divine umbrella over his head.

The Kothishila looked resplendent with the congregation of heavenly beings.

Shri Ramachandra began to speak in a voice that was soft tender and cool like sandal paste.

The congregation comprised heavenly beings Gandharvas, Kinnars, Vyantars and Vidyadhars. There was not a single human being. Of course, there were present the animals and birds of the forest. They were experiencing profound, inward felicity at the sight of Shri Ram. Even wild and violent beasts stood there having discarded their natural propensities.

The heavenly beings; the Gandharvas, the Kinnars, and the Vyantars were overwhelmed with felicity when they heard Shri Ram's discourse. Their *Samyagdarshan* became specially pure and elevated. The discourse ended.

Sitendra stood up and said in voice shaken with emotion.

"Revered Lord ! Kindly pardon me. Blinded by my attachment for you I created impediments to you; and tried to disturb your sublime meditation. I caused great agitation to you My desire was that you should become a heavenly being; and stay with me in heaven. Hence I tried to disturb your meditation. Be so gracious as to pardon my blunder".

"Oh Sitendra ! Where is any need to pardon you ? The jivas in the samsar commit countless sins blinded by infatuation;

but the impediments you caused were actually benefactions to me.”

“Oh you ocean of compassion ! Kindly let me know what happened to Lakshman and Ravan ? Where are they ?”

“Sitendra ! The state of existence that a jiva attains depends on his Karmas. The jiva attains a state that accords with its Karmas. You wish to know what happened to Lakshman and Ravan. Well, they are now in the fourth hell”. Shri Ram said in a serious voice. Sitendra’s face was covered with gloom.

“Revered Lord ! After they complete their span of life in hell, what will become of them ?”

“Sitendra ! After completing the span of their life in hell; they will be born in the city of Vijayavathi in the area called Mahavideh. They will take birth as the sons of Rohini and Sunand. Lakshman will be named Sudarshan; and Ravan will be named Jindas. In that janma, they will follow the Dharma, and will attain to the *Saudharma* heaven.

After the span of their life ends, they will be born in a noble family in Vijaypuri. After that Janma, they will be born again as human beings in a place called Harivarsha. After that Janma, they will be born again in heaven.

After completing the span of life in heaven, they will be born again in Vijaypuri. They will be named Jayakant and Jayaprabh. After entering the phase of youth, they will adopt the Charitradharma and after their death, they will reach the heavenly world called Lantak.

On Sitendra ! At that time after completing your span of life in the twelfth heaven, you will be born in this country of Bharat as an emperor by name Sarvarathnamathi Lakshman and Ravan that is Jayakant and Jayaprabha after completing their span of life in the heavenly world called Lantak will be born as sons of your family.

“O you protector of the helpless ! What are you saying ? Will Lakshman and Ravan be . . . born as my children ?”

“Yes, Sitendra ! I have spoken the truth. In this samsar, all relationships are changeable. No relationship is permanent and lasting. Every moment relationships keep changing. You will name Ravan’s jiva Indrayudh and Lakshman’s Jiva Megharath”.

After these two princes enter the phase of youth, they will discard all worldly pleasures and will become detached. The two princes brought up in the lap of imperial splendour with abounding affection will renounce the samsar and will adopt the path of *samyam*. They will adopt the path of *Charitradharma*. You too will adopt the *Charitradharma* and after spending your lives in sublime spiritual austerities, you will be born in the *Vaijayant Viman*, of the heavenly world called *Anuttar*.

Ravan’s jiva will live through three lofty janmas and within that duration he will acquire the ‘*Tirtankar Namkarma*’. When in the last janma, he becomes a Tirthankar, you will end your existence in the *Vaijayant* and will be born in this world and you will receive initiation into the *Charitradharma* at the feet of Ravan who would have become a Tirthankar. You will become a *Ganadhar* and follow him. All your Karmas will be destroyed in that Janma and both of you will attain *Moksha*.”

“But revered Lord ! What will happen to Lakshman ?”

“Sitendra ! Lakshman’s jiva passing through lofty janmas will become the *Chakravarthi* emperor of the city of *Ratnachitra* in the *Mahavideh*.”

After enjoying the splendour, prosperity and happiness of the life of an emperor, he will adopt the path of *Shramandharma* and as a *Shraman*, he will earn the merit called *Tirthankar Namkarma* and in course of time, he will become a Tirthankar and will attain *Moksha*.

“Revered Lord ! The future of Lakshman and Ravan is indeed splendid. They are undoubtedly sublime souls but they are now in hell experiencing hellish tortures. Are they not ?”

