



JAIN RAMAYAN

PART 2

Shri Priyadarshan



Ed.

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 Bhanuvijayji who is at present **Acharya Shri Vijay Bhuvanbhanusoorishwarji Maharaj**.

Muni Shri Bhadruguptavijayji, 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 *ARIHANT*, 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 Bhadruguptsoorishwarji Maharaj**.



JAIN RAMAYAN

(PART-II)

(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

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A FOREWORD BY THE PUBLISHERS

We are extremely happy to place in your hands, the English version of the *Jain Ramayan* Part-II. 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-II. 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 Bhadruguptsoorishwarji 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 Bhadruguptsoorishwarji 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 *Ramayan* 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-II. 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.

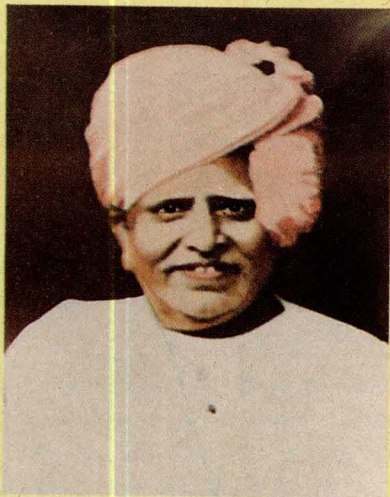
The *Jain Ramayan* written by me has been published in Gujarati and Hindi, are very popular.

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

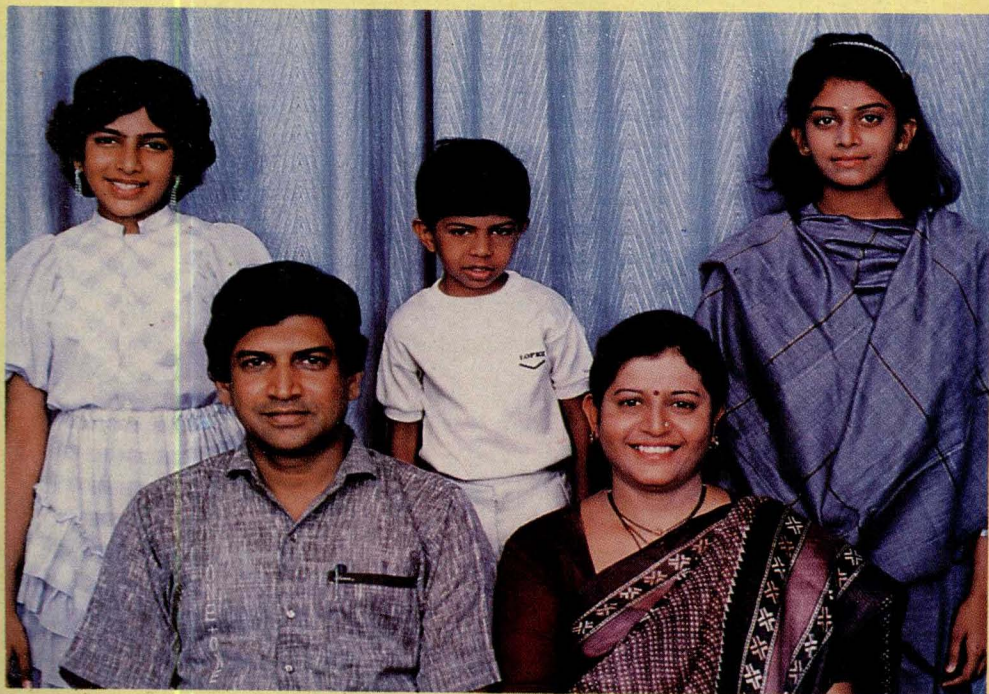


Late Shri Chandulalji
Tarachandji Parmar



Lat Smt. Champaben
Chandulalji 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-II. 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.



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A BRIDEGROOM BECOMES A MENDICANT

This is the immortal story of Ayodhya. This golden age flourished thousands of years ago; and the Indian culture should be proud of this age which was remarkable for its progress, prosperity, peace, tranquillity, serenity and felicity.

In those days, Ayodhya was prosperous with ever-flowing rivers, fertile and smiling lands; and its citizens were renowned for their virtues and ethical excellence; and the city of Ayodhya was heavenly with its inexhaustible treasures of wealth and virtues.

At the same time, the kings of those days were men of extraordinary virtues; they admired virtues and insisted that all should be men of ethical excellence. The Kings and the subjects led a life of noble conduct, and possessed such virtues as compassion, politeness, wisdom, courtesy; and experienced the felicity of life without any worry or agitation. They never hesitated to sacrifice anything for their principles and ideals.

King Vijayaraj who was ruling over Ayodhya and the people of the kingdom belonged to this class. They were not living like worms steeped in the quagmire of sensual pleasures; but they were sublime swans that swam loftily on the magnificent waves of the *Manasa Sarovar* of spiritual excellence that had been initiated by Bhagwan Rishabhdev and that had been revitalized by Bhagwan Munisuvrat swami.

King Vijay had two sons. The elder son was Vajrabahu; and the younger son was Purandhar. Queen Hemachula took a bird's eye view of the inner selves of her sons, with her spiritual vision. She carefully observed the souls of her sons existing in

their bodies. She visualized the progress and decline that had been going on in them from times immemorial. The vision was thrilling. While bringing them up, she made them drink the nectar of the love for the Paramatma. She made them travellers on the sublime path leading to the Paramatma. She did not sing to them the lullabies that inspire worldly desires, infatuation and deception; on the contrary, she sang songs that would destroy the stupor of *Moha*; and awaken spiritual vision in them.

You have been wandering in the Samsar from times immemorial;
 You have been ensnared in the meshes of illusion.
 You are a soul which possesses infinite knowledge;
 Yet you have been caught in countless meshes.

You are indeed pure, perfect and awakened spiritually;
 Discard your attachments and become a spiritual hero.

This world is replete with deception and falsehood.
 You must have extraordinary patience and endurance.
 You are indeed devoid of qualities and form.
 Your body and name are illusive.
 You are not touched by fame or blame.

This drama of your life is indeed illusory.
 This world is full of selfish relationships.
 You should never be ensnared in those meshes.
 You must be always absorbed deeply,
 In a contemplation of the *Paramatma*, the supreme soul.

When a child receives such education even in the earliest phases, there is no wonder if, later, he or she develops the spirit of renunciation and absolute detachment, as well as *Vitragatha* (The quality of having conquered the inner enemies). Vajrabahu as he grew up mastered all the branches of knowledge, arts and accomplishments. He attained supreme mastery over various arts and *shastras*. Yet he always desired deeply to attain spiritual elevation by conquering the inner enemies.

The wheel of time kept revolving unimpeded. After having passed through boyhood, he entered the phase of youth. His youth, his handsomeness and his physical graces fascinated

everyone like the fresh spring season that fascinates every eye with its grace and beauty. He was so handsome and possessed such a fascinating appearance that even the god of love would feel ashamed of his appearance. Countless princesses and damsels of sublime beauty were dreaming of securing him for their husband. King Vijayaraj was eager to celebrate the marriage of his son. Prince Vajrabahu was fully aware of the extent of his father's love and affection for him. Yet he was not at all prepared to be bound by *Moha* (infatuation) and *Maya* (illusion). He was totally indifferent to all the pleasures of worldly life.

Meanwhile, one day the Chief Minister of King Ibhavahan, the ruler of Nagpur, came to the court of King Vijayaraj. He was received in the court with due honour and respect. Then in a polite manner, he communicated to King Vijayaraj the message sent by King Ibhavahan.

He said, "Oh King Vijayaraj ! You are the protector of the Raghu dynasty. Our king has sent a message to you. We hope that you will not disappoint us".

"Honoured Chief Minister ! When our friend King Ibhavahan sends us a message, reposing such great confidence in us, we will surely endeavour to honour it in accordance with our ability but we should know, at least, what the message is."

"My Lord ! Probably, you know that our Princess Manorama, the daughter of our Queen Choodamani has entered the phase of youth which has appeared like spring in her life adding grace to her beauty. She is angelic in appearance and character and has attained mastery over all the arts and accomplishments that are worthy of a princess. She is the very embodiment of politeness, wisdom and ethical virtues. Moreover, Queen Choodamani has brought her up in an atmosphere of culture, inspiring in her lofty virtues by singing to her songs of ethical excellence. Oh lord of the earth ! Our King Ibhavahan greatly desires that Princess Manorama should marry Prince Vajrabahu and glorify your palace and dynasty. This is the message sent by the king of Nagpur and this is our heartfelt wish."

When King Vijayaraj heard the message, his delight knew no bounds. He requested the Chief Minister to give him a day's time to consult the Queen and the other members of the royal family; and made arrangements for the Chief Minister's stay in the royal guest-house.

After dismissing the Court, for the day, King Vijayaraj went to the harem. He discussed with the Queen Hemachula, the message sent by King Ibhavahan of Nagpur. Of course, the Queen did not like her sons' taking the path of worldly pleasures. Her secret desire was that they should pursue the path of spiritual elevation. But she knew the mind of her husband regarding this matter. Therefore, at once, she gave her consent to the alliance.

The next day, King Vijayaraj invited the Chief Minister of Nagpur and communicated to him his acceptance of the proposal. The Chief Minister was overwhelmed with delight. After fixing an auspicious day for the marriage, he went away to Nagpur.

Prince Vajrabahu heard from his companions and friends the news of his engagement to Manorama. But the news did not give him any delight; nor did he feel enthusiastic about it. At the same time, he did not also experience any sadness. He used to reflect upon the affairs of worldly life with a feeling of detachment. The day for the marriage had been fixed. King Vijayaraj sent invitations to his relatives, friends, subordinate kings and the other kings, and princes. He made preparations to celebrate his son's marriage with all grandeur and eclat.

King Ibharaj extended a hearty invitation to King Vijayaraj to bring a large marriage-party to Nagpur.

Accordingly, Prince Vajrabahu set off to Nagpur accompanied by twenty five princes and a large number of friends and relatives. Queen Hemachula put the *Tilak* on his forehead and sent him off to Nagpur. King Vijayaraj bestowed upon the prince his heartiest blessings.

After halting and camping at various places, the marriage-party reached the territory of Nagpur, in a few days. The people

of Nagpur thronged to have a look at the bridegroom who was going to marry the princess of their country. The friends and companions of Princess Manorama came enthusiastically; surrounded Prince Vajrabahu; and rushed forward to see him; and after seeing him, they began to praise Manorama's good fortune in securing such a charming prince for her husband.

They went to Manorama; surrounded her and praised the looks of Vajrabahu heartily. On hearing their praise of her dear one, she felt immensely delighted; and her heart began to dance with elation. Her joy and elation knew no bounds. She began to praise her good fortune.

King Ibhavahan extended a magnificent welcome to the marriage party. He arranged for their stay in grandly decorated guest-houses. Queen Chudamani was greatly delighted to see her son-in-law.

The marriage took place in an auspicious *Muhurt*, with all grandeur and *eclat*. The atmosphere of elation, celebrations and jubilations pervaded the whole city of Nagpur. Everyone in the city began to sway with joy and jubilation. The bazaars, the streets, the circles, and all places in the city wore a festive and colourful look. Ceremonies and celebrations were organized in all the temples in the city. Food and clothes were distributed among the poor and the destitute. Yet, inspite of all this grandeur, Prince Vajrabahu was in a mood of deep agitation. He was absolutely indifferent to all these celebrations and jubilations. Outwardly, he seemed to be cheerful and delighted; but inwardly, his mood was completely contrary to it.

After the marriage was over, the marriage-party taking Manorama with them proceeded to Ayodhya. Manorama's eldest brother, Udayasundar was acting as Vajrabahu's charioteer. He decided to accompany his sister to Ayodhya out of affection for her.

The chariot in which the twenty five princes were seated, was at the head of the marriage-procession. Behind it, there was the chariot in which Vajrabahu sat with his wife, Manorama.

Behind his chariot, there were countless princes, kings, relatives and friends travelling on elephants, horses or in chariots.

The golden rays of the sun shot out from the east. Gentle breezes were blowing in a slow and pleasant manner. Birds were flying in the sky making pleasant and musical cries. The atmosphere was exciting and delightful. The marriage-party was proceeding along a highway on one side of which there stood long and high mountain-ranges; and on the other side of which flowed the Sarayu river with its cool and pellucid water. The brothers-in-law, Udayasundar and Vajrabahu were engaged in a delightful conversation. At the same time, Vajrabahu was observing the sky-high peaks of the mountain-ranges. His heart was swinging with joy at the sight of the magnificent beauty of nature created by *Vidhata*, the creator. He suddenly asked;

“Dear Prince ! Do you know what these mountain-ranges are ?”

“Why not ? This range of mountains is called *Vasantadri*.”

“Indeed, it appears as though it is always spring here.”

Vajrabahu said admiring the magnificence of the *Vasantadri*. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a peak which was not clearly visible. He began watching it with fixed eyes. He noticed a *Mahamuni* standing in meditation on that peak.

The tender days of the rising sun were playing on the face of the *Muni*. His face looked resplendent in the golden splendour of the sun. He looked radiant as if he was reflecting on the sublime path that leads to *Shivapuri* or the supreme state.

Why does the peacock dance with elation at the sight of clouds ?

Why does the bee keep buzzing joyfully at the sight of a lotus ?

Vajrabahu also began to sway with delight at the sight of the great *Muni*.

All of a sudden there arose in his heart a deep desire to attain spiritual delight by saluting the holy feet of the Muni.

"Please stop the chariot a little," said Prince Vajrabahu.

"Why ? What's the matter ?" Udayasundar asked with evident surprise.

"You too see this ! Indeed, it is a blessing of our fortune that we should see a great Muni, in this wild and secluded area."

"Where is the Muni ?" Said Udayasundar looking around with astonishment.

"Oh dear prince ! Look there ! See that peak in the western range of the Vasantadri. The holy Muni is standing on that peak absorbed in deep meditation".

Prince Vajrabahu pointed his hand at the peak holding the hand of Udayasundar.

"Yes, indeed ! You are right" said Udayasundar.

"He seems to be the veritable *Kalpavriksha*, the heavenly tree that grants all wishes," said Vajrabahu, with his eyes fixed on the great Muni. There surged out from his heart a spring of delight at the sight of the great Muni. Even his marriage with Manorama had not inspired in him such delight and enthusiasm. He was thrilled to the brims of his being at the sight of the holy Muni.

Udayasundar laughed aloud as he saw Vajrabahu, in that condition. He said sarcastically;

"Ah ! How delighted you are at the sight of a mere *Muniraj* !"

"Why should I not be delighted ? Why should not the ocean of joy roll in my heart at the sight of that great Muni ? Actually, the Muni has attained an extraordinary spiritual elevation. He has carried out the loftiest duty of human life by making his worldly and his other-worldly life fruitful".

"Is the acceptance and adoption of the life of a Sadhu the highest duty of human life?"

"Why not?"

"Then, are you also thinking of pursuing that path?" Udayasundar said scoffing at the idea of his brother-in-law.

"Undoubtedly! There is no room for any doubt in this. My innate aspiration is to accept the life of a *Sadhu* and to live the life of a *Sadhu*". Vajrabahu said in a serious tone.

"In that case why did you come taking this marriage-party at all?"

"Only to comply with my father's wish".

"If so, who is preventing you from becoming a Sadhu? Why should there be any delay in carrying out an auspicious action? An auspicious action should be carried out, at once. I too will join you". Udayasundar said making a joke.

"Udayasundar! I hope you are saying this after a careful consideration of the matter."

"Yes, I have surely thought about all the aspects of the matter."

"Please remember! A Kshatriya's word should never be broken!"

"Never! Such a thing has not happened; and such a thing can never happen in the future".

At once, Vajrabahu descended from his chariot as if he had been delivered from this *city* of vanity and illusion. Manorama also alighted from the chariot. Udayasundar and the twenty four princes who were the "*best men*" at the marriage, followed Vajrabahu. But his soul which had attained *Vitragata* (an absolute victory over the inner enemies) could not recognize anyone of them. The princess Manorama who had been hearing the conversation thought that they were merely making jokes.

This incident was unique; such an event had not taken place in the past; and could not take place, in the future. The young man who had married a young woman of unexampled beauty had instantaneously become an adorer of the life of a Sadhu. This was something inconceivable in the whole world. If anyone even by a mistake talks about the *Sadhudharma* in such an atmosphere of infatuation and intellectual intoxication, it would only sound funny and ridiculous.

Of course, the world looks at the external activities of a jiva and imagines him to be the opposite of what he actually is; but there is the possibility of the Jiva being inwardly different from what he seems to be outwardly. But that inward nature of a Jiva cannot be seen with the physical eyes. One requires spiritual insight to visualize it. Vajrabahu was returning home after having married Manorama; in the eyes of the world this event was one of jubilation and joyful celebration. It is commonly believed that those who marry are men of attachment interested in life. This is what Udayasundar thought of Vajrabahu. But Vajrabahu had falsified that belief.

Vajrabahu proceeded towards Vasantadri. The spirit of renunciation and detachment showed itself on the face of Vajrabahu. His very gait was suggestive of his spirit of absolute detachment. Udayasundar was deeply shaken by anxiety, doubts and suspicions.

“Vajrabahu may really accept the *Sadhudharma*!” He feared; and looked intently towards Manorama. Her beautiful and charming face had been clouded with worry and anxiety. She looked straight at Udayasundar; went up; and stood like a stone unmoving, in the way of Vajrabahu.

Vajrabahu stopped there. He said in a serious tone :

“Oh Prince ! What’s the matter ?”

“Oh Lord ! Please do not attach any importance to my jocular words”.

“Dear brother ! I never took your words to be light-hearted and flippant”. Vajrabahu replied smiling.

"Whatever I said, I said only with the purpose of making a joke".

"You might have made a joke : but your words gave me the inspiration necessary for pursuing the path of *Sadhudharma*".

"I did not say anything to give inspiration to you. Therefore, the question of your receiving initiation into the *Sadhu-dharma* does not arise". Udayasundar's face became pale with gloom, boundless sorrow and agitation.

"Ah ! How is this possible ? If a Jiva does not think of pursuing the *Sadhu Dharma* in the human state of existence, in which other state can he think of it ?"

"Dear Prince ! You are yet a youth. This is not the time for renunciation and self-sacrifice. Youth is a time when one should enjoy oneself and spend time in amusement and sensual delights. When you reach the age which is proper for renunciation, then, you can surely think of it. But this is not the time for it. It is not yet necessary".

"Udayasundar ! Do not put forth false arguments. Youth is the best time at which one can receive initiation into the *Sadhudharma*. No other phase of life is so suitable to it as youth. Moreover, do not forget the truth that there is no other phase of life which is better than youth for pursuing the *Sadhu-dharma*. Therefore, cutting off the cover of *Moha*, please try to fling fuel into the sacrificial fire of my spiritual elevation".

"Dear Prince ! We have been entertaining many radiant hopes regarding you; and the people of Ayodhya also have many hopes and aspirations regarding you".

"Oh Prince ! Are there any hopes or aspirations of the Samsar that have been fulfilled ? Has anyone succeeded in fulfilling his worldly desires and aspirations ? Which worldly objectives have been attained ? Like the deer that run madly towards mirages in a desert; wander endlessly and die; the Jivas in this world run madly after worldly delights, hopes, aspirations and ambitions; first lose their wealth of *Punya* (merit)

and then fall victims to miserable death." The cataract of renunciation flowed freely from the lips of Vajrabahu. Bathed in the holy waters of his utterances, the twenty four princes became completely drenched in those sublime waters of renunciation. All were greatly astonished to hear the sweet and sublime melodies of renunciation in the atmosphere of attachments and affections.

"Though what you have said is absolutely true, it is not suitable to this time. So, please give up your insistence and listen to my words".

"Udayasundar ! You have forgotten your words".

"You need not attach any importance to what I said light-heartedly and jocularly. Untimely utterances are not to be heeded. Therefore, it is good to forget those words".

"Udayasundar ! Please listen to me. Do not think only of the present. Think of the world and the other world a little. Your words served merely as an immediate cause. Actually, even from my boyhood I have been thinking of renunciation; and the roots of renunciation have gone deep into my heart. In fact, I do not have any attachment for worldly life. I am not at all fascinated by it. This is the real cause....This is the deeper cause for my determination to renounce worldly life".

Hearing the logical words of Vajrabahu, Udayasundar became silent. Just then, Swethakirthis, the prince of Indraprastha who was Vajrabahu's dearest friend, went forth a few steps; and tried his best to prevail upon him to give up his decision to become a Sadhu.

"Dear friend, Swethakirthis ! you too think well and realize which path I wish to pursue. Oh you mad fellow ! The path which I wish to pursue is supremely beneficial to all of you. You too can attain boundless spiritual felicity by pursuing that path. The Jivatma can never attain satisfaction by pursuing the path of worldly delights and sensual pleasures. Therefore, it is not proper that sensible people like you should insist upon

my pursuing the path of physical pleasures which are perishable and upon my leading a worldly existence."

"Vajrabahu ! Your words are absolutely true from the other-worldly and spiritual point of view; and I whole-heartedly accept your view; but in the present situation you should not put into practice those ideals of yours; not for our sake but for the sake of your newly married wife. Manorama. What will happen to her if you become a Sadhu ? Think of it a little. Have you ever thought of what might happen to her tender heart ? The responsibility of taking care of her and securing her welfare lies on your shoulders". Swethakirthi said in a tender voice expressing his views logically.

"Of course, it is my responsibility to see that Manorama's heart is not offended or harmed in any way. But I firmly believe that since she has been brought up in a highly cultured family, she will not place any impediments on my way and that, on the contrary, she will extend help and co-operation to me in the pursuit of the path I have chosen."

"If she too possessed the spirit of renunciation, she would not have married you. She has married you with the sweet dreams of enjoying worldly delights. Does it not amount to deception and betrayal of trust if you now suddenly discard her ? I think this is nothing but deception in a way." Swethakirthi said emphasising every syllable of his utterance.

"Dear friend ! I am not deceiving or harming anyone by pursuing the path of renunciation, and mendicancy. If I marry any other princess now, I would be deceiving and betraying her. But I am reminding her of the highest duty of human beings by adopting the path of mendicancy and renunciation."

For a while, all were silent. Deep gloom and depression clouded the faces of all who were there except, the face of Vajrabahu. The joy and jubilation of the marriage disappeared in a moment.

"Is it not possible to attain spiritual progress even while living in the Samsar ?" Udayasundar said in an argumentative tone.

"Did not Emperor Bharath attain *Kevaljnan* even while living in the Samsar?" Swethakirthi said supporting Udayasundar's argument.

"You are putting forth all these arguments on account of your boundless love and affection for me. You want to please yourselves by compelling me somehow or the other to remain in the samsar. But you have not cared to think of the state of my mind. You have not realized my indifference towards life and my spirit of detachment. Do you think you can please me by doing so? That is never possible. Why do you vainly attempt to do something which cannot be done? Is it not your sacred duty as my loving friends and relatives to help me achieve my spiritual aspiration?"

"Is it not the height of selfishness on your part to leave us in the lurch thus; and to pursue the path of your spiritual welfare?" said Udayasundar, in measured tones.

"I do not desire that only I should adopt the path of *Sadhu-dharma*. Let us all proceed on this path of spiritual elevation and we shall together climb the steps of spiritual elevation. I do not desire to cause sorrow to anyone but my heartfelt aspiration is that all should attain spiritual felicity and that all should attain endless and ineffable spiritual felicity and serenity.

"I think my jocular remarks have hurt you deeply. They must have deeply offended you. That is why you are not prepared to give up your obstinacy. But this spirit of renunciation of yours is only momentary." Udayasundar said expressing his displeasure.

"Udayasundar! Do not get angry. I have already told you clearly that your words have not offended me or annoyed me. Even from my boyhood the spirit of renunciation has been lying dormant and latent in my heart and your words merely awakened those dormant aspirations of mine. Now those aspirations have manifested themselves outwardly and have been impelling me to pursue the path of renunciation."

Manorama was silently listening to the words of her husband. She felt that every word uttered by Vajrabahu revealed his intense spirit of renunciation. In her mind, there arose a deep conflict between the feelings of attachment and detachment. On one hand, she was greatly fascinated by the worldly pleasures and sensual delights; and on the other hand, she felt deeply impelled to follow her husband on the path of *Sadhu-dharma*. She had been brought up with great affection; and now she saw her sweet dreams of the delights of married life breaking into pieces and collapsing and falling apart. Deep darkness seemed to envelope her on all sides. Nothing seemed visible in that dense darkness; but an obscure idea that a new turn was likely to take place in her life, seemed to be emerging from that darkness. She had to proceed on a new path which was beset with difficulties and calamities. Her young mind was torn with fears and doubts. Her heart began to beat faster. She had to take a decision regarding her future life, in a few moments. She fell into a strange quandary. Her future life would depend on her decision.

Purandharkumar was thoroughly familiar with his elder brother's life and nature. He knew very well that Vajrabahu had been entertaining the desire of renouncing worldly life, even from boyhood, and that he had been leading a life of detachment. He had noticed that Vajrabahu had no interest in or attachment for the things which people in this world desire as the means of happiness. Moreover, he had also been entertaining the suspicion that some day, Vajrabahu would renounce the world and that no power on earth could prevent him from doing so.

That was why Purandhar was silent without saying anything though Udayasundar and Shwethakirthi were endeavouring to change the mind of Vajrabahu by means of their arguments and persuasion. Of course, he had not come across any necessity in the past of arguing with Vajrabahu. Moreover, he was fully familiar with Vajrabahu's thinking, utterances and sense; and even from his boyhood he used to respect his views and thoughts. That day, he knew very well that the time had come when his

elder brother would renounce the worldly life and become a Sadhu; and a tremor ran through his body as he thought of this. His sorrow and agitation knew no bounds. Suddenly, his eyes welled up with tears. Two hot tears trickled down his cheeks. He wiped the tears so that no one might see them. But Purandhar could not conceal his feelings from the incisive eyes of his elder brother.

“Purandhar ! you must console our father. Remember that he may be deeply anguished by my action yet he is a man of great sense and wisdom. Somehow, he will reconcile himself to the situation; and then he will feel happy about my decision. My mother of course is my (*Guru* spiritual guide) who gave me spiritual awakening; and she will be greatly happy and would feel proud of me. Kindly convey my salutations to that veritable *Sadhvi*.”

“Oh revered one !” Till now, Purandhar had been trying to check his tears; but he could restrain his sorrow no more. He began to weep bitterly like a child. He fell on the feet of Vajrabahu. Stillness pervaded the whole atmosphere. There was pin-drop silence. The clouds of gloom spread everywhere but for sobs and shrieks. Who could console whom? The eyes of all were heavy with anguish.

‘Purandhar ! My dear brother ! This is not proper. At least, some day you too have to adopt this path. Then, why all this lamentation and crying ? This tradition has been in existence from the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev. May you attain prosperity and may your future be auspicious. Weeping while parting is said to be inauspicious”.

The eyes of all the princes welled up with tears. Udayasundar could not refrain from weeping. Manorama maintaining her mental poise with great difficulty, closed her eyes and was endeavouring to fathom the mysteries of life.

“Dear friends ! Now please permit me to go. Do not delay. Moreover all of you join me in pursuing the path shown by the Jineshwar Bhagwan. We can make our souls resplendent; and

reach a state of absolute perfection where we need not be separated from one another. There we need not at all part from one another. We can stay together for ever and for ever; and we can together enjoy endless and ineffable spiritual serenity and felicity. We should not be caught in the illusory and mesmeric meshes of mean, low and transient pleasures which are dependent on others. We should not be ensnared in the meshes of *Moha* (infatuation) and *Maya* (deception) forgetting the importance of our souls."

Vajrabahu's words which were serious, dignified, soft and sweet like nectar brought about a tremendous change in the atmosphere. The fires of attachment began to abate. The light of renunciation began to burn bright and radiant.

"Look here ! Think of your past ranging over countless millenia. What pleasures are there which we have not experienced in the past ? What have we not seen ? In other words, we have enjoyed to our heart's content all the pleasures of the world. We have seen the various aspects of life and its stupefying miracles. Yet we are not happy or satisfied. Our terrible thirst for sensual pleasures has not been quenched. Please remember that we can never attain contentment, in respect of physical delights and sensual pleasures. It is only renunciation that can give us the ultimate contentment; and it is only by means of renunciation that we can attain the supreme contentment".

At once, the hearts of all the princes and that of Udayasundar melted away. Why would they not be melted away ? All of them had great affection for Vajrabahu and had the greatest respect for him. The myrtle-colour on the hands of Manorama whose extraordinary beauty would make even the *Apsaras* as (demi-goddesses) feel ashamed of their beauty, had not yet dried; the newly married bride had not yet stepped into the house of her husband but Vajrabahu renounced everything and was determined to travel on the sublime path of the Paramatma; and if his words which were polite, sensible and were bathed in the sublime waters of renunciation captivated the hearts of all, there was no wonder in it.

It is an unshakeable principle of nature that the words of those for whom we have love, affection and high regard produce upon us the desired effect; whereas even the desirable and beneficial words of those whom we despise do not produce any effect upon us.

Princess Manorama was moved to the depths of her being by the words of her husband, whom she deemed the lord of her life. She decided to follow the path of renunciation chosen by her husband; and folding her hands politely, she made this entreaty to Vajrabahu.

“My lord ! I surrender myself at your feet. The aim you choose for your life will be the aim of my life also. The path you choose is the path I too choose. I am determined to follow the path chosen by you. Let me follow you on the path you have chosen”.

On hearing about the determination of Manorama, Udayasundar also made his determination. He respectfully saluted Vajrabahu; and said;

“I too seek your refuge. I too am prepared to become a mendicant.”

At the same time, all the twenty four princes unanimously decided to receive initiation into the *Śādhudharma*, along with Vajrabahu. This is indeed an extraordinary kind of friendship ! This is an absolutely selfless kind of love. This is indeed a precious and invaluable moment.

Suddenly, the spring of spiritual excellence bloomed and smiled on the Vasantadri (the mountain of spring). The birds agitated by excessive joy began to sing songs of renunciation; and the creepers in the forest smiled gleefully and began to dance and swing in a sprightly manner with their flowers. Taking all with him, Vajrabahu went up to the Muni who was absorbed in meditation and saluted him respectfully by performing the *Panchang Pranipath*.

"*Dharmalabh* (May you attain spiritual prosperity)" the Muni blessed him lifting his right hand; and sat down upon a clean stone after cleansing it with his *Rajoharan* (a mop).

"Oh thou ocean of compassion! Kindly bestow your compassion upon us and help us to cross the ocean of Samsar." Vajrabahu said humbly folding his hands in veneration.

"Noble man! The Jiva can cross the ocean of Samsar by following the path of *Charitradharma* shown by the Paramatma. Therefore, you have to adopt the path of *Charitradharma*". The Mahamuni Gunasagarji said explaining in a soft voice the secret of crossing the ocean of samsar.

"Oh thou ocean of kindness! Make our lives fruitful by initiating us into the *Sadhudharma*". Vajrabahu entreated the Muni.

The Mahamuni. Gunasagar initiated Vajrabahu, Manorama, Udayasundar, Swethakirthi and the twenty four princes into the *Sadhudharma* in an auspicious *Muhurt* (time). Countless gods and goddesses appeared in the sky; joyfully praised the newly initiated ones and caused a magnificent shower of flowers upon them.

After that Purandharkumar who was in a state of deep depression and gloom, set off towards Ayodhya with the other members of the marriage-party. A messenger on horseback set off to Nagpur to convey the news of the initiation of Vajrabahu and the others into the *Charitradharma*. The great muni Gunasagar set off on his *padyatra* taking the newly initiated ones with him.

When such novel and unique events take place in the world, people continue to speak of them for some days, some months or even years. But after sometime, gradually those events fall into the depths of oblivion. But a philosopher or a thinker gives those events, the form of words and preserves them from being forgotten and renders them immortal. Some speakers and preachers may describe them in their discourses. As a result of this, the preachers keep describing them and the tradition of

preachers keeps those events alive and fresh. Some sculptor may carve those events on stone and render them immortal and imperishable and may thus enable generations of people to be familiar with those events.

But the people of this world do not care to know those events, to hear about them and to read about them. They wander madly in search of the means by which they can satisfy their sensual cravings and they are drawn hither and thither by the mirage of sensual pleasures.

Purandharkumar travelled with difficulty and in sorrow and reached Ayodhya some days later. The news of the arrival of the prince spread throughout the city like an electric flash. Thousands of people of the city of Ayodhya made enthusiastic preparations to receive Prince Vajrabahu and the princess Manorama. But the mockery of fate was such that they could not meet and receive Vajrabahu and Manorama. Though they came rushing forward, they could not see their dear prince Vajrabahu and the newly married princess Manorama. The absence of the prince and the princess became the topic of discussion for people throughout the city. All were greatly worried thinking that some unhappy event had taken place because the members of the marriage-party were all in low spirits. The Chief Minister came making a way through the crowds; saw Purandhar and stood before him like a stone-image. He kept staring at Purandhar's gloomy and depressed face. Then holding the shoulders of Purandhar, shaking him violently asked him in a serious tone; "Dear Prince ! How is it you have come alone? Where is prince Vajrabahu ? The other princes are not to be seen. Where is the princess Manorama ? Why have they not come with you ? Has any unexpected calamity occurred ? I hope nothing undesirable has taken place. Why have you come alone?"

A volley of questions fell from all sides upon Purandhar. The crowds of people who were first calm like the slowly moving waves of an ocean, began to speak aloud with impatience. All put the same questions; "Where is Vajrabahu ? Has any calamity occurred to the princess and to the other princes ?" Poor Purandhar ! What reply could he give ? To whom

could he give replies ? Even if he wanted to give a reply, what could he say ? His head was cracking with pain and sorrow. His eyes had grown red with continuous weeping. His white and bright face had become pale and gloomy with distress and despair. Yet he had to give a reply, with great difficulty. In a voice shaken with emotion, he said : "Dear Sir ! No calamity has occurred. No unhappy event has taken place ..."

"Then, why are you gloomy ? Why is your face depressed ? The members of the marriage-party seem to be in a state of despair and sorrow. What is the matter ?" The Chief Minister said unable to control his impatience and eagerness.

"My elder brother Vajrabahu has received initiation into the *Sadhudharma*", and Purandhar began to weep like a child. His voice was choked with emotion and his body began to shiver.

"Has our prince become a Sadhu ? and what happened to princess Manorama ?"

"She too adopted the path of *Charitradharma*."

"What do you say ? I cannot believe it. All this must be false. Can such a thing ever happen ?"

"Dear Chief Minister ! What I have said is absolutely true".

"Then what about the twenty five princes ? Did they go away to their cities".

"No, sir. No. Those twenty-five princes and Udayasundar also became Sadhus."

"Oh God ! What an unhappy thing has taken place !" The old and revered Chief Minister widened his eyes with horror.

At once, the news reached the ears of King Vijayaraj, the king of Ayodhya. He was greatly upset to hear the news. His affectionate heart broke to pieces. He became unconscious and fell on the ground. When the king fell down unconscious, the palace resounded with cries of distress. Queen Hemachula came runn-

ing from her chamber. A large number of maids and attendants gathered in the hall around the king and the queen. Purandhar also came running accompanied by relatives and friends. The whole palace was filled with people. All were in great impatience and anxiety. All were in deep anguish on account of the separation from their prince.

On account of the tireless efforts of the court-physicians, the King recovered his consciousness. He became a little calm but the tears were flowing from his eyes. His anguish was intense. A deep gloom fell over all but Queen Hemachula retaining her equanimity was trying to console King Vijayaraj. The King after being silent for a few minutes said in a low tone; "I am not sad that Prince Vajrabahu has received initiation into the *Charitradharma* but I am sad that we are still in the samsar caught in its confounding meshes deeply absorbed in increasing our sins. Vajrabahu is blessed because he has brought glory to our royal dynasty; and he has embraced the path of renunciation cheerfully even in his youth".

"Dear Lord! You have spoken the truth. The opportune time has come. We too shall without any delay follow the path chosen by our son". Queen Hemachula said accepting her husband's idea.

Accordingly, King Vijayaraj and Queen Hemachula decided to renounce the samsar and issued orders for the coronation of Purandhar as the King of Ayodhya.

Purandhar was crowned king of Ayodhya on an auspicious day. The city looked resplendent with celebrations and jubilatons.

Once, the great muni, Nirvana Moh happened to come to the gardens of the city of Ayodhya. The care-taker of the garden conveyed the news to the king. The king was greatly delighted with the news and gave the care-taker of the garden, costly presentations. Then, the king dedicated himself to the service of Nirvan Moh Maharshi. He heard his discourses and then saluting his holy feet requested him to initiate him into the

Sadhudharma. The great Muni initiated Vijayaraj and Hemachula into the *Sadhudharma* and made them adore the path of Moksha.

This excellent tradition had been coming down through countless generations among the kings of the Ikshvaku dynasty of Ayodhya. As soon as the prince reached the proper age, the king placed upon his shoulders, the responsibility of the administration; renounced all attachments and responsibilities; dedicated himself to a noble spiritual head; became a sadhu and began pursuing the path of spiritual progress and elevation. What a great tradition? How sublime were the souls that took birth in that dynasty!