“Sitendra! They cannot help experiencing those tortures. The Karmas resulting from strong attachments and hatred will have to be experienced”. Sitendra fell into deep thought. He began thinking. “It will be good if I could go to hell and deliver them from that life of torture. I will lift them out of hell and help them to achieve a higher level of existence”. Sitendra overwhelmed with compassion saluted the holy feet of Shri Ram with devotion and went away. The other heavenly beings also saluted Shri Ram and accompanied Sitendra.

Lord Shri Ramabhadra began his *vihar* again.

\* \* \* \*

Sitendra!

Sitendra desired to deliver Lakshman from the tortures of hell. At the same time, he also entertained the benevolent desire of delivering even Ravan from that life. Sitendra forgot Ravan's ignoble actions and felt elated at the thought of the future in which Ravan would lead an exalted life. “In future, Ravan is going to be a Tirthankar. Not only this, he will be born as my son also”.

Sitendra! He was the supreme head of the twelfth heaven. He possessed extraordinary powers and potentialities. It would not take much time for him to fly through the three worlds namely the Mrithyulok, the Madhyalok and the Adholok.

Within a short time, Sitendra reached the fourth hell. The fourth hell was beneath the third hell; which was beneath the second hell, which existed beneath the first hell. How terrible and dreadful was the place! The souls dwelling there were engaged in endless quarrels, recriminations and indignant talk and mutual attacks.

One moment, they became divided by dissensions and the next moment they came together and again in a few moments, they started fighting.

They were caught in ever-consuming but never-consuming fires. One moment, their bodies were cut to pieces and the next

moment, the pieces came together and obtained their original form. Even after thus being cut into pieces, they did not die. They could not die though they deeply desired to die. They could not die even though they desired death. The jivas have to spend in hell the stipulated span of time and hell is hell. It is not a mere imagination or a mental creation. It is a real and existent world. The jivas that commit serious sins have to undergo punishment there. They have to experience tortures in hell. Neither heavenly beings nor human beings can punish jivas thus but in hell, they experience the bitter fruits of their sinful Karmas.

While Sitendra was passing through the fourth hell, his eyes fell unexpectedly on Ravan. He saw Shambuk and watched Lakshman with concentration. Ravan and Shambuk were fighting against Lakshman. A terrible fight had, broken out there. They attacked each other there assuming the forms of lions, panthers and bears. Just then, a cruel *asura* by name Paramadharmik (the most ignoble monster) said to them.

“By fighting thus you will not achieve the desired anguish therefore, fight thirsting for each other’s blood.” All of a sudden, Ravan, Shambuk and Lakshman screamed. They were being burnt in terrible flames. Their bodies were burnt to ashes. Even after that the *asuras* who were there assuming horrid forms lifted them and threw them into boiling oil in large cauldrons and then began the hellish tortures. The atmosphere was filled with a terrible anguish, agitation and painful screams.

Sitendra could not bear with the sight. He was shocked to see the sight and he began to shudder with fear. Greatly overwhelmed with compassion, he said :

“O you *asur* ! Don’t you know these great men ? Have you not heard of them ? Get away a little. Release these great men.”

The *Paramadharmik Asur* was greatly fascinated by the heavenly splendour of Sitendra. Lakshman, Ravan and Shambuk began to look at Sitendra in great amazement. They thought, “Who may be this great benefactor ?” Just then, Sitendra turning towards Ravan and Shambuk and said.

“You too know the truth. Oh Ravan! Oh Shanbuk! Since in your earlier janma as Ravan and Shambuk, you committed many enormities now you have had to experience these tortures in hell. Even now, impelled by the memories of your earlier janmas, and your hostilities of the earlier janma, you are fighting. You are attacking each other and you are out to kill each other.”

Sitendra separated Ravan and Lakshman who were engaged in a fight and stopped them from fighting. The fight ended. After being silent for a while, Sitendra looked towards Ravan and Lakshman, described to them, with the purpose of creating spiritual awakening in them and stopping their fight, the story of their past janmas and future janmas as narrated by Shri Rambhadra Muni. Moreover, Sitendra also narrated the important events that would take place in their future janmas.

Hearing the discourse of Sitendra, Ravan and Lakshman said :



“O you ocean of compassion! You have bestowed a great benefaction upon us by describing our past janmas and future janmas. You have been gracious enough to come here and you have been benevolent enough to create spiritual awakening in us. Your sweet words have made us forget all our agonies and anguish. Even then, who can save us from these hellish tortures which are the fruits of our sinful Karmas of our earlier janmas. We have to experience these tortures whether we like them or not.

“No. No. It cannot happen so. I will carry you to the heavenly world”. Saying this Sitendra lifted the three slowly and took them into his hands.

But they were jivas inhabiting hell. Their bodies were in a subtle and fluid state. As Sitendra lifted them, their bodies flowed down in the form of a fluid; fell down in the form of drops but soon they assumed their forms. Sitendra again lifted them but again their bodies fell down in the form of particles.

Sitendra tried to lift them again and again and all his efforts were in vain. Then Lakshman's jiva said in anguish.

“O you compassionate one ! When you lift us up, our agnoy increases. We experience great pain, and anguish. Therefore, kindly leave us here and return to heaven.”

Bitterly disappointed Sitendra returned to the *Kevaljnani*. Shri Rambhadra; saluted him with a devout heart and set off towards the Nandeeshwar dweep.

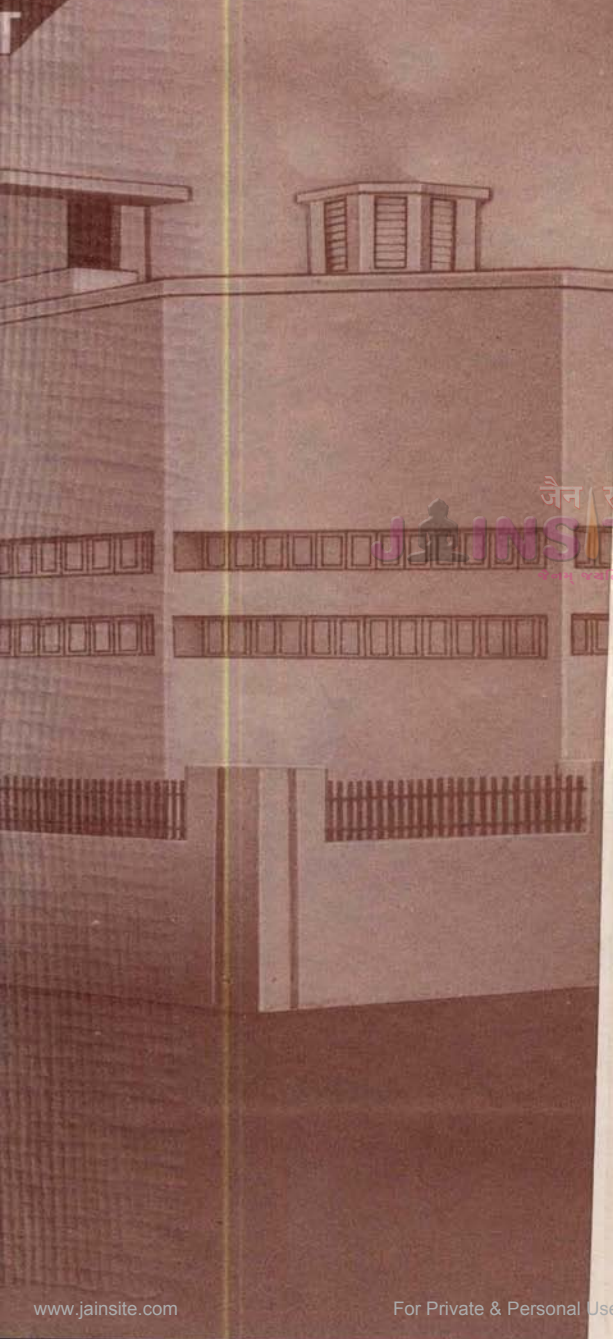
On the way, he arrived at an area called Devakuru. Naturally Sitendra remembered his brother Bhamandal. At that time, Bhamandal was living in Devakuru. Sitendra met him; delivered a discourse to him and brought about spiritual awakening in him. After all, both had in them the attachment of their earlier janma as brother and sister. Later, Sitendra having visited the magnificent temples on the Nandishwar dweep set off towards the twelfth heavenly world called *Achyut*.

Shri Ramachandra, after attaining *Kevaljnan* kept travelling on foot from place to place for nearly fifty years helping and guiding countless jivas to cross the ocean of samsar. He also helped countless animals and birds to attain *moksha*. After destroying all his karmas, Shri Rambhadra attained *Moksha*.

Shri Ramabhadra attained permanent, ineffable and eternal felicity and spiritual serenity.

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# ग्रंथ महत्ता निर्मित प्रकाशन ट्रस्ट भवन



## MILESTONE OF MEDITATIONS

- The Way of Life — Part 1
- The Way of Life — Part 2
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- The Peace of Mind
- The Art of Thinking
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- The Fountain of Faith
- Whisper of Wisdom
- Sound of Silence
- The Happy Hours
- The Beauty of Life
- The Pure Life
- The Natural Life
- The Wholesome Life
- The Divine Life
- Nector of Knowledge
- Forgive Me
- Several Books in Gujarati and Hindi Languages
- 'Arihant' [Hindi Monthly]





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