XXXI

KIRTHIDHAR, THE SAINTLY KING

How were those days of spiritual enlightenment !

In those days, people did not have a deep desire for sensual pleasures. Though they were enjoying sensual pleasures and physical delights their innate aspiration was to lead a life of renunciation.

The people of those days possessed an other-worldly outlook and over the world there prevailed the sway of gods, spiritual heads and the Dharma.

And since people adopted and maintained an other-worldly view, they did not entertain any terrible cravings for worldly pleasures; and did not act contrary to Dharma in their endeavours to attain them.

The possessed spiritual awareness; and were conscious of the principles of Dharma; and carried out endeavours in accordance with those principles. They were fully contented with what they earned thus. If others acquired more wealth, they did not feel jealous of them, nor did they entertain desires for more. They always kept in their view the doctrines relating to *Punya* (Merit) and *Pap* (Sin); and always lived a life of serenity and felicity.

After King Vijayaraj renounced his wealth and royal power; and became a Sadhu; the responsibility of the administration fell on the young and weak shoulders of Purandhar. Prince Purandhar was not inferior to anyone, in any way. He was a worthy son of a worthy father. He did not hesitate even a little to take over the responsibility of administration. Even then, in

his mind, there arose a severe conflict between the contrary attitudes of acceptance and negation.

The pleasures of eating and drinking; and the elations of honour and prestige did not bring him peace and serenity. Royal splendour, prosperity and power failed to bring him any joy or satisfaction. Prince Purandhar deemed all these things worthless, futile and transitory. He clearly visualized the raging volcano that lay behind those things. Though he possessed all those things, he desired to follow the path of mendicancy chosen by his father and his elder brother. But one thought stood on the way of his spiritual aspiration, like a serious impediment.

Prince Purandhar had married a princess of great nobility and beauty by name Prithvi. Two or three years had passed, since the time of his marriage, but Prithvi's womb had not yet borne a fruit. How could Purandhar become a Sadhu until a boy was born to him who could succeed him to the throne of Ayodhya? From times immemorial, the kings born in the line of Lord Rishabhdev had been continuing the magnificent tradition of administering the Kingdom in such a way that the people of the Kingdom enjoyed absolute serenity, felicity and prosperity. The objective of their life was not confined to this ideal; it also included the principle; "The supreme felicity and serenity are found in renunciation"; and they embodied this lofty principle. When the kings themselves voluntarily embraced the path of renunciation, how could the people have any attachment for sensual pleasures and worldly delights? There was no likelihood at all of the people falling into the bottomless pit of immorality, inequity, injustice, sexual immorality, stealing and false and deceitful conduct which are necessary to secure worldly delights and sensual pleasures.

A serious calamity would have taken place if Purandhar had become a Sadhu renouncing the world without handing over his kingdom to his son. The Kingdom would have fallen into the hands of a hostile person; and the new king might have made worldly pleasures his only objective; and might have encouraged people to follow him; and in consequence, the people would have forgotten or ignored culture, noble conduct and tradition and

would have become absorbed in sensual pleasures; and sensuality. He might have impelled the innocent people to commit crimes and sins. As a result of this, the common people would have fallen into the confounding ocean of anarchy and sinfulness.

King Purandhar was physically existing in the *samsar*; but mentally and spiritually he existed in the realm of Moksha. His body made of muscles and bones lived in the palace but his mind existed in the ideal spiritual life that can be led in a forest. His voice dropped the nectar of renunciation, and the unfathomable ocean of compassion rolled in his eyes.

Queen Prithvi felt supremely happy and blessed in the company of Purandhar. She knew very well that her lord loved a life of detachment and renunciation; and that he had no attachments or worldly desires. Queen Prithvi was spending her days sharing her husband's spirit of renunciation. She was thoroughly familiar with the path of renunciation that had been expounded by the Paramatma Jineshwardev. Moreover the ultimate objective of all the kings of Ayodhya was to renounce this illusory *Samsar* and to proceed on the path of spiritual elevation.

The wheel of time kept moving endlessly. No change was visible anywhere and then on an auspicious day in an auspicious *Nakshatra* and at an auspicious *muhurt* Queen Prithvi became pregnant. The joy of King Purandhar and the jubilations of the people of Ayodhya knew no bounds. Everywhere, there appeared an atmosphere of elation and overflowing enthusiasm. Bards and poets sang auspicious songs and hymns. The king gave gifts to all his officers and food and clothes to poor people. Ceremonies and worship were organized in all temples. In course of time, Queen Prithvi gave birth to an extremely handsome boy. The astrologers prophesied that his future was going to be resplendent. The Court-priest prepared the horoscope of the child with great joy and made a careful study of the stars and of their effects. According to the horoscope, the boy was destined to become an extraordinary hero and a saintly king. It was as if *jivas* with little *Karma* and little worldly life were being born in the family of the Kings of Ayodhya.

The prince was named Kirthidhar. On a calm and serene night, when the whole universe was tasting the sweetness of dreamless sleep, when the millions of stars kept joyfully twinkling in the sky; when all the people tired of having worked throughout the day were sleeping delighted by the cool breezes that blew playfully over the world, King Purandhar revealed to his queen the anguish of his heart: "Dear goddess! Kindly release me now. I desire to renounce the samsar and to pursue the path of spiritual elevation".

"My Lord! I am not unaware of your thoughts and feelings and your attitude towards life. I know very well that in your heart the spirit of renunciation has been rolling like a river. You are a perfect Yogi eventhough you are physically existing in this world. Will you go away from me leaving me alone to wander in this world?"

"No, my dear goddess! That is not what I mean. I wish that you too should join me in the pursuit of the path of renunciation...."

"If you desire my progress, you have to keep your decision in abeyance for sometime".

"Why?"

"We have to wait until our son Kirthidhar is able to stand on his own feet and until he is able to distinguish between good and evil. We have to wait until we can make him educated and cultured and until the spirit of renunciation appears in his heart also. Until then, we cannot discard him. On the contrary we have to bring him up and educate him and make him a noble human being. After that, I will certainly act according to your desire. I am only a woman and you know a woman's intelligence is limited".

"My Queen! What you say is not improper. We shall adopt the path of *Sadhudharma* only after crowning Kirthidhar, King of our country".

Queen Prithvi was immensely pleased with the words of Purandhar. King Purandhar made all arrangements to educate

prince Kirthidhar and to make him a heroic warrior, an able and cultured ruler. Gradually, he began to lessen his responsibilities relating to the administration of his kingdom because the dutiful officers and the intelligent and capable ministers took upon their shoulders more and more responsibilities relating to the government.

Some years passed thus. Prince Kirthidhar grew up attaining greater and greater splendour like the waxing moon. He entered the phase of youth as if in the twinkling of an eye. The king and the queen put forth all the necessary endeavours to enable the prince to attain an all-round development. The people of the city entertained lofty expectations regarding the prince who was like the veritable god of love in appearance. The beautiful damsels of the city admired his fascinating looks and always composed and sang newer and newer songs of glory. Suppliants were full of praise and gratitude for his magnanimity.

Once, the care-taker of the forest came to King Purandhar; offered his felicitations and salutations to him and informed him of the arrival of a great Muni by name Kshemankar who possessed an extraordinary spiritual radiance.

When king Purandhar received this news he felt immensely delighted. He gave the officer gifts and presentations and set off with his family to have a *darshan* of the great muni.

As soon as he sat in the chariot he felt thrilled as a wave of joy flashed to the brims of his being. All of a sudden, he experienced a deep spiritual felicity. His right eye shook suddenly. The chariot stopped in front of the gate of the garden. As soon as he alighted from the chariot he saw the great Muni seated beneath a tree in the garden and his heart began to swing with delight and elation.

What an extraordinary and other-worldly appearance !

What an extraordinary serenity was there in his face !

How totally devoid of passions and aberrations he looked !

The King bowed to him with devotion folding his hands and saluted him touching the ground with five limbs (*Panchang*

Pranipath). He made polite enquiries and then sat near him in absolute humility.

The great muni bestowed his blessings upon the gathering by saying *Dharmalabh* (May you attain spiritual prosperity) and preached to them some principles for their spiritual welfare. He explained to them the mysteries of reality and illusion; of the soul and the supreme soul. He explained the original form of the soul to them. He also explained to them the means by which they could realise and attain the original form of the soul. The king's spirit of renunciation became intenser. His eyes were filled with the tears of joy.

"Revered Lord ! What you say is true. I have engraved on my heart your precious words and they have filled my heart with a new elation and enthusiasm."

"Oh king ! Whatever duty has to be carried out in life, it must be carried out at once without any delay because life is full of changes and the physical potentialities may not remain always firm and strong".

"Oh Lord ! Kindly initiate me into the *Charitradharma* and help me to cross the ocean of samsar".

After that Kirthidhar's coronation as king of the country took place with all grandeur and *eclat*. King Purandhar and Queen Prithvi received from the great muni initiation into the *Charitradharma*. Some pious and devout people of the city followed the example of the king and the queen and became sadhus and sadhvis.

How greatly were the people fascinated by the path of Moksha ! What an extraordinary revelation of 'the path of spiritual elevation ! Those times were great indeed and those sublime souls were indeed blessed.

The administration of the kingdom of Ayodhya was going on excellently under the inspiring leadership and guidance of the King Kirthidhar. The king and the people lived as if they were equals shouldering responsibilities and sharing joys. Goats

and lions drank water from the same vessel; but the prince could not forget that event of his parents' renouncing worldly life because it was deeply engraved upon his mind. Sometimes in the court itself he used to become absent-minded thinking of the way taken by his parents and desiring to reach that level. Though he was always living in the external world physically his inner world was totally different. Kirthidhar married a princess by name Sahadevi who was renowned for her beauty and purity of character. The marriage took place with all grandeur and eclat but the prince was not interested in this marriage. He thought it was proper to act according to the circumstances that came his way. Yet he was totally free from sensual desires and temptations. He lived an absolutely pure and detached life like a lotus in the slime.

It was the second *prahar* of the night. (One *prahar* is equal to three hours). The whole city of Ayodhya was steeped in deep sleep. The stars twinkled in the sky. Cool and tender breezes were playing hide and seek. Peace and serenity held sway over the kingdom. At such a time, Kirthidhar saw a waking dream, a reverie. He felt that he was seated on his throne. The Court was jam-packed with people. Suddenly, the saintly king Purandhar came into the court. The king Kirthidhar got off his throne with great veneration and bowed to the feet of the saintly king and stood near him. The tears were streaming from his eyes. He washed the feet of the saintly king with his tears. Purandhar muni was greatly moved by all this and bestowed upon him his blessings.

"Revered Father ! You have gone away leaving me alone in this illusory world. You have rendered your life blessed. But you have not thought of me. I am greatly worried and agitated. Kindly take me also with you so that I too may attain spiritual elevation." The prince said this in a voice shaken with emotion.

"Dear Prince ! Why are you worried ?? You have at your command the whole kingdom of Ayodhya, its vast and fertile plains, its boundless prosperity, a happy family and an unbroken royal power. Yet why are you worried ?" The saintly king asked in a calm tone.

“My lord ! It is this samsar that has been causing worry and agitation to me. The kingdom, royal power, wealth, splendour and prosperity are all the forms assumed by the samsar. I do not desire any of these things. I am sick of them. Kindly deliver me from them. I wish to pursue the path of spiritual welfare”. Every word uttered by Kirthidhar revealed his innate worry and anguish.

The tears streamed forth from the eyes of the saintly king. This sight filled the prince with boundless felicity. His heart which had been consumed with the fires of samsar found peace and serenity. He was not aware of the passage of time. He was deeply absorbed in that state of supreme spiritual felicity. Then suddenly he woke from his sleep. He noticed that the palace was pervaded with silence and stillness and that the lights in his chamber were burning dimly. He also saw his dear queen, Sahadevi lying in deep sleep near him. Within a moment, he came out of the dream-world and entered the actual world. But to him now, the dream-world was the real world, while the actual world was false and illusory.

His sleep had ended suddenly. He got off his cot and sat on a clean seat. He had closed his eyes, and with an absolute concentration, he was meditating on the Paramatma. As soon as the last *Prahar* began, Queen Sahadevi woke up. When she saw her lord, she found him sitting absorbed in deep meditation.

Frightened by this unexpected event she got up and sat at the feet of her Lord. But she was a woman and could not remain patient for a long time. She remained patient for a while and remained silent but when her impatience increased, she placed her tender hand upon Kirthidhar's hand suggesting that he should end his meditation.

Having finished his meditation, Kirthidhar looked towards Queen Sahadevi.

“My dear Lord ! What is the matter ?” Sahadevi asked him in an anxious tone.

“What shall I say”, my dear Queen ?

I have had an extraordinary experience this night. This night has been an extraordinary one !”

“How ?”

“I saw an extraordinary and unprecedented dream”.

“Kindly tell me about your dream”.

“In my dream, most unexpectedly I saw my saintly father”.

“Did you spend the whole night, in these thoughts and reflections ?” Sahadevi asked him a little anxiously.

“First, listen to me. As soon as I saw my father, I saluted him. I entreated him to deliver me from this samsar. My father said many things. Compassion overflowed his eyes. If this dream comes true, the boat of my life would have crossed the ocean and reached the other bank”.

“What did you entreat your father to do ?”

“I entreated him to enable me to attain liberation from the samsar”.

“Dear Lord ! You should not have made that entreaty”, Sahadevi said with evident worry.

“My dear queen ! You please tell me if as human beings, we can do anything better than this. A Jiva can never attain endless ineffable felicity and serenity unless he attains liberation from the samsar”.

“My lord ! Is it not possible to carry out spiritual endeavours even while living in Samsar ?”

“My dear queen, what spiritual austerities, can we perform as householders ? Can we as householders meditate upon the pure soul ? Can we be free from the snaky coils of passions and sensual desires ?”

“My Lord ! When I hear you speak of renunciation, my heart palpitates with fear. A nameless tremor runs through my body

and shakes me to the brims of my being". Even the walls of the chamber seemed to shake with her anxious voice.

The sun had risen. The eastern skies had grown rosy. The people of the city had awakened from their sleep and were setting about doing their daily duties. Kirthidhar tried to console his queen but all in vain because Sahadevi was certain that her lord would sooner or later renounce the samsar and that no power on earth could prevent him from doing so. Kirthidhar also day by day became more and more detached from his royal duties and was becoming more and more fascinated by the path of mendicancy. Once he sent for his Chief Minister and said;

"Dear Chief Minister ! You are fully aware of what I have been thinking. I desire to be rid of the responsibilities of kingship. I have been yearning for years to adore the path of spiritual elevation. You are perfect and absolutely capable and you are the most conscientious person in our country. Therefore, you kindly find out someone who can take my place as the king of Ayodhya and who can attain higher levels of prosperity, progress and welfare for our kingdom".

"My dear king ! I can understand the meaning of every word uttered by you. At the same time, I am also fully aware of the fact that every king who sat on the throne of Ayodhya adopted the life of mendicancy. I know very well no king of Ayodhya broke this tradition in the past and will break this tradition in the future, of becoming a mendicant; and seeking spiritual welfare. This is a special virtue of all the kings of the Ikshvaku dynasty, of Lord Rishabhdev. But oh king ! I wish to make an entreaty. Kindly do not take any decision without thinking over the matter deeply. Kindly do not implement your plan of adopting the *Sadhudharma* until the queen gives birth to a son who can succeed to the throne. Please do not break the lofty tradition that has been in existence in your family from the earliest times. This tradition is very useful and beneficial to the people and to the world. With the help and guidance of the kings and great men of your dynasty, countless jivas have been able to cross the ocean of Samsar. I think this is enough.

What else can a lay man like me say ?

King Kirthidhar fully comprehended the meaning of what the Chief Minister said.

Some years passed; and the palace of Ayodhya resounded with joyous screeches. But the mockery of fate was such that Queen Sahadevi in accordance with her preconceived plan ordered her maid to conceal the child in some secret place. Accordingly, the maid concealed the child in an underground cellar and she too lived there.

Then Queen Sahadevi sent word to the king that she had given birth to a dead child. As soon as he received the news he came running to the harem. When he saw the expression on the face of the queen, he grew suspicious. He said in an agitated voice.

"Where is the dead child ?"

"The maid has taken it away". Queen Sahadevi gave a curt reply.

"Which maid", he asked.

"Sunanda !"

Kirthidhar, leaving the chamber went to the door-keeper.

"When did Sunanda go out ?"

"Oh King ! I have been here on guard since last evening. Let alone Sunanda, not even a tiny bird went out of the harem".

"Did anyone go out carrying the new-born child ?"

"No, my Lord !"

Kirthidhar stopped there. He stood thinking for a few moments. All sorts of doubts and fears distressed him. Yet making a decision, he returned to the queen's chamber. He sent for all the maids and asked them with evident perturbation.

"Where is Sunanda ? She is not to be seen anywhere." His voice was full of distress.

"Oh giver of food ! The queen has sent Sunanda on some errand; but we do not know where she has gone."

"Did anyone see her going out ?"

All were silent. The chamber was pervaded with absolute silence. The maids and attendants shook with fear. Just then the king noticed that a maid wanted to say something but that she was unable to speak out on account of some fear. He called her near him; and said in a serious tone;

"You need not fear anything. Speak out plainly whatever you know. I promise you that I will see that nobody can harm you. You can be fearless".

"Oh thou ocean of compassion ! I did not see Sunanda going out; but I surely saw the queen handing the child to her. At that time, the prince was crying. Sunanda took him into her lap; and disappeared mysteriously but did not go out".

It did not take much time for the king to realise the truth. Having sent away the maids and attendants, he went back to the queen. When the queen saw the king coming into her chamber again, she began to shudder with fear. She was filled with fear.

"Dear Queen ! I wonder why you have been uttering lies and why you have been turning away from truth. I have gone to the bottom of the matter. Our darling ... the apple of our eyes the star of our eyes is alive."

"Dear Lord ! That is not true. Why should I utter lies ? What you have heard is false. Why should I utter lies at all !"

"Dear Queen ! Do not try to conceal the truth. Do not try to escape by making such elusive statements. What do you gain after all by speaking falsehood ? You had better tell me where you have hidden our son".

“But”

“Discard your fears and doubts. Who can conceal the sun ? You too cannot. If you do not tell me where you have hidden the child, I will have to search for him”.

Suddenly, Sahadevi's eyes welled up with tears.

“Oh you mad one ! Should we weep over this event or should we rejoice at it ? Is it a matter for lamentation or for jubilation ?”

“Instead of sitting mute and motionless thus in gloom, it is necessary that we should make splendid arrangements to celebrate the birth of the Prince”.

“My dear lord ! I am indeed happy at the birth of our son; but you”

“I may become a Sadhu. I think you are agitated over that possibility”.

“Yes”, she said and sobbed. The tears began to stream forth from her eyes.

“Dear Queen ! It is not auspicious to weep on such an occasion. Please try to console yourself and tell me where you have hidden the child so that the people of the city may know that a son is born to us; and so that they may make arrangements to celebrate the event”.

Queen Sahadevi narrated the whole story. King Kirthidhar, at once, went to the underground cellar. He found Sunanda swaying in delight looking at the beautiful child. The face of the prince was resplendent with an extraordinary radiance. Sunanda was shocked to find that the King had come to the underground cellar. She felt as if the ground under her feet was slipping away. She began to shudder with fear. With overpowering fear, she saluted the King; and stood with a bowed head.

“Sunanda ! You need not fear anything. You are absolutely innocent”. Having said this, he tenderly took up the child. Sweet

smiles covered the face of the child. He began looking at his father with fixed eyes; and the father kept looking at the child with fixed eyes.

At once, the news of the birth of the son spread from one end of the Kingdom to the other like wild fire. The courtiers, the officials, the rich and the poor came to the Court carrying with them special presentations. A week's worship and ceremonies were organized in all the temples in the city. The people greatly delighted at the birth of the prince organized countless celebrations and jubilations with overflowing enthusiasm.

Everywhere joy and jubilations prevailed. All were in a state of supreme satisfaction; but the Queen Sahadevi was plunged in agitation and anguish. She was certain that now the king would renounce all his splendour, power and his family; that he would become a Sadhu; and that she would have to spend all her life in desperation and separation from her beloved husband.

At the very thought of the separation from her husband, she felt shocked and agitated. But the king did not take any such step as would cause agony to the Queen.

The prince was named Sukoshal. He began to grow like the waxing moon. As he grew up, she developed greater and greater attachment for him; and her attachment for her husband began to dwindle.

At that time, a great Acharya by name Vijaysen happened to come to Ayodhya, accompanied by his disciples. King Kirthidhar visited him to offer his salutations to him. The great Acharya made them drink the nectar of Dharma. After the discourse was over, King Kirthidhar stood up; and said;

"Oh lord ! Be so gracious as to initiate me into the *Charitra-dharma*; and to help me cross the ocean of Samsar."

Prince Sukoshal was crowned king of the country. King Kirthidhar became a Sadhu and began to proceed on the path of spiritual endeavour.

After her husband became a mendicant, Queen Sahadevi had to face two serious problems. The boy Sukoshal had to be educated; and the kingdom had to be administered properly. Queen Sahadevi began to carry out these duties with a dedicated mind.

The Muni Kirthidhar entered the realm of *Charitra* and began to live in the company of his spiritual head. He was completely absorbed in the adoration of Dharma. He used to wake up in the *Brahma Muhurt* and meditate upon the *Pancha-parameshti*. He used to study the scriptures with absolute concentration. He carried out *Pratikraman* and *Pratilekhan* with great spiritual awareness. He rendered service to the Gurudev and his fellow mendicants with devotion. He engaged himself in studying the scriptures in the company of other Sadhus and saints. At the time of the *Madhukari* i.e., of obtaining food, he went through the streets of the village, town or city; collected *Bhiksha*; which was necessary for existence; and entreated the other Sadhus to take a little of what he had collected. After that, with the permission of the Gurudev, he ate food, without caring for taste. Apart from this, he engaged himself in *Vihar* (travelling on foot) and then he became absorbed in scriptural studies.

In the same manner, gradually in his mind, there arose the desire to carry out spiritual austerities of greater and greater severity. Sometimes, during the winter season, when the winds blew cold, he discarded his clothes and spent long hours in deep meditation. Sometimes, he stood in the cold weather beneath a tree outside the upashray. With the purpose of conquering fear, he took the permission of his Gurudev, he went out of the town and carried out meditation in such lonely places as cemeteries. Poisonous snakes and other venomous creatures bit him, yet he carried out his meditation unshaken by those impediments. Sometimes, on some dark nights he used to carry out meditation in lonely and desolate burial grounds. Ghosts, spirits and other supernatural beings could not terrify him.

His Gurudev was supremely pleased with his spiritual austerities, his endeavours and his devoted pursuit of the path of

charitradharma. Hence, he allowed him, to go out alone and to carry more austere spiritual endeavours.

The great Muni began to walk upon the thorny path prescribed by the Jineshwar Bhagwan. Gradually he conquered the inner enemies like anger, infatuation, avarice, fear and arrogance. He discarded all his attachments for his body. The scorching heat of the summer could not terrify him and the cold and biting winds of winter failed to shake his determination. He travelled from place to place walking on the uneven roads of the countryside; and happened to arrive at the garden near Ayodhya; but no one could recognize him as the beloved Maharshi of Ayodhya. What remained in him that would enable people to recognise him? The people who were madly pursuing the path of worldly enjoyments could not recognize him; but the countless sublime souls possessing a spiritual vision knew him and could recognize him.

It was noon.

The great Muni began to wander about on the hot and dusty streets of Ayodhya to collect *Bhiksha*. At that time, Queen Sahadevi happened to be sitting on the balcony of her palace. She was experiencing intense happiness at the sight of the progress and prosperity of the city of Ayodhya.

All of a sudden, her eyes fell on the Rajarshi, Kirthidhar.

At the first sight, she could not recognize him.

Again, she looked at him with fixed eyes; and some doubts and conjectures entered her mind.

But when she saw that mendicant, wandering in the streets, she felt certain about his identity.

“Oh ! Yes ! He is my lord.... the lord of my life.” The queen kept looking at him to her heart's delight. He who was once the king of Ayodhya was now, wandering through the roads and streets of the city. He wore soiled and old clothes and looked completely emaciated. When she saw him in that condition, the queen's heart was greatly grieved, and her eyes welled

up with tears. She at once; stood up. The maids and attendants who were standing behind her were greatly shocked and amazed when they saw the queen's strange behaviour. They asked her stupefied ;

"Oh Queen ! What happened ?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Nothing has happened." She said and sat down. For a moment, suddenly a thought flashed through her mind like a current of electricity. "Let me go down; and invite the Maharshi to receive *Bhiksha*."

But the very next moment a fear... an unwise idea.... a cruel thought entered her mind like a monster. "If my son also becomes a mendicant taking his father's example; and goes away with him, when he sees his father, I will have to experience life-long anguish caused by the separation from my son. The king of course has gone away leaving me in the lurch; and now he may snatch away from me the only prop of my existence. Therefore, I should manage to send him away from the city before Sukoshal or any official of the court or anyone else recognizes him. He has come to set fire to the *Nandanvan* (Heavenly garden) of my life and see the fun. But now I will not yield to attachments and I will not also yield to anyone. I will not allow him to fulfil his innate desire. He may be a Muni.... and he may be innocent, but I have to send him out of the city for the welfare of Sukoshal and of the Kingdom. And I have to do this."

The knife of selfishness cut off all her noble ideas. She had lived with him for years bound to him with the bondage of love and affection. She had heartily carried out her duties of worldly life as his wife and queen. She used to call him repeatedly with such words of endearment as, "My lord : lord of my life ! Oh god of the temple of my heart !" and tasted the sweetness of love for years. But now years later the same person had become a detached Muni and was wandering through the streets of the city. He was about to break his one month's fast and that heartless woman decided to send the Muni out of the city.

This is the Samsar and this is entangling snare.

And this is the evil consequence of the attachments caused by worldly cravings and desires.

Queen Sahadevi called for the door-keepers. The door-keeper came running at once; saluted her respectfully and stood near her with bowed head.

“Go and bring the officer in charge of the city.”

“May the queen be victorious !”

Saying this, the door-keeper retreated. Within a short time, the officer appeared before the queen; and bowed to her.

“How well you are protecting the city ! If you carry out your duty thus, what will happen to the city ?”

“Why oh queen ! Has there been any lapse ?” The Officer asked shuddering with fear. He was bathed in perspiration.

“I wonder how so many beggars could enter Ayodhya and keep wandering here ! And you ask me if there is any lapse in your guarding of the city ! If beggars and wanderers are thus allowed to enter the city, the peace and felicity of the city will be affected. Go and find out if any mendicant or beggar is wandering through the streets of the city; and if you find any such person give him what he wants and send him away. Do not allow him to stay in the city.”

“Your command shall be carried out revered queen !” The Officer saluted her and went away to carry out his duty.

Queen Sahadevi felt supremely relieved.

The palace of Sukoshal also was on the side of the main road. At that time, the king was not at home. But the old maid Shivadevi sat at the window contemplating on the beautiful dance of nature. Suddenly, her eyes fell on the Muni who was wandering on the road. She was shocked to see him. She saluted him from there with devotion; and forgot herself in admiring the life of renunciation that the Rajarshi was leading. Suddenly, when there was some noise on the street, she woke up from her

trance. The care-taker of the city was issuing some orders to the guards.

“Go and find out if there is any mendicant or beggar wandering in the city. If there is any, send him out of the city. This is the command of the queen.”

The troop of guards set off, at once, hunting for any beggars or mendicants who might be wandering in the city. When they began to search for beggars and mendicants who might be wandering in the city, they first came across the saintly king. None of them could recognize him as the former king of Ayodhya. They surrounded the Mahamuni and stopped him on the way.

“Oh beggar ! Get out of the city at once.” The guards of the city ordered him in an angry voice.

The Mahamuni did not want to reveal his identity and his power; so, even after hearing the angry words of the guards, he was calm and silent. He did not get angry with them; nor was he offended by their insulting words. He went slowly out of the city.

But when the old maid saw this incident, her anger shot up to the sky. She, at once, descended from the balcony.

The Officer stood at the gate of the palace, twisting his moustaches haughtily.

“Oh ! Dear Officer ! What an outrageous thing have you done ! You are abusing your powers thus insulting great Munis on the holy land of Ayodhya ! At the same time you are showing your rudeness and impertinence”, On account of anger, the white face of the maid grew red.

“Mother ! I beg your pardon for my insolence. What you say is absolutely true. But that is the command of the Queen-mother. How am I guilty ? I am absolutely innocent”.

The maid looked towards the palace of the queen-mother with angry eyes. There was no expression of sadness or grief

on the face of the queen; on the contrary, she looked cheerful and satisfied.

The old and experienced maid at once understood the situation fully. Her anger changed into anguish and flowed out of her eyes in the form of tears. She returned to her palace with an anguished heart and tearful eyes. Her face grew pale and dull; and all the strength in her body seemed to have disappeared.

Suddenly she came across King Sukoshal.

“Mother ! Why are you so sad ?”

“Dear child ! A great injustice is taking place in your kingdom.”

“What is that injustice ? Please tell me !”

“Even if I tell you what is it you can do ?”

“Mother !”

“No child ! You can’t do anything. You are helpless because the Queen-mother herself has done this injustice”.

“I am not able to understand anything. Please tell me clearly what you want to say. What is the use of speaking in riddles ?”

“The saintly King Kirthidhar came into the city; but the queen.....”

“Is it true ? When did he come here ? Where is he ?”

“Oh king ! Do not be impatient. The Queen knows everything”.

“Then”

“She ordered the care-taker of the city to turn him out and he turned him out of the City”.

"Is all this true?" And there appeared on the face of Sukoshal simultaneously sorrow, anger, agitation and eagerness.

"But why did she do so?"

"Do you want to know why she has done such a thing?"

"She has acted in this manner out of the fear that if you see him you too would become a Sanyasi and go away with him." And she began to weep bitterly.

King Sukoshal thought for a while; and then went out of the palace hurriedly. His horse was ready at the gate. Without a moment's delay, he mounted the horse and set off.

XXXII

MOTHER ?

The saintly king, Kirthidhar sat in deep meditation beneath a banyan tree in a garden outside the city of Ayodhya. From his emaciated face there surged out the nectar of serenity and equanimity. His body looked resplendent with the radiance of his austerities. He had returned without having had any food after his fasting for a month.

Sukoshal came out of the city at a great speed. He looked around intently in his search for the Mahamuni; and approached the banyan tree. He was overwhelmed with joyful emotions as soon as he saw the Mahamuni. The tears began to flow from his eyes naturally. He fell at the feet of the Mahamuni and wept like a child.

“Oh you fortunate young man ! Why are you so greatly grieved ?” The saintly king asked Sukoshal after having completed his meditation but Sukoshal did not stop weeping. His throat was choked with emotion. His tearful eyes had grown red. He lay at the feet of the Rishi helpless and weak.

“Sukoshal ! Stop weeping. Check your grief. No one has committed any mistake. All this is the effect of the sins of my previous *janma*. I have to endure this. Whatever happens is for the good. We have to think so.”

“Oh lord ! Actually this samsar itself is the source of all sins. Kindly help me to get out of this illusory samsar; and deliver me from it.”

What an excellent spiritual view did Sukoshal adopt ! His view was born out of self-scrutiny. He did not refer to his

mother but he began to blame the worldly desires and temptations that make one sin against and forget one's own parents. Until the jivatma does not attain a victory over worldly desires and cravings, he will continue to commit such errors. Jivatmas have to control their worldly desires if they should refrain from committing blunders and sins. Worldly desires and temptations should be eradicated totally.

This is what the spiritualistic outlook does in this universe. It impels man to detach himself from sensual desires and passions. It causes the decline of evil passions and cravings. The man who has the spiritual outlook refrains from committing any blunder or sin. As a result of this, an atmosphere of serenity and felicity appears in this world. In the same manner, except the spiritualistic power, there is no other power which can impel and inspire human beings to destroy their passions and cravings. At the same time, it checks injustice, immorality, ignoble conduct and ignoble dealings.

Sukoshal was a young man. He was the king of the vast Kingdom of Ayodhya. Yet the spiritual outlook exercised a complete control over his mind and heart. The light of knowledge shone resplendent in his eyes. On the basis of his spiritual outlook, he could examine and realise the truth about worldly events and occurrences.

What was the offence committed by Sahadevi ? Her only fault was that she was agitated and oppressed by her attachment for her son. It was on account of that attachment that the feeling of hatred against the saintly king arose in her mind. She was agitated by this thought, "My son also might become a Sadhu if he sees the Rajarshi and then who is there to support me ?" Actually, if there was any offender, it was her attachment which kept cutting into her mind and heart. Her soul was the cause only outwardly. The real cause was her attachment.

There was a commotion in the palace. The atmosphere was filled with the whisperings of the maids and attendants. Everyone was speaking contemptuously of Queen Sahadevi in her

absence. Who could say anything in deprecation of the Queen in her presence ?

Queen Sahadevi learnt from reliable sources that her son Sukoshal had come to know of the arrival of the saintly king and that he had gone on horseback to see him. At once, she became worried and agitated. She sent a message to the Chief Minister to be present in the secret chamber for a consultation and then she went to the chamber of Queen Chitramala, the wife of Sukoshal.

Chitramala was a soft-natured woman of great purity and nobility. She knew very well that her husband was a man who looked at everything from the spiritualistic point of view. Therefore, she did not feel sad at what had happened. Moreover, she was fully convinced that if she had to make any endeavours in life, she must make only spiritualistic endeavours for her spiritual welfare but she was pregnant at that time.

“What a strange thing has occurred, Chitramala ! Have you not received any news ?” Queen Sahadevi asked her impatiently soon after entering the chamber.

“No ! I have not heard anything”, Chitramala stood up, saluted the Queen-mother and said in a polite manner :

“The saintly king has come to Ayodhya unexpectedly. Somehow, Sukoshal has come to know of it and he has gone in search of the saintly king. I do not know what is going to happen ?”...

“Mother ! Do not worry about anything. I will at once go to my husband and will entreat him to....”

“But if he does not listen to your entreaty what will you do ?” Queen Sahadevi said with excitement. She seemed to know what was going to happen in the future.

“In this situation what control do you have over him ? Of course he has control over us”.

Queen Sahadevi became silent and kept looking at Chitramala. Just then a maid came in and informed the Queen-mother

that the Chief Minister had come into the secret chamber. The Queen-mother advised Chitramala to go to Sukoshal and then she went back to her palace.

“Dear Chief Minister ! I think you have heard about the arrival of the Rajarshi ?”

“Yes, Honoured Queen-mother ! I have heard about it”.

“What have you thought about it ?”

“I think that our king will not return from the Rajarshi”.

“Ah ! What did you say ?” Queen Sahadevi’s eyes welled up with tears.

“Queen-mother ! Do not worry about it ! Do not give way to sorrow. This has been the tradition of the kings of Ayodhya. This has been their way and this tradition has been in existence from the time of Lord Adinath”.

“But the throne of Ayodhya will be vacant !”

“Enough ! This is the only infallible method by which we can prevent him from becoming a sadhu. We shall place this problem before him and there is the possibility of his accepting our suggestion. There is no other way”.

“Then, why delay ! Please go at once and bring my son here somehow”.

Accordingly, the Chief Minister accompanied by the high officials of the court visited the saintly king, Kirthidhar. The people of Ayodhya followed him and thronged the garden to see and to salute the Rajarshi.

All went to see him but only Queen Sahadevi stayed behind. She was burning with anger and hatred. She cursed the Rajarshi and deprecated him in her mind, but the fire of her anger could not do any harm to Kirthidhar. On the contrary, he remained calm and detached. His equanimity remained unshaken. Queen Sahadevi who was blinded by selfishness gained nothing. On the contrary, she lost what was hers.

“And what shall I do ? I managed to send the Rajarshi out of the city but when my son acts thus against my wishes; and when he acts thus ungratefully towards me what shall I do ? What can anyone do anyway ? He has not cared to think even a little about me. I brought him up with such affection. I carried him in my womb for nine months; and gave birth to him. I bore with countless hardships for his sake and brought him up with love and affection. I celebrated his marriage with a princess of great beauty and virtues. Oh ! He has forgotten all my benefactions and gone away with the purpose of becoming a Sadhu”. Queen Sahadevi’s eyes began to burn with anger. She bit her lips angrily. She wrung her hands in complete helplessness. She felt like devouring her son and her husband, Kirthidhar.

Oh ! What a cruel game this is of attachments and hatred ! She who a moment ago, got her husband expelled from the city for the sake of the welfare of her son began to entertain cruel thoughts regarding her son. But what else could she do except entertaining such thoughts ? She tried to prevent that possibility but when a situation arises attachments and hatred impel a jiva to behave unjustly.

Chitramala sat in the chariot along with her relatives and friends and set off at great speed. Her chariot halted near the banyan tree and then she approached the Mahamuni in all humility and veneration. She prostrated to the Mahamuni with overflowing devotion and sat near him. Those who had gone with her also did the same.

King Sukoshal was entreating the Mahamuni holding his feet to initiate him into *Charitradharma*. There was silence everywhere. All were silent. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also came there accompanied by the Ministers. They saluted the Rajarshi and sat near King Sukoshal.

“Oh Lord ! You have bestowed upon us a great benefaction by visiting the city of Ayodhya. The ignorant guards could not recognise you. They behaved improperly and ignobly in turning you out of the city, but you are the ocean of com-

passion. Kindly pardon their blunder." The Chief Minister folding his hands begged for his forgiveness.

"Dear Chief Minister ! What the guards did was for my good. Creating that situation, they helped me to destroy my Karmas". The Mahamuni said with a smile on his face.

"Dear Lord ! It was my mother who rendered that help to you; not the guards." Sukoshal said making the point clear.

"Even there her attachment for you was the cause !" The Chief Minister said looking towards Sukoshal.

"Dear Chief Minister ! Do you call this, attachment for her son ? Actually, it is neither attachment nor affection but mere selfishness and in this samsar what can we find except selfishness ?" Samsar itself means selfishness. In this samsar, people employ countless manoeuvres to achieve their selfish ends. So, the enlightened people have said that the samsar is the source of all sins. Therefore, I do not want to live in this samsar. I have decided to renounce this samsar and to surrender my life at the holy feet of my revered father."

"But is it proper on your part to become a Sadhu leaving Ayodhya in the lurch ? The Kingdom will be without a king if you go away as a Sadhu. You are not unaware of what happens to the kingdom which has no king to rule over it". Chitramala turning towards Sukoshal said in a voice shaken with emotion.

"Oh Queen ! You have forgotten this truth that the successor to the throne and the kingdom is growing in your womb. That means, the kingdom of Ayodhya is not without a king and I crown that child in the womb, king of Ayodhya and then become initiated into *Sadhudharma*" Sukoshal said suggesting a new way out.

"But you must respect your father's words and example. He became a mendicant only after your coronation." Chitramala said making her point clear.

“Dear queen! what you say is true. I too wish to crown my son king of the country. But the difference between the two situations is this. My father crowned me king of the country after my birth but I wish to crown my son king of the country even while he is in your womb”.

“Dear king! I entreat you to suspend your plan of becoming a sadhu at least for sometime”, and her grief which had been suppressed till then found expression in the form of tears that streamed down her eyes.

“Do not worry. You know my innate feelings very well. I cannot live in this samsar even for a moment. I find it difficult to spend even a second in this samsar. In me there has arisen the desire to live in solitude carrying on the task of spiritual realisation; to destroy the bondages of Karmas and to spend the remainder of my life in the endeavour to attain the supreme state. Do you think that I will be happy if I remain here caught in the confounding meshes of the samsar? Can I make you also happy in this samsar?” Sukoshal said looking intently at Chitramala.

The Rajarshi who had been sitting silent all this while turned towards Chitramala and said in a soft and tender voice! “Dear daughter! You must feel happy that your husband has chosen the path of spiritual elevation and it is your duty, to extend a helping hand to him in this matter. This is the first duty of every jivatma who is bound by the commands of the Paramatma Jineshwardev”.

Chitramala found it difficult to refute the words of the Rajarshi. She bowed her head and accepted heartily the words of the revered sage. Even the Chief Minister and the other ministers gave their silent consent. All the people of Ayodhya who had gathered there were plunged in grief when they saw their beloved king determined to become a sadhu. The tears flowed from their eyes. King Sukoshal explained to them the secret of the supreme duty that has to be done in life. He made them realise the importance of the soul. He inspired them also to attain freedom from the bondage of karmas and he crowned his son

who was growing in Chitramala's womb, king of the country and then, received the *Deeksha* from him.

The news that the king was becoming a Sadhu spread like wild fire. When the Queen-mother Sahadevi heard the news, she fell down unconscious like a tree which had been cut off. The maids and attendants began to lament aloud on hearing the news. The news that the queen had swooned spread like wild fire. The palace was filled with people. Whoever heard of this, became shocked and depressed. On account of the ceaseless efforts of the servants and attendants, Queen Sahadevi recovered her consciousness but her lamentation continued. As moments, hours, days, months and years passed, her heart-rending lamentation went on increasing. Chitramala made every possible effort to console her but all her efforts were in vain. Even the minister tried to console her but to no effect. She went on grieving over the occurrence. On account of endless grief and anguish, she became weak and withered.

She stopped eating food. She did not carry out such daily activities as taking a bath. She never went out of the palace. Sometimes, overcome with her attachment for her son, she remembered him and wept in a heart-rending manner; sometimes overcome with hatred, she rained fire on Sukoshal and sometimes she screamed aloud in sheer madness.

As days passed by, she grew weak and emaciated. She lost all her strength. She lost her mental poise and firmness. When she was passing through such a phase of painful existence one day the bird of her life flew away from her perishable body.

She staked her life in the game of attachment and hatred with the desire of attaining victory but what did she gain at the end? She herself died. She lost both this world and the other world.

She suffered a bitter defeat in the human state of existence. But with the desire of placing impediments on their way, after her death, she became a lioness and began to live in a mountain-cave. Now, she had a boundless opportunity to play her game of hatred.

On the other hand, the father and the son also found a boundless sphere where they could endeavour to attain a victory over attachments and hatred. As a result of this, soaked with absolute selflessness and detachment, the father and the son continued to consecrate the soil, they trod upon.

They began to make extraordinary endeavours to attain a victory over their inner enemies. They were physically absorbed in austere penance and mentally absorbed in deep meditation. The two great kings of Ayodhya became Yogis of Bharat and revealed to the world the greatness of the path of renunciation.

The Chaturmas approached. The Rajarshi, Sukoshal became impatient to carry out sublime spiritual endeavours. He stood before the yogi with a bowed head and folded hands and said;

“Oh great lord ! The Chaturmas has approached.”

“Then ?” The yogi said in a serious manner.

“Oh lord ! If you agree, we can go to some mountain-cave and there in a lonely place we can spend the four months of the rainy season (Chaturmas) in meditation.”

“Oh muni ! you are right”.

“So, shall we proceed to some mountain-cave ?”

The father and the son were extraordinary sadhus. Both of them had the same aspiration; wanted to pursue the same path of spiritual endeavours; they thought of the same endeavours; and cherished the same ideals!

Travelling on foot; they reached the valleys of the mountain called Vasanthadri.

At a close distance they saw a small hamlet of cowherds. Both the great munis took food before commencing a four-month fast and then began climbing the mountain. They climbed over several peaks and reached a large mountain-cave.

The cave had been formed out of a single rock and the interior walls of the cave were carved with exquisite pictures.

A sublime image of the Jin had been carved out of stone and this was an object that would impel people to carry out meditation.

There was silence everywhere. Peace reigned supreme there. The place was ideally suitable for the performance of spiritual austerities and activities. The two great Munis first prayed to the deities presiding over the cave; offered their heart-felt devotion to the Jineshwar Bhagwan and then they commenced their meditation.

Food was not available anywhere in that vicinity. It was a wild forest area with huge trees and gigantic creepers and all over the area one could see wild animals prowling about freely and fearlessly, and screeching and roaring joyously. Here they decided to carry out a fast for four months without consuming food or water. Their only objective was to become absorbed in a contemplation on the Paramatma and to attain to that state. As days passed they began to acquire greater and greater degree of indefinable enlightenment. The natural radiance of knowledge appeared in them. Step by step, they began to experience incomparable and ineffable felicity.

While they were thus engaged in their extraordinary spiritual endeavours, the monsters of sin like ignorance, infatuation, attachment, hatred, passions, lust, anger pride and deception could not enter the threshold of their hearts.

Their monstrous potentialities were totally ineffective against the infinite spiritual potentialities of the two great men. Mahatma Sukoshal's spiritual powers shone out. They were radiant. The light of *Vitragata* (the victory over the inner enemies) pervaded his soul. The waves of spiritual felicity rolled in his soul.

In this manner, the Chaturmas that is the four months of the rainy season passed.

The two great munis with overflowing devotion and with their voices shaken with emotion offered the flowers of absolute

faith to the feet of the Jineshwar Bhagwan and with a feeling of elation, they came out of the cave.

The trees, plants and creepers which had put forth tender leaves and flowers all over the Vasanthadri mountain seemed to extend a warm welcome to the two yogis.

Animals and birds overwhelmed with joy performed circumambulations around them. Having experienced the state of *Parambrahma*, and having tasted the sweetness of spiritual felicity, the father and the son descended from the mountain. Their eyes fell on every object and aspect of the world, on every particle of the world. They kept looking at the game of the countless objects in the world with a feeling of neutrality. Meanwhile, a lioness saw them. The lioness was none other than Queen Sahadevi who had suffered a defeat in the human state of existence and who was wandering about with a hungry soul intent upon taking revenge against the father and the son.

As soon as her eyes fell upon Sukoshal, her innate animosity woke up. Its monstrous jaws opened in a terrifying manner. The lioness roared so loudly that the noise seemed to break the rocks in the whole area; it leaped from its place; performed a couple of somersaults and ran towards the two munis.

As soon as the two munis heard the roar of the lioness, they became cautious.

They did not want to run away from there. They did not fear the lioness and try to run away from there. Why should they fear the lioness ? They became cautious only to retain and maintain their spiritual equanimity. They wanted to attain and retain the attitude of equanimity at that time of calamity.

They stood there absorbed in deep meditation. They sought the forgiveness of all the jivas in this universe and began to meditate upon the Paramatma with absolute concentration. All the worldly things that had enveloped their souls became detached. They cast away their bodies and became merged with the *Parambrahma*.

The lioness leaped over them; seized at once the emaciated body of Sukoshal in its claws. On account of its sudden attack, Sukoshal muni fell on the ground like a tree that had been cut off; but his soul had become merged with the *Parambrahma*.

The lioness tore off his body limb by limb.

It sucked out all his hot blood.

It cut his body into pieces and ate away his flesh piece by piece.

What a terrible mockery of fate this is ! The same lioness was once his mother, the very image of affection and the goddess who showered sweet love upon him. She had once grown mad with her attachment for her son. She was the woman who had given birth to him and suckled him but now she was madly raging in the form of that lioness intent upon taking revenge against him. The mother who had once fondled him in her lap and had bathed him with the sweet waters of affection was now intent upon cutting him into pieces and devouring them. The mother who had once kissed the skin of her son and had embraced him affectionately was now taking a diabolical delight in peeling off his skin into pieces. This is the *samsar*. This is the attachment which brings about such terrible consequences. That is why, the enlightened people are intent, upon breaking all attachments of *samsar*.

We should not, impelled by the attachments of the *samsar* even by a mistake act unwisely and cause harm and injustice to any *jiva*. This broad-mindedness delivers the enlightened people from the bondages of the *samsar*.

When Sukoshal who had cut off all his attachments for his body was being torn into pieces by the lioness when his body was being torn and devoured by the lioness, he rose from the level of *Dharmadhyān* to the level of *Shukladhyān*. As a result of this, all his most harmful (*gathikarmas*) were burnt in the fires of meditation and the *agathi* (harmful) *karmas* also perished. His soul attained perfection and occupied a place among the *Siddhabhagwans*.

Here, the lioness scattered the bones of his body helter-skelter satisfied its desire for revenge and went away.

The great muni, Kirthidhar also floating on the mighty tide of meditation, reached the supreme state of Kevaljnan. In the light of his Kevaljnan, he saw his son who had attained the supreme state enjoying boundless and ineffable spiritual felicity.

XXXIII

HIRANYAGARBH

Chitramala, the wife of Sukoshal gave birth to a son. He was named Hiranyagarbh. The child was beautiful and charming like the moon in the blue sky. In course of time, he entered the phase of boyhood; and then after having passed through boyhood, he entered the phase of buoyant youth.

The heart of Queen Chitramala began to swing with delight and elation. When she saw her son Hiranyagarbh, she felt greatly delighted; and could not contain herself. At the proper time, he was married to a beautiful and virtuous princess by name Mrigavathi. The whole city of Ayodhya looked resplendent and jubilant on the occasion of that marriage which took place with all grandeur and *eclat*.

Hiranyagarbh began to carry out the administration of the Kingdom with great ability. The queen, Chitramala after handing over to her son, the responsibilities of the administration began to pursue the path of spiritual endeavours.

The wheel of time continued to revolve. In course of time, Hiranyagarbh entered the phase of old age; but blinded by royal splendour and worldly enjoyments he was completely indifferent to the spiritual values of life; and was absolutely incapable of utilizing his life for noble purposes. But, of course, sometimes, he remembered the noble tradition set up by his ancestors who were men of outstanding spiritual excellence and who adopted the path of *Charitradharma* for their spiritual elevation but those reminiscences were fleeting like bubbles on water; and soon fell into the depths of oblivion; yet those flashes of reminiscences remained carved on the table of his memory.

Queen Mrigavathi's love continued to flow like ceaseless river. Its flow was uninterrupted.

Hiranyagarbh inebriate with love, was steeped in it fully. Every day, Mrigavathi used to dress and decorate him. She rendered loving service to her husband day and night. She deemed her husband a god. Whatever she desired, she got from the company of her husband !

On one morning which looked resplendent with a golden splendour; and when the atmosphere was pervaded with enthusiasm and elation. Queen Mrigavathi forgot herself in decorating her husband. Unexpectedly, while combing his hair, she noticed some grey hair on his head.

"My Lord ! The messenger has arrived".

"Where is he ?" The king looked towards the door and asked. He looked around for the messenger but he could notice no one anywhere. He was nonplussed. He began to look at Mrigavathi seriously. Seeing this, Mrigavathi heartily laughed and said :

"My dear King ! The messenger is not at the door; he is near us. He is on your head". Mrigavathi said increasing Hiranyagarbh's curiosity. When the king looked up, he saw there a rocking toy studded with gems and the roof on which fascinating pictures had been carved."

"My Lord ! Here is the messenger !" Mrigavathi cleverly plucked the white hair on his head and placed it in his hand.

"Oh ! He is a terrible messenger. He is the veritable messenger of Death ". Hiranyagarbh looked at the messenger of death in his hands with wide open eyes.

"My dear queen ! Indeed you have shown me the messenger; otherwise, we should have been ignorant of the arrival of the god of death. Yamaraj is proceeding at a terrific speed You have to make a thorough preparation to achieve a victory over him".

Queen Mrigavathi who was a great scholar could comprehend the inner meaning of her husband's words but as she realised the meaning of his words, she experienced a tremor through her body. The tremor shot up to the brims of her being. Hiranyagarbh understood the truth. Mrigavathi's condition could not remain hidden from his incisive eyes.

"Oh Queen ! Are you terrified ?"

"Where is the need for fear; but . . ."

"Oh Queen ! This tradition has been in existence in the family of the Ikshvaku kings of Ayodhya from times immemorial. This tradition is eternal and sacred. The kings have followed the tradition of renouncing the samsar and becoming Sadhus to attain a victory over death".

Mrigavathi was silent but there arose in her mind various kinds of thoughts and conflicting questions. She kept her face turned aside for a few moments and then said in a humble voice.

"My Lord ! Is it absolutely necessary to attain a victory over death ?"

Hiranyagarbh kept looking at her with fixed eyes for sometime. Then, he closed his eyes and began to wander about, in the trackless realms of his soul where the light of knowledge shone resplendent. The light of wisdom was all-pervasive there. He became spiritually aware and began drinking the nectar of knowledge. He experienced a sublime felicity in the light of knowledge. Such a felicity, he had not experienced in the sensual life he had led for years. He-woke up from his spiritual trance and looked towards Mrigavathi.

"My Queen ! Is it ever possible to experience endless, boundless, imperishable felicity without attaining a victory over death ?"

"My Lord ! What is lacking in worldly enjoyments ? Why should we renounce the samsar ?"

"My Queen ! Think a little and understand it. Is there any real pleasure in this world ? There is no independence in the pleasures we experience relating to eating and drinking physical and materialistic enjoyments, power and prosperity and royal splendour. There is no freedom in these pleasures. These pleasures are not permanent, and which worldly pleasure is free from fear ?"

"Then do you mean to say that all pleasures and enjoyments of worldly life are dependent, perishable and fearful ?"

"The truth can be understood only by means of experience. Let us take the example of sensual pleasures. In order to enjoy sensual pleasures, we have to depend upon each other. If you are in a mood of anger, I cannot enjoy sensual pleasures. You can experience sensual pleasures even in the company of others. Thus, sensual pleasures depend upon others. Well, are they at least permanent ? No ! After our senses grow weak, we cannot enjoy those pleasures though we may yearn for them. Moreover, after we attain them the fear of physical ailments agitates us like a ghost. If we look at any other pleasures from this point of view"

"My lord ! What you say is absolutely true, but is it not possible to conquer death without renouncing these pleasures ?"

"Is it necessary to explain the nature of the pleasures which are dependent, transitory and fearful and the need to renounce them even after the desire appears in you for independent, permanent and fearless felicity ? If the desire to discard worldly pleasures has not arisen in us we should realise that our fascination for independent, permanent and fearless pleasures which can be attained after we conquer death is not strong".

The king who was a little while ago steeped in a life of pleasures and enjoyments suddenly became a philosopher and began to talk like a seer. From where did he get this philosophical knowledge and enlightenment ? Philosophical knowledge and the spirit of renunciation are not brought from outside. On the contrary, as soon as our dormant soul awakens philosophical

knowledge and the spirit of renunciation appear automatically. Hiranyagarbh's dormant soul woke up as soon as the messenger of Death namely a grey hair appeared on his head.

"Is it only after conquering death that we can experience such incomparable spiritual felicity ?

Mrigavathi's eager mind was like a thirsty deer. She tried to quench her thirst for spiritual knowledge by drinking the nectar of philosophy.

"My queen ! Until we conquer Death, we cannot attain that supreme felicity. As long as the soul exists in the body, death is all powerful. After we attain victory over death, the soul which is released from the body, begins its life; and then death cannot touch us. As soon as the soul, after being released from the body, begins its life, we attain independent, imperishable and fearless felicity".

Is there any end to that felicity ?

"No. No. That felicity has no end. That is why it is said to be permanent and endless".

"Indeed, such a felicity ought to be attained and experienced in life but is it not possible to carry out endeavours to attain that felicity even while living in the palace without adopting the path of *Charitradharma* ? What kind of endeavours should be carried out to attain that felicity ?"

"Do not you realise that when we become Sadhus and put on the guise of Sadhus, our attachment for royal power, royal splendour and our palace will end ? Don't you think that it is necessary to break off those attachments ?"

"Is it not possible to live in the palace without attachments ?"

"If we do not have attachment for the palace the question of living in it does not arise at all. Then we would as well live in a forest, in solitude".

"If we live in the palace, we can carry out our duties relating to people, our family and our kingdom. At the same time, we can also endeavour to attain spiritual welfare".

"Oh queen ! Is it necessary to carry out worldly duties even now when we have grown old ? Should we continue to carry out worldly duties upto our last breath ? First, you please realise that the responsibility of carrying out worldly duties is not on our shoulders now. Our son, Prince Nagush is capable of carrying out all those duties and of ruling over the country. The same duties need not be carried out throughout our lives. We should carry out those duties that are proper to the various phases of our life". Mrigavathi became silent. There was seriousness in her silence and there was an innate profundity. She tried to realise the meaning of her husband's words. She turned her eyes inwards into her soul in order to scrutinize it and to solve every problem in such a way that there would be no conflicting ideas or questions in her mind. She put so many questions to Hiranyagarbh with the purpose of clearing her doubts and suspicions. She had no intention of opposing her husband's opinions. On the contrary, she made an honest attempt to understand her husband's ideas.

Now-a-days, for the most part, we come across everywhere the propensity to refute the lofty opinions of other thinkers, philosophers and men of spiritual excellence. We do not generally come across, anywhere the tendency to understand and assimilate the useful and lofty opinions of others. Of course, we find among people the formidable tendency of asserting that their own opinions and theories are the greatest, and soundest. This false pride has been gradually increasing in the world.

"Dear Queen ! What are you thinking of so deeply ?" Hiranyagarbh asked Mrigavathi who sat silent.

"Dear lord ! I have been trying to understand your sublime ideas because I too desire to follow you on your path and to attain spiritual elevation".

"I am supremely happy to hear this".

Hiranyagarbh left his personal chamber and went towards the chamber in which he held political consultations with his ministers. He sent the door-keeper to inform the Chief Minister to come to the chamber for some secret political consultation. As soon as he received this information, the Chief Minister came to the chamber of consultations.

“May the King be victorious !”

“Dear Chief Minister !”

“At your command !”

“Dear Chief Minister ! Prince Nagush is worthy of being crowned king of the country. He has reached the proper age. Now, we should celebrate the coronation without delay”.

“Dear King ! Where is the need for such a hurry ?”

“Hurry ? What are you saying dear Chief Minister ? Already there has been much delay. My father and grandfather did not delay thus”.

“Your Highness ! The prince is worthy in every respect to be crowned king of the country”. The Chief Minister said expressing his opinion.

Prince Nagush had attained mastery over the various arts and accomplishments essential for a king. Mrigavathi had taken great care regarding the external and internal development of her son, Nagush. He had mastered the scriptures and the arts of war. He had attained mastery over many mighty weapons. At the same time, he was incomparable in his mastery over the art of carrying out spiritual endeavours for spiritual elevation. Nobility and culture had permeated every aspect of his personality. He had acquired great popularity among people. In a way, it is not an exaggeration to say that he held an imperialistic sway over the hearts of the people of Ayodhya. He married a princess of great nobility and beauty by name Simhika.

The coronation of Prince Nagush as the King of the country took place with all grandeur and *eclat*.

The care-taker of the forest appeared in the royal court and offered felicitations to the King.

A great and enlightened Muni by name Vimal had arrived in the garden outside the city of Ayodhya. He had been accompanied by a number of Munis. Even after he had passed through the phase of youth, he was devoid of passions and mental aberrations. On account of the spiritual austerities he had performed, his face looked resplendent with a sublime effulgence.

Hiranyagarbh gave many costly presentations to the care-taker of the forest and made him affluent and at once he set off with his family to see the great muni in the garden. As soon as he entered the garden, he was overwhelmed with joyful emotions. He had a *darshan* of the Mahamuni and saluted him and his heart danced with delight like a peacock. Hiranyagarbh saluted the muni with great devotion; performed circumbulations around him and stood before him with his head bowed. Queen Mrigavathi also did as her lord had done. After saluting the muni, Hiranyagarbh, Mrigavathi and the other members of the royal family sat in front of the muni.

The muni Vimal uttered the words "*Dharmalabh* (May you attain spiritual prosperity)" and bestowed his benedictions upon him. As the muni was delivering a scriptural discourse Hiranyagarbh's desire to renounce the samsar became stronger and stronger. Mrigavathi also developed the spirit of renunciation and her attachment for samsar declined. After the discourse was over, Hiranyagarbh stood up and said in a humble manner :

"Oh thou ocean of compassion ! After hearing your auspicious discourse my attachments for the samsar have disappeared. Oh Lord ! Be so gracious as to initiate me into the *charitra-dharma* which can help me to cross the ocean of samsar." Hiranyagarbh sat near him and looked towards Mrigavathi. Mrigavathi was eagerly waiting to give her consent to his decision.

All the people of Ayodhya knew this. As a result of this, ceremonies and celebrations were organised in all the Jin temples in the City.

Gifts were freely distributed among the needy and the destitute. The whole city looked colourful and fascinating with festoons and other decorations. The city looked charming like a young maid.

At an auspicious moment, the king and the queen received initiation into the *charitradharma* from the great muni. Along with the people of the city, the new king Nagush bowed his head and saluted the feet of the Rajarshi.

Which title is permanent in this world ?

Sometime ago, the ten directions echoed with the cry, "May king Hiranyagarbh be victorious !" But now the slogan, "May king Nagush be victorious !" resounded in the highest skies.

As soon as king Nagush assumed the reins of kingship, he made arrangements to safeguard and defend the frontiers of the kingdom. He made a comprehensive search for the enemies of Ayodhya. He acquired a thorough knowledge of the subtleties and complexities of the administration of the kingdom. When he thus carried out a thorough search for the hostile elements, he found out that the kings of the Northern area were growing stronger and stronger and that some day they would invade Ayodhya. Therefore, even before Nagush could lift his head to look out for those enemies, he decided to adopt the policy of destroying those enemies.

He held consultations in connection with his decision. He invited the commanders of the army, the Chief Minister, the governors of the provinces, the suzerains and the high officials of the government to those meetings. He explained to them his new policy : "My plan is to destroy our enemies even before they can think of invading our country. Therefore, all of you kindly think over this point and let us know who our enemies are and how we can destroy them".

"Your Highness ! Until anyone invades our territories, why should we think of restraining them or destroying them ?" The Chief Minister made his suggestion.

"Have the kings of the Northern region made any attempt to encroach upon our territories?" Nagush looked towards the commander-in-chief of his armies and asked him.

"Your Highness! In order to display their power and to establish their domination now-a-days, they have been creating some problems and troubles on our borders but our armies have been defeating their designs." The commander said expressing his view and endorsing the king's view that the Northern kings were hostile.

"That is why I think that once at least we should try to repel them vehemently. Moreover, in the North, we have many enemies. Therefore we have to make extremely cautious and adequate preparations to repel them".

"As your Highness commands! It will not take much time to make all preparations for an attack on our enemies. Our armies are ready for any emergency. The only thing is you have to give us your command." The commander said turning towards the Chief Minister.

"We do not have the intention of conquering their territories; nor do we desire to make them our tributary kings but we should certainly make them realise our abilities and capabilities so that in the future they may not even by a mistake dare even look towards the frontiers of our kingdom with evil intentions". Nagush said with the intention of finding out the opinion of the Chief Minister.

"Oh king! Your idea is quite acceptable. The plan you have thought of to secure the welfare and safety of the kingdom and of the people is definitely right," The Chief Minister said expressing his consent to the king's proposal.

"Dear commander, you may now launch upon your preparations. It will certainly take a month or two to make the necessary preparations".

"Dear Chief Minister! Apart from this do we have to make any other preparation?"

"Oh king! When we set off with all our armies on our campaign we have to make the necessary arrangements for the safety and security of Ayodhya; otherwise..."

"Where is the need for such an arrangement? What other fear is there? We are setting off to fight against our enemies".

"Yet how can we leave Ayodhya unguarded? We have to keep some troops to guard the city."

"If so, that is all right,"

"Your Highness! It is absolutely necessary to keep such troops to defend the city so that there may be no need to regret our carelessness later."

King Nagush felt irritated by the insistence of the Chief Minister. But he could not make light of the words of the Chief Minister because he was a very shrewd person.

"All right! We shall ask our commander to keep some troops at Ayodhya to defend it if a necessity arises."

"Your Highness! I did not give this suggestion to offend you; but I gave it as a diplomatic measure. It does not take much time for undesirable events to occur; and often, unexpected events do occur; sometimes, even friendly kings turn hostile." The Chief Minister said making his point clear.

After sending away the Chief Minister, the King Nagush proceeded to his bed chamber. Queen Simhika had been waiting for him there.

"May the king be victorious!" Queen Simhika said welcoming the king.

"Dear Queen! I think I will have to set off towards the northern kingdoms, in a couple of months". Nagush said hinting at the possibility of his going to the Northern Kingdoms.

Simhika said nothing. She was silent for a while. Then, she said.

"I wonder how long you would take to return. So, I too would like to accompany you".

"No. No. You must stay here. The situation is highly complicated and perplexing. The danger of war is imminent. We cannot predict the course of events. We may have to be without food and water there. Your remaining here is the most desirable thing."

"My lord ! You need not at all be worried about my comforts. The shadow always follows the body; doesn't it ?" Simhika said emphasising her desire to accompany him.

For a while, King Nagush was absorbed in deep thought. After a few moments, he said in a serious tone.

"It does not matter. You may accompany us. But who will be here to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the city of Ayodhya ? If you remain here, the people of the city will live in peace and felicity; and their enthusiasm and zest will be unabated".

Queen Simhika felt that she could not reject the suggestion of the king. The people of Ayodhya used to adore her as a goddess. She too had a great love and affection for the people of Ayodhya. Therefore, she said in a voice shaken with emotion.

"My lord ! I obey your commands. You kindly set off cheerfully and attain victory. Until you return victorious, I will be looking forward to seeing you, with unclosing eye-lids".

The flowers of joy bloomed in the heart of Nagush. He was relieved of a heavy burden; and he felt light and cheerful.

XXXIV

A STRONG WOMAN

“Honoured Queen ! A terrible thing has happened ! Something undesirable has occurred ! I never even dreamt that such a thing would happen”.

“What happened ? Please tell me what happened”.

“Mahadevi ! The kings of the southern realms have hatched a conspiracy. They have united and are marching towards our kingdom.

“Who are they ?”

“Rajdev, Alankardev, Sahyadri and others have united.”

The official spy came; and conveyed to the Queen secret information. Queen Simhika was stupefied to hear about this unexpected turn of events. Countless fears and doubts arose in her mind. King Nagush had set off on his campaign against the kings of the north, with a large army. Countless heroes, warriors, kings and men of militaric prowess had gone away with him. Even the Chief Minister had gone away with him. The people of Ayodhya were unaware of this unexpected occurrence. They never even dreamt that the kings of the south who were friendly with Ayodhya would turn hostile; and adopt such a crooked way in the absence of King Nagush.

This is diplomacy you see ! Friends become foes; and foes turn friends. The kings of the south knew that King Nagush had gone away to the North; and thought that Ayodhya was unguarded. They deemed this an excellent opportunity to swoop upon Ayodhya. They, at once, met and had consulta-

tions; and decided to make use of the opportunity and to invade Ayodhya. Their plan was to occupy Ayodhya and to establish their power over it before King Nagush could return to the city.

The enlightened people say that deceptive and hypocritical diplomacy leads to hell. This is true enough. The positions of power are so infatuating that when some people occupy those positions, they fail to act in accordance with the principles of morality and nobility, despite their noble intentions. We rarely find men who can act nobly though they occupy such positions.

Of course, the Chief Minister had suspected this possibility even in the very beginning because he was an expert in political matters; and he was a master of the militaric tactics and manoeuvres relating to such a situation. But King Nagush had an unshakeable faith in his own incomparable militaric prowess and in the loyalty and friendship of the kings of the south: yet on account of the insistence of the Chief Minister, he had left behind five thousand soldiers to safeguard the city of Ayodhya. But how could the soldiers face the enemy kings without the Chief Commander ?

Queen Simhika was an expert not only in domestic affairs but also in the arts of war. She had obtained military training in her youth and had attained mastery over the arts of war. So, she was not new to warfare.

The people of Ayodhya had not seen any queen in the past having had to face the enemy, in the battle-field. But the Queen Simhika had no alternative to entering the battle-field and to fighting against the enemy soldiers. If she had remained at home thinking, "War is not my sphere of action", Ayodhya would have been exposed to the danger of being captured by the enemies. So, after thinking over the matter for a long time, she decided to face the situation with courage and confidence.

A tremendous commotion arose everywhere as soon as people heard about it. The fear of war increased in the minds of the people. All were terrified by the prospect of a war. It became necessary for Simhika to take a firm decision. She

clapped her hands; and at once the door-keeper came running; and stood before her with his head bowed in respect.

“Inform our Commander Sumukh to meet us at once”.

Sumukh was the commander of the troops left behind at Ayodhya. He was a young warrior of outstanding abilities. He was a master of the arts of war besides being the very embodiment of heroism.

“May the great queen be victorious !” Sumukh came, at once, and said in a humble manner. The intoxication of youthful heroism showed itself through every limb of his.

“We have come to know from our spies that the kings of the south have been ignobly marching against Ayodhya,” Queen Simhika said in a serious manner.

“Oh Queen ! You have merely heard rumours; but we have to find out how far the news is true.”

“The news I have received is undoubtedly true. Our spies have brought the news. It cannot be false. You will see that those enemy kings will reach the borders of Ayodhya within the next twenty four hours”.

Lines of worry and agitation appeared on Sumukh’s forehead.

“What are you thinking of, dear commander ?”

“Oh Queen ! We have with us only five thousand soldiers. Can they stand against the large armies of the enemies ? I am agitated over this point.”

“Dear commander ! Do not forget that we too have lakhs of soldiers. The people of Ayodhya are not inferior to any soldiers. You need not worry unnecessarily.”

“But Oh Queen ! Preparations have to be made in a short period of twenty four hours”.

“We have at our disposal, at least, twenty four hours. What else do we need ? In twenty four hours we can do the work of

twenty four years ! There is no need to fear anything. I will personally lead the army into the battle-field; and then I will see who are really heroic and patriotic and who are not. I will make the kings of the south lick the dust in the twinkling of an eye. You need not worry."

Sumukh was stupefied by the words of the queen; and kept staring at her. The Queen's irrepressible enthusiasm and unexampled heroism inspired inordinate courage and confidence in Sumukh. He began to sway with heroism.

"Commander Sumukh ! We cannot waste even a single moment. See that the four gates of Ayodhya are closed; and keep at every gate one thousand soldiers to guard it. Be ready with the remaining one thousand soldiers".

The commander Sumukh saluted the queen and went away.

After that, the queen again clapped her hands; and when the door-keeper appeared before her, she ordered him to inform the officer in charge of the horses to appear before her.

The officer appeared before the queen within a short time; and saluted her.

"How many horses are there in our stables ?"

"Ten thousand, oh great queen". The officer said in a polite manner.

"How many horses do the citizens have ?"

"Our citizens have about twenty five thousand horses".

"Very good ! Keep ten thousand horses ready in our stables.

As soon as the officer went away, the queen called the door-

"As commanded by the queen !" The officer retreated.

As soon as the officer went away, the queen called the door-keeper; and said;

"Let it be proclaimed in the whole city of Ayodhya officially that all the citizens, both men and women, must come to the palace. Let our men beat drums and make this proclamation."

Soon, the royal announcer went through the streets and bazaars of Ayodhya beating the battle-drum and proclaiming the Queen's command. As soon as hearing the drum-beats and the proclamation, all the citizens of Ayodhya thronged to the courtyard in front of the palace. Within a short while, the courtyard was crowded with the citizens. There seemed to be an ocean of human beings.

Queen Simhika watched the thronging citizens with overflowing enthusiasm and was filled with great excitement. She appeared on the balcony of the palace; expressed her joy and made a sign with a wave of her hand to the people to be calm and silent. On seeing their Queen, the citizens became silent and seemed to be offering their mute salutations. Queen Simhika addressing her beloved subjects said in an impassioned and inspiring voice; "My dear people! You know that King Nagush has gone to suppress the haughty and impertinent kings of the north. Making use of this opportunity, the kings of the south are marching towards Ayodhya with the evil design of occupying it. They have with them large armies and countless weapons. They are ready for a war. Unexpectedly the clouds of calamity have begun to hover over our beloved city. In this perilous situation the responsibility of safeguarding and defending our kingdom lies on our shoulders. We should see that those wicked kings will not be able to step into our sacred territories. As long as we have in our veins even a single drop of blood we should fight to the last and safeguard the honour of our kingdom. We should show our mettle to our enemies and we should teach them a proper lesson. They should be made to realize that they can never capture Ayodhya and that they cannot achieve their objective in this life. Therefore, every young and able-bodied person must get ready to fight. They should be ready even to die in order to safeguard and defend our motherland. Those who do not have horses will be given horses. Arrangements have been made to provide weapons to everyone. All of you

may remain fearless and must extend your co-operation to our endeavour of safeguarding our kingdom. I will lead the soldiers and in this war which is a struggle between life and death I will myself be the leader and will set an example to others”.

“May the Queen be victorious !”

“Long live King Nagush !”

The war-cries of the people echoed in the skies. The queen ended her speech and her throat was choked. The leading citizens of Ayodhya vowed to stand by the queen upto their last breath. All were intoxicated with the zest for fighting against the enemies. The Queen Simhika went into the palace. There, the head of the city was waiting for her. He saluted the Queen bowing his head.

“Any other news ?”

“Oh great Queen ! The enemy armies are now at a distance of about twenty four miles”.

“Have all the people who are outside the fort come in ?”

“Yes, oh great Queen !”

“Have you anything more to say ?”

“No ! Only this. The four gates of the city have been shut. One thousand soldiers are guarding each gate; yet”

“Your doubt is how a handful of soldiers can face a large army. Is it not ?” Queen Simhika said with a smile on her face.

“Yes; No”

“Do not worry; Everything will be right. We are sure to repulse the enemy armies. And yes ! You have to carry out a duty. It is your duty to take care of our arsenal. When any young man of our city comes for weapons you have to provide him with the necessary weapons”.

The head of the city saluted the queen respectfully and retreated. As soon as he went away, the maid, Nayana came in. She said fretting; "Mahadevi, today you have not taken any food from the morning. It is now afternoon. Please take some food at least now".

Just then, the door-keeper came in and said with irrepressible enthusiasm.

"Mahadevi! Thousands of young men wielding various weapons have gathered in the courtyard of the palace. How full of enthusiasm are they! Indeed, I do not find adequate words to describe their enthusiasm. Even old men have joined them".

"And then.....?"

"They are waiting for you".

"Very good," and Simhika turned towards Nayana and said; "Nayana, please see whether my horse has been brought from the stables" and turning to the door-keeper, she said "Send them a message to be ready with their weapons. I will come by and by." Having sent away the door-keeper, she stood waiting for Nayana.

Within a short time, Nayana came back and said: "The horse and the weapons are ready", and pausing for a few moments, she said in a polite voice.

"Mahadevi!"

"Yes, Nayana, what is the matter?"

"Oh Queen! I too will accompany you".

"What do you say? Eventhough you know that a war is not a children's game....."

"Yes, dear Queen! I too wish to accompany you".

"Do you know the art of war?"

"Yes, I know."

"But where did you learn it?"

"Here in Ayodhya".

"I hope you are not afraid of war".

"When you are with me, why should I fear anything?"

"Then, get ready".

Nayana's joy knew no bounds. She hurried to her room to get ready. After Nayana went away, the queen put on war-like dress. She put on an impenetrable armour and fixed her dagger on her waist-belt. She held her tremendous bow called *Dhananjaya Danushya* on her left shoulder and she tied the quiver over her back. She took a lance in one hand and a sharp and radiant sword in the other.

The elders of the family put on her forehead a mark of *Kumkum* as an auspicious sign. The elderly ladies, enthusiastically sang songs of victory and bestowed their blessings upon her in accordance with the traditions of the family.

"Oh great queen ! May you attain victory over our enemies. May your name dwell on the tongues of the people of Ayodhya for ages and ages, and may the songs of your glory be resounding even in heaven always glorifying your valour!"

The Court-priest advised the queen to set off on her campaign in an auspicious moment. In one leap, the queen Simhika mounted her horse. After that Nayana also equipped with weapons, mounted her horse.

The commander Sumukh taking with him one thousand able soldiers followed her on horseback. He entered the courtyard of the palace. Twenty five thousand young soldiers were waiting eagerly for him there. Queen Simhika's horse neighed loudly. All of a sudden, the entire courtyard began to reverberate with the cries of victory uttered by the soldiers in honour of the queen.

Queen Simhika's heart overflowed with a tremendous enthusiasm and elation, when she saw that vast army of twenty five thousand young soldiers. She visualized her lofty flag of victory waving over the farthest horizons. With heartfelt faith she meditated for a while upon Bhagwan Sri Rishabhdev and set out on her march of victory. Trumpets were blown from the towers of the fort and the sounds of the battle-drums reverberated in the sky.

While the queen was passing through the streets of Ayodhya the women of Ayodhya showered flowers over her from balconies; old women lifted their hands to bless her and youngsters uttered loud cries of victory. All seemed to be saying in one voice, "May she live long ! May our great Queen be victorious !"

Queen Simhika slowly approached the eastern gate of the fort. The soldiers guarding the gate were astonished to see that army of twenty-five thousand soldiers rolling before them like the waves of an ocean. A tremendous enthusiasm and boundless energy appeared in them. Above all, when they saw the queen at the head of the army radiant like the goddess of war they began to sway with elation.

Queen Simhika explained her plans to the commander Sumukh thus; "You be ready at the western gate, with five thousand soldiers. The enemies will attack us on the eastern side. We should not encounter them in the field, but we should checkmate their plans by means of our manoeuvres. Therefore, you must emerge from the western gate and approach the enemy armies in such a way that no one should come to know about it; and our enemies should not be able to sense our manoeuvres. I will attack the enemy army with twenty five thousand soldiers. At that time, you must launch an attack upon them from behind and must compel them to take to their heels in utter confusion and stupefaction. And yes ! You send one thousand of your soldiers towards the north, at once. They will attack the enemy from that side".

The commander set off to his destination taking with him five thousand chosen and trained soldiers. One thousand soldiers

went to the northern gate. And queen Simhika stood ready in the fort with twenty thousand young and able soldiers.

The spies who had come from the south were stupefied and astonished. Their astonishment knew no bounds. They had not even imagined that such a vast army lay concealed in Ayodhya. Until now they had this illusory belief; "Now Ayodhya is without an army to guard it and without the king to safeguard it. Therefore, our flag will certainly be hoisted at once, upon the palace of Ayodhya". That was why they had launched their attack with a limited army. They had thought of one possibility and they have witnessed a different development. In consequence, the spies returned to their kings and appraised them of the actual situation thus.

"Oh kings! The queen of Ayodhya has entered the battlefield like a veritable goddess of war. The young and the old in Ayodhya are eager and enthusiastic to encounter us. At the same time, a vast army of heroic women is standing ready to carry on the fight. Four thousand soldiers are guarding the impregnable fort of Ayodhya with an extraordinary vigilance."

This news threw cold water upon the enthusiasm of the hostile kings like Rajadev and Sahyadri. Within a moment they lost all their courage and stood in utter despair. They had not even dreamt of such a possibility but now what could be done? There was no other way. They feared a disgraceful defeat. Such was their condition. They found themselves between the devil and the deep sea. If they went back without fighting, that would bring them permanent disgrace and if they fought they would be surely killed. Yet, they had no alternative to fighting in the War.

Therefore, with palpitating hearts, they commanded their armies to march forward. Within a short time, there broke out a terrible war on the plains of Ayodhya which began to resound with war-cries and the metallic noises of their swords.

"O king! We do not see anywhere here anyone to fight against us or to stop our march". Rajadev said to Sahyadri, in natural agitation.

"It appears as though the queen's heroism has cooled down. She has lost her courage and must be totally devoid of any desire to fight. After all she is a woman. Has any woman at any time fought a war?"

"Then, is the information brought by our spies false?"

"No! Even that is not likely. Yet this is a matter of war This is a question of life and death. Therefore, anything may happen at the last moment. At such a time as this, people may risk their lives or they may keep quiet in order to save their lives".

"Then shall we obstruct the passages of the fort of Ayodhya on all the four sides?"

"Surely we can".

The armies of the southern kings marched forward and reached the main gate of Ayodhya, and then they began to move to the four sides of the fort. Within a short time fifty thousand enemy soldiers laid a seige to the city of Ayodhya. All of a sudden from behind the armies, there arose a loud cry of lamentation that seemed to crack the sky. The commander, Sumukh suddenly attacked the hostile armies from behind; and began cutting off the heads of the soldiers as if they were grass. In the same manner, the valiant soldiers of Ayodhya began to deal with the hostile army of the northern side.

Rajadev proceeded from behind and Sahyadri proceeded northwards speedily to rout the inspired and haughty soldiers of Ayodhya. All of a sudden, Queen Simhika marched out of the main gate with twenty thousand soldiers. At once, the hostile armies were demoralized. Everywhere, there arose cries of horror and fright. The battle-field was flooded with human blood. The earth was covered with the severed bodies of soldiers.

The self-complacent and arrogant armies of the southern kings were stunned and stupefied by the three-pronged attack

made by the soldiers of Ayodhya. They were harassed and vanquished. Like a ferocious lioness, the Queen Simhika kept killing the enemy soldiers. She attacked the enemy soldiers with a spear in one hand and a sword in the other. Every soldiers of Ayodhya sent twenty five enemy soldiers to the abode of death.

Nayana kept spinning round Queen Simhika ferociously. She protected the queen from attacks by the enemies facing them herself. All of a sudden, Alankardev and Rajadev pounced upon Queen Simhika. Even Sahyadri who was engaged in fighting on the northern side, came up. The Queen was thus surrounded by the enemy kings; but the heroic queen of Ayodhya began fighting against them with invincible courage and ability.

Sahyadri threw his spear from the left at the queen. But Nayana prevented the spear from reaching the queen and by means of a deft stroke cut off his left hand. Queen Simhika attacked Rajadev and vanquished him and made him lick the dust. The commander Sumukh attacked Alankardev and made him see the stars even during day.

In this manner, one *Prahar* (three hours) passed. Everywhere a terrible war broke out. The atmosphere resounded with the clanging sound of swords and the agonized cries of dying soldiers. Rajadev thought. "If the war continues thus, there will be devastation. We will have to face utter ruin. Thousands of our soldiers will be killed. There is no hope at all of our attaining success." In consequence, he made a clever plan. He suddenly left the battle-field; and ran away.

A large part of the armies of the southern kings faced humiliating defeat and death; and those who were still alive ran away helter-skelter. Thus the enemy soldiers began running away.

All began to save themselves from death. Even the soldiers of Ayodhya were killed in large numbers but no one was there who would not retreat without winning a victory.

When Rajadev was not to be seen anywhere on the battlefield Alankardev and Sahyadri also ran away. The end of the war was visible. The enemy soldiers had been utterly routed and devastated. Queen Simhika blew on her conch-shell and gave, a signal to end the war. Then, she glanced over the battlefield. The faces of the commander Sumukh and Nayana were resplendent with the elation of victory, but blood flowed continuously from one eye of Nayana. She had lost her eye in fighting.

“What happened Nayana ?” the Queen asked anxiously.

“A symbol !”

“What kind of symbol ?”

“It is a symbol of my having defended my motherland. Who can have this good fortune oh queen ?”

Of course, Nayana had lost an eye; but she was not at all sad about it. Her heart was overflowing with the tides of joy at having fought for her motherland.

WHAT AN ADORATION OF VIRTUES !

The great queen of Ayodhya by means of her astounding heroism and valour routed the kings of the south and devastated their armies.

“Well.....”

“In response to a single call for action issued by the Queen of Ayodhya, twenty five thousand young men of Ayodhya showed their readiness to fight against the enemies risking death. They got ready to sacrifice their lives”.

“Well.....”

“Even the battle formations were extraordinary..... The Queen’s manoeuvres were remarkable for their skill and strategy’.

“Um !”

After having subjugated the kings of the north, King Nagush had returned to Ayodhya. The people of the city were making excellent preparations to extend a hearty welcome to the king. They organized celebrations and jubilations enthusiastically because the king had brought great glory to Ayodhya by defeating and subjugating the kings of the north; and the queen had brought glory to Ayodhya by routing the kings of the south.

When King Nagush was at a distance of twelve *Yojanas* from Ayodhya the commander Sumukh went to receive him ceremoniously. Overwhelmed with elation, Sumukh gave that information to King Nagush but the King did not show any joy or enthusiasm. He merely kept nodding his head and saying “*um*” formally and kept displaying only an artificial delight.

He merely pretended to have been delighted by the news. There had arisen in his mind all sorts of doubts and suspicions. The King entered the city of Ayodhya. The people of the city honoured him greatly; yet in his mind there was not even a trace of joy or enthusiasm. He seemed to have been lost in the darkness of terrible despair and inexpressible agony. He straight went to his palace. The leading residents of the city, the state officials and the leading merchants of the city attended upon him and gave him gifts and presentations. They greeted the King with loud and enthusiastic cries of victory; made polite enquiries about his welfare; and praised the heroism, valour and manoeuvres of the Queen who routed the enemies in his absence; but king Nagush merely nodded his head and evaded any straight reaction. In every part of the city, in every nook and corner of the city, songs glorifying the Queen's heroism and militaric prowess kept reverberating. Even in the palace, everyone was talking admiringly about the Queen's abilities and valour. Their joy knew no bounds; but only the mind of King Nagush was filled with the darkness of dissatisfaction and indifference.

The common people were overwhelmed with delight. They heartily admired the Queen's incomparable valour and extraordinary virtues whereas the king was experiencing agitation thinking of the virtues and defects in the matter. How could he experience elation when he was bestowing greater attention on defects ignoring virtues ?

We can feel happy at the sight of the good deeds of others only when we do not see defects in them. If we look at them with an eye for defects, we would not feel happy about them; on the contrary, we would treat them with contempt and abhorrence. If we keep searching for defects in others, we develop only hatred and contempt for them; and if we look at them with an eye for virtues, then we develop admiration and love for them.

Nagush saw an unpardonable defect in the Queen's heroism and valour; and at once, his love for her was eclipsed by a cloud of contempt. In his mind, there arose various kinds of thoughts

like whirlwinds; and he began to think; "Whatever might be the abilities of Simhika, she is but a woman. She has beauty; she has arts and accomplishments; but what is the use? After all she is a woman. She became intimate with the commander. She has freely mingled with thousands of soldiers. She has carried out secret consultations with the commander. She fought openly in the battle-field; and has won a victory! She has broken all the conventions and limitations of the Royal family; and has mingled with all. Who would not suffer even effacement and death to have the felicity of seeing her enchanting emotional display and graceful gestures and expressions? Everyone would have enjoyed her graceful, gleaming glances. Who would not have plundered the felicity of being near her? Who would not have been bewitched by her beauty which is incomparable? And all these things have occurred in my absence. Moreover, even the Chief Minister was not here! At the time of war one has to be in intimate terms with various kinds of people. A chaste woman never becomes familiar with other men; under all circumstances, a noble woman would be intent upon safeguarding her chastity and purity. A woman born of a noble family would not act thus, even by a mistake."

His mind was deeply agitated and worried. He began walking to and fro lost in deep thought, in his counsel chamber. He was trying to find a way out of the darkness that had enveloped him but no way out was visible. Meanwhile, Simhika entered the chamber.

"Dear lord, after your return to Ayodhya you have not been happy even for a moment. Your dull and depressed face and your emaciated body bear testimony to this fact". Queen Simhika said in a serious manner, sitting on a seat of state.

"People have been coming and going....." Nagush said briefly in measured accents.

"Their king has returned after attaining a tremendous victory over the haughty and proud kings of the north. Naturally, they are delighted and are proud of their king". Simhika said in a sweet voice trying to explain the cause for the visitors

visiting the king in large numbers but he sat in his arm chair seeming not to hear her words.

“My lord ! You kindly take rest. I will instruct the guards at the door not to allow anyone to disturb you for a few hours, so that your rest may be undisturbed and so that you may recover your spirits a little.” Having said this Queen Simhika went out; gave the necessary instructions to the guards and again came back to attend upon the king.

In one heart, the fires of hatred were flaming and in the other heart, the cool fountain of affection was surging out. One had an eye for defects and the other had an eye for virtues.

The day dawned. King Nagush was engaged in his administrative duties but the waves of agitation rolling in his heart did not abate. On the contrary, they gradually became intenser. The king thought that Queen Simhika had lost her character. He was not willing even to look at her face. Therefore, he began evading meeting her. Whenever Queen Simhika tried to meet him and to speak to him he used some pretext or the other to avoid her. This continued for a few days. Queen Simhika had no suspicion or doubt in her mind. She was thinking, “The king had to carry on a war after a long time. Even in the war he had to spend a long time. It is natural that he should spend all his time solving the administrative problems, and that when it is so, how can he find time to meet me ?” But Queen Simhika began to notice as days passed that her lord was treating her with contempt, indifference, abhorrence; and this realization filled her mind with inexpressible agitation. “All right he may not be able to spend much time with me but even when he meets me for a few moments he does not look at me with love and affection. . . . After his return from the north there has appeared a clear difference in his attitude towards me. I think he looks at me not with love and affection but with conempt. He has not spoken even a word of appreciation regarding the victory I achieved over the kings of the south and he is purposely evading saying anything”.

She decided to meet the king and to have a heart to heart conversation with him to get rid of her doubts and suspicions. Accordingly, one night when silence prevailed everywhere she went into the sleeping chamber of Nagush. Nagush sat on a swing and kept looking intently at the stars in the sky and seemed to be lost in an endeavour to explore the mysteries of the stellar world. His face which had lost its radiance was covered with the marks of worry, agitation and gloom. Everywhere, there was silence.

Simhika went slowly upto him and stood near him. Nagush glanced at her once and then again became absorbed in contemplating on the starry sky. A few moments passed thus but those few moments were like years for Simhika. She could not stand quietly thus and with a look of despair and solicitation she fell at his feet like an uprooted tree. Her mind was deeply agitated and she began to weep. She kept sobbing thus for sometime. Her hot tears bathed the feet of Nagush and he was startled. He asked in amazement, "What's the matter ?" He did not even touch her. He remained unperturbed. In reply, he could only hear Simhika's soft and suppressed sobs.

"What do you want to say ?" Again, Nagush's voice which was devoid of affection and which was harsh echoed in the air.

Simhika looked towards Nagush with her face covered with tears. There was unfathomable pain in her eyes; there was boundless sorrow in her eyes. She tried to control her sorrow and then said in a tone of agitation. "Since your returning from the north you have been treating me with indifference and contempt. Have I committed any unpardonable sin ?"

"Have you not been able to realize your blunder, yet ? You are asking me that question because you have not realized your blunder. This is really amazing".

"My Lord, you yourself tell me what my blunder is. You are the lord of my life. If I have committed any mistake I will certainly rectify it."

"If you had regarded me as your husband and lord you would not have done all this".

"What exactly do you mean, my lord ?"

"Can any noble woman move intimately with other men ?"

"My Lord, I have not desired intimacy with any other man even in my dreams".

"Then did you fight a war without moving intimately with other men ? Did you win a victory alone and unaided ?" Suddenly there appeared the feeling of anger in the words of Nagush. His voice was serious and stern.

"I never desired to go into the battle-field".

"Then, who compelled you to go to the battle-field ?"

"But my king, there was no other way left than to fight against the enemies. Without my entering the battle-field Ayodhya could not have been safeguarded".

"Instead of saying this you can as well speak the truth and say that you would not have got such an opportunity of mingling with thousands of young soldiers, young men . . . to exhibit your beauty freely". Nagush suddenly stood up. His eye-brows were knitted in anger.

Simhika began to shudder on hearing the angry words of Nagush. Her soul which was absolutely sacred became torn with anguish. She experienced an indescribable anguish. She never imagined that Nagush had such a low opinion of her character.

Simhika held his feet and implored him; "My lord ! I am absolutely innocent. I have not committed any blunder. Whatever I did I did only with the purpose of safeguarding our kingdom and impelled by a sense of duty towards our subjects. I entered the battle-field only for the welfare of the people. Indeed I am absolutely"

"Oh Queen ! You need not tell me anything now. I do not believe that a woman of noble birth and chastity can remain pure and chaste after having entered the battle-field. Even I could not defeat and subjugate those mighty kings of the south and you have so easily defeated them and they have so easily accepted defeat and returned. All this is not possible normally".

And Nagush having thus reprimanded her went towards his chamber. Simhika kept looking at her husband who was walking away angrily and at once the tears flowed down from her eyes. She kept weeping and sobbing in despair like a defeated soldier for a long time. She was totally shocked and nonplussed and was unable to think of any solution to her problem. In consequence, she fell into a deep state of agitation. All of a sudden there appeared the flames of anger in her mind.

"Did I commit a blunder in safeguarding Ayodhya ? Have I committed any offence in trying to defend my kingdom and my people ? If I had not taken arms and fought against the kings of the south they would have destroyed the defences of the kingdom and would have captured it. If such a calamity had taken place thousands of women would have been disgraced and outraged by the enemies. They would have destroyed all the magnificent mansions and temples of Ayodhya. Of course, I am a woman but why should not a woman fight a war ? Is womanhood a curse ? Was it not my duty to fight against enemies under those circumstances ? Have I become characterless just because I fought a war against the enemies ?"

She began to burn with anger because of the injustice done to her by Nagush. She had never in her life desired any other man's company. Such sinful love and affection had not at all appeared in her heart. When she was such a noble woman, such a woman of character, her husband imagining all sorts of things had made an ignoble accusation against her. When that was so what could a mortal like her do except growing angry with her husband who had made such an accusation. If a person is not angered by such an accusation he or she must be only a great yogi, not an ordinary mortal.

Of course, Simhika was perfectly chaste but she had not been able to discard such inner enemies as anger, pride, deception and avarice. In spite of it, she tried to think of herself and to control herself.

“When the sinful Karmas of a Jivatma produce their effect he or she has to endure many inconceivable agonies. Today, misfortune has befallen me. It is not my husband’s mistake. It is my misfortune. As long as the wheel of my misfortune keeps revolving, he will continue to entertain evil thoughts about me. He cannot help entertaining false notions when I am in the grip of misfortune but after this period of misfortune, the period of good fortune will emerge.... Therefore Oh Jiva ! You must be patient. During the period when sinful Karmas are effective, you must retain your mental serenity; and you must try to become immersed in a contemplation on the Paramatma !”

After thinking thus, she recovered her serenity; rose to her feet; and slowly proceeded towards the chamber of Nagush. Meanwhile, the harsh and indignant voice of Nagush pierced her ears like an envenomed arrow :

“You need not enter my chamber. Moreover, from today, you need not reside in my palace. Arrangements will be made for your residing in a separate palace.”

Simhika was shocked and pained. She stood still and motionless. She closed her eyes. She folded her hands with a deep emotion of devotion. She bowed her head; stood silent and still for a while; and then saluting Nagush, she went out.

In those days, there were no social workers who showed hypocritical sympathy for abandoned women or who were impelled by sensual cravings to treat such women with sympathy !

Those were days when women did not entertain hostile thoughts and hatred for their husbands when they were abandoned by them; but adored them as gods as they did when they lived together in love and amity because women in those days

treated such a period of separation as an excellent opportunity for the practice of celibacy. They always endeavoured to face such situations with patience. If they could not put themselves into such a framework of conduct, they sought refuge at the feet of the Paramatma and became absorbed in a meditation on the Paramatma; and so they could retain their mental serenity. If they failed, in spite of all this, to control their minds, they sought the holy company of Sadhus who had renounced the samsar and tried to find solace and comfort in their company.

The life of a noble woman is not confined merely to sensual pleasures and physical and materialistic enjoyments; and a woman can never be noble if she considers that her life is meant only for sensual pleasures and materialistic enjoyments. Everyone gets joys and sorrows; prosperity and splendour and sensual enjoyments according to his or her destiny and Karmas; and a noble woman believes in this truth and remains humble in happiness and carries out her duties in sorrow, with absolute severity.

Queen Simhika straight went to her chamber. There, her favourite maid, Nayana was anxiously awaiting her arrival.

"Dear Queen ! How much delay there has been !" She said by way of a formality. But when she saw the queen's face which had lost its radiance, she was greatly startled. The tears on the cheeks of Simhika and not yet dried. Her anguish was evident in her eyes. She looked as though she had been ill for years.

"Haven't you yet slept ?"

Simhika said glancing deviously at Nayana; and moved towards her cot. For a few moments, she kept thinking deeply. Then she lay on her cot. Nayana came and sat near Simhika; and tried to hear her inner voice. She began to pass her hand softly over her head and cheeks. Her tender touch gave Simhika some relief.

"What happened, my dear queen ?"

"All this is the sport of destiny."

"Yet ?"

"Tomorrow....We have to go and start living in another palace".

"Why so ?" saying this, suddenly, Nayana stood up.

"I have already told you. All this is the sport of fate." Simhika said trying hard to laugh.

"Oh Queen ? Say clearly what you want to say. What is the offence you have committed to suffer thus ?"

Simhika sat up on her bed. For a few moments she kept staring at her. Even now, the bandage on Nayana's left eyes had not been removed.

"What on earth is the matter ? Why should we live in a separate palace ? Even this is our palace".

"No ! You mad girl ! This palace belongs to the King of Ayodhya".

"So is it ours also".

"That was so in the past; not to-day."

"Then, has the king..... ?"

"Yes ! He himself gave this command."

"Is there any reason for this ?"

"I mingled with other men in the war. I openly moved about with other men. He has not liked this."

"If you had not fought in the war, to-day neither you nor the king could have been seen here. On the other hand you two should have been spending time in sorrow and shame, in some wild forest or in the shadow and shelter of some tree".

Simhika was silent.

"Oh, I see ! He did not like it; is that the case ? So, he has inflicted upon you this severe and harsh punishment; is that the case ? This punishment has been given to you for the sacrifice you made for the kingdom, the subjects and the king !"

"The king suspects my fidelity; because I fought against the enemies with the co-operation of men."

"My queen ! This is a terrible injustice to you".

"Nayana ! This is a cruel joke of destiny".

For a few moments, there was deep silence in the room. In the heart of Nayana, naturally there appeared anger and contempt for Nagush. But what could she do ? She was after all a maid. Nayana who could inflict a disgraceful defeat upon such a mighty hero as Sahyadri felt helpless against King Nagush.

"My dear friend ! What is the use of worrying ? Even such painful events are necessary in life. We have fought against our external enemies and defeated them, and we have routed them; but now the time has come to fight against our inner enemies. Therefore, we have to go on without giving way to despair or excitement. Really, the king has given us an excellent opportunity to scrutinize ourselves."

Nayana unable to do anything kept listening to Queen Simhika. She was astonished to hear the queen's plain but befittingly beautiful words. She saw the queen displaying to-day a hundred times greater courage and composure than the courage and composure she had shown while encountering the enemy kings of the south.

As soon as the day dawned, Queen Simhika went to live in a separate palace. Everyone who heard of this was greatly amazed and shocked. A loud commotion arose in the king's palace.

Queen Simhika was absorbed in rendering devotion and worship to the Arihant Bhagwan. Whenever she found time,

she carried out discussions with Nayana on some great doctrines of Dharma. In this manner, she spent her days and nights in spiritual activities.

The news that Nagush, the king had abandoned queen Simhika without any reason spread like wild fire. A tremendous furore and commotion arose everywhere. The people of the city were full of sympathy for Queen Simhika and dissatisfaction with the king's unjust action. Everywhere, people were talking about the same thing; "The King has done a great injustice to the queen; and it must be removed." But is it not said that no one can do anything against those who are in power ? This was the situation that had arisen here also. Yet a group of the representatives of the people met the Chief Minister to discuss the matter with him.

"Dear Chief Minister ! Do you consider that the King's action of thus abandoning the noble Queen is in consonance with the lofty ethical traditions of the illustrious royal family of Raghu ? Do you call this the justice of Ayodhya ? Have you tried to explain the situation to the king and to prevail upon him to realize the truth ? Do you also suspect Queen Simhika's fidelity and character ?"

"This is a very difficult and intricate problem. We cannot do anything about it until the king is personally satisfied with the Queen's fidelity and chastity."

"But could you not convince the king of the truth that the queen is absolutely noble and innocent ?"

"We can convince a person of some truth at the intellectual level by means of arguments and logical reasoning; but logic and arguments cannot change a person's heart. But at the intellectual level we can surely convince a person of a truth."

"This event has added fuel to the fire of the anger of the people of Ayodhya. A bitter feeling of dissatisfaction with the king's action has been raging in the mind of every citizen. Wherever we go in the city we see a violent commotion raging

among the people. You know very well that in the heart of every citizen there is the highest regard for our great queen. In a way, she has become a veritable goddess in the eyes of all the people of Ayodhya and has won their faith and devotion. Is this the treatment that should be given to the great queen who by virtue of her extraordinary heroism and valour and her incomparable intelligence and wisdom has saved our Kingdom of Ayodhya from being captured by the enemies; who has safeguarded the unity, sovereignty, and honour of our kingdom? Is this the value that should be given to her extraordinary sacrifice? Is this the way in which the king of Ayodhya appreciates virtues? Is this the ethical tradition of the Raghu's line?" said a young man intervening in the discussion, in a voice sharpened by anger.

"I know your feelings towards the queen and I also know very well the extraordinary honour that the people have for the queen and the lofty place they have given her in their hearts. I also know that estimating the greatness of the queen's action in safeguarding the welfare of Ayodhya is like trying to see the sun with the help of a light. The whole kingdom of Ayodhya has already realised and appreciated the real greatness of the queen and now there is the question of the king's realization of her greatness. I am sure that he too will realize the truth some day. It will be an unexampled action if he himself realizes the greatness of the queen and appreciates her worth properly. Until then we have to remain peaceful. We have to practise patience." The Chief Minister tried thus by means of proper arguments to prevail upon the representatives of the people to realize the situation and to be patient for sometime. The wheel of time kept revolving. King Nagush was experiencing deep agitation and worry.

As time passed the king's internal conflict kept gradually becoming more and more intense. He stopped attending the royal court and public functions. He also avoided meeting his ministers. He remained in his sleeping chamber, day and night.

Step by step, his inner agitation and mental worry began to exercise their effect on his body also. He became physically.

weak and sick. There appeared a tremendous agony in his body also. Famous physicians treated him but though he was given the best medical treatment his physical agony did not decrease.

The Ministers were greatly perturbed and agitated. Eminent physicians were invited from distant places; but all in vain ! No physician could cure him of his mental and physical maladies. No treatment could reduce the terrific agony that raged in his body and mind.

Queen Simhika did not know that the king was suffering from such a malady. She could not get any news of his physical condition because she had turned her face away from the external world and was totally absorbed in a contemplation on the inner world. On account of the king's suspicion regarding her character she had developed a strong feeling of renunciation. She was totally detached from this world and was immersed in a profound contemplation on the meditation of the Paramatma. But when once Nayana happened to go out of the palace she came to know of the king's illness. At first, the queen could not believe the news when she heard it from Nayana but she found out that it was true by getting definite information through Nayana. Nayana said this describing the condition of the King; "Dear Queen, the condition of the king is growing more and more serious causing anxiety to all of us. Many physicians and magicians are attending upon him. Many kinds of medicines and treatments are being given to him but all in vain. No treatment has relieved him of his agony. His physical agony and his mental anguish have been growing more and more serious. All are greatly perturbed and anxious".

Simhika heard the words of Nayana silently and calmly. Then for a few moments she thought about it and then closing her eyes she became absorbed in a meditation on the Paramatma. She began thinking, "Should I go to the King now ? Will my visit to him bring him any peace or happiness ? If I visit him my presence may increase his anguish and agony instead of reducing it." Then the voice of her conscience said, "Simhika ! This is the time for you to visit the King. You must go to him.

It is likely that your visit will help to relieve him of his agony and anguish. He may get peace and serenity”.

At once, she rose to her feet. She said in a calm voice, “Nayana, get me my clothes. I must visit the King at once”.

“But my dear Queen.....”

“Do not worry about anything. My conscience tells me that all will be well. Ah ! Yes send word to the Chief Minister that I am visiting the King”.

XXXVI

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE QUEEN'S CHASTITY

"Do not bring her into my presence. I do not like even to glance at her face." King Nagush said in an agonized voice.

"Kindly permit her to meet you at least once, Oh King !"

"But I do not like even to look at her," The King reiterated.

"She has been eager to see you. Kindly allow her to meet you at least once."

The Chief Minister entreated the King thus to permit the queen to meet him once. Nagush was greatly distressed by his bodily agony. He was intensely angry with the queen. His anger flamed like fire in his mind and heart. He harshly refused to permit the queen to meet him; yet out of regard for the Chief Minister, he said.

"If you desire it so much, you may bring her here; but I will keep my eyes closed as long as she is here; and I will not speak to her. I will not even glance at her." and having said this, he closed his eyes, and lay turning his face to the wall.

The Chief Minister made a sign to Nayana suggesting that she might bring in the queen. Nayana, at once, went out hurriedly and brought in Queen Simhika. Suddenly, the Chief Minister's right eye shook. Unknown to himself a new feeling of enthusiasm and liveliness ran through his veins. In his heart which had been depressed by the despair caused by the failure of the medical treatment given to the King, there arose a new ray of hope.

Queen Simhika entered the King's Chamber slowly; went and stood by the cot on which the king lay.

"Nayana ! Bring some holy water in a small vessel".

Nayana at once, brought holy water in a gold vessel. Simhika closed her eyes. She folded her hands and became absorbed in a prayer.

"I swear on the Arihant Paramatma, and the Siddha Paramatmas, the greatest of gods; the Munis who have made great sacrifices, all the gods and goddesses of the heavenly world; and upon my soul and declare that my chastity is unsullied and unstained; I have not at any time given a place to any other man in my heart in which I have enshrined my dear and revered husband; and that I have not even glanced at other men with passion. If my chastity is pure and unsullied, may my husband's fever abate at once !"

And then, opening her eyes, she took the gold vessel containing holy water and with heartfelt affection and devotion, she sprinkled the holy water on him.

For a while, there was a silence everywhere. All were standing mute and motionless like wooden images. They kept watching with fixed eyes, the radiant face of Queen Simhika and the sick King who lay on his cot like a skeleton. All were impatiently and eagerly waiting to see the effect of the holy water sprinkled on the King by Simhika.

A few moments passed thus. All of a sudden, the eyes of all began to sparkle with delight and cheerfulness. Slowly, the King's eyelids grew heavy. The agitation, the anguish, the gloom and the grief that had darkened the face of the King began to disappear. Soon, he fell into deep sleep. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The physicians examined the King's body; and their astonishment knew no bounds. The eyes of all who were present there widened with wonder. The king had been totally cured of his fever. He was perfectly well. All experienced horripilation;

and a new consciousness seemed to be running through their veins. Nayana, of course, began to dance with elation. She speedily ran out of the palace. Outside the palace, in the spacious courtyard, there stood thousands of people of Ayodhya, grieved by the King's sickness. Nayana conveyed to them the happy news of the King's recovery. Just then, the Chief Minister also came out. He said with a voice elated by joy : "Brothers and sisters ! There is no need for any worry or anxiety. The King has been cured of his dreadful fever. Rejoice at this miracle and celebrate it with jubilation. The sublime chastity of Queen Simhika has freed the king from all his dreadful maladies. Please go and organize celebrations and jubilations. Ring the bells in the temples. Organize an eight-day programme of devotional activities in the temples of the Jin. Illuminate the city in the nights with ghee-lamps."

"May King Nagush be victorious and prosperous ! May our beloved Queen Simhika live long ! May the rule of the *Ikshvaku* line be everlasting !" The jubilant cries of the people reverberated in the skies.

Then, the members of the royal family and the state officials prostrated before Queen Simhika; and said in a voice shaken with emotion; "Oh goddess ! You have brought imperishable glory to the Royal line of Ayodhya. You have hoisted the flag of its fame high over the world. On account of our ignorance, even we kindly forgive us."

"Dear Chief Minister ! Where is the need for any forgiveness here ? You have not offended me in any way. No one has offended me. This calamity was caused by my own sinful karmas. You need not worry. Everything takes place for the good. All will be well by the grace of the supreme Lord Parameshwar...."

"Nayana, let us go !" Queen Simhika turned to go back to her palace.

"Honoured Queen ! Where do you want to go ? Kindly stay here." The Chief Minister said in a humble manner.

“Dear Chief Minister ! If the King commands it, I shall be here at once. Now, I should go because I have to carry out the worship of the Paramatma”.

And Simhika accompanied by Nayana proceeded towards her palace.

The night passed soon. No one was aware of the passage of time. The king woke up in the morning. As soon as he got up, he looked around. He got off his cot and sat in an arm-chair. He noticed the ministers and the members of the royal family standing around. Their faces were radiant with joy. The Chief Minister came near him and said : “My Lord ! How are you ? I hope you are well and that your fever has completely abated. I hope you are not suffering from any pain or fever”.

“No ! No ! I am perfectly all right”. King Nagush said looking towards the Chief Minister, in great wonder and then, he fell into deep thoughtfulness. He spent a few moments in thinking torn by conflicting feelings. At a hint given by the Chief Minister, all went out. Now, only King Nagush and the Chief Minister remained in the Chamber.

“Dear King ! What is your order regarding the Queen ?”

“Kindly send for her at once. Really, I have done a great injustice to her”, Nagush said regretting his blunderous action.

“My Lord ! Only you are enshrined in the temple of the Queen’s heart. Her chastity and nobility are beyond words. How tremendous is the efficacy of chastity and nobility !”

“Now I realise that she could defeat and rout the kings of the south only by the power of her nobility and chastity.” All of a sudden the King’s inner eyes opened.

“If at the time the great queen had remained at home without taking any measures to repulse the enemies, today the flag of the Southern kings should have been flying over the city of Ayodhya.” The Chief Minister said endorsing the King’s opinion and admiring the Queen’s action of safeguarding the city.

"Indeed, it was an absolutely impossible task!" Nagush said admiring the Queen's heroism and valour.

"The woman who has the virtue of unsullied chastity possesses invincible powers. It is impossible to describe such a woman's heroism and nobility".

"Yes, even the people gave her active co-operation in her mighty endeavour to safeguard the city".

"At one word of command issued by the great Queen, twenty five thousand young men of the city got ready to brave death; and to fight against the enemies. This was indeed the effect of her sublime chastity".

King Nagush forgot himself in listening to the story of the Queen's heroic exploit. When his drowsiness disappeared, his face became clouded with the gloom of grief.

"Dear Chief Minister! I committed a terrible offence against her. Oh! What an ignoble person am I? How mean I am! I deemed her guilty though she was innocent and dishonoured her. I dishonoured her publicly by making false allegations against her. I have committed a great sin".

"Oh King! the sinful karma showed its effect and it abated on account of the efficacy of her chastity. Now, it is useless to worry over what has happened. On the other hand, we should bring the great Queen back to your palace with honour and respect".

"Surely..... We shall do so. I will myself bring her back to my palace with royal honours. Only then will I regain my mental peace."

Just then, the attendants came into the chamber. They entreated the King to take a bath and then retreated. The Chief Minister bowed to the king and went out taking leave of the king; and King Nagush went to take his bath.

In course of time, the adoration of the people of Ayodhya for the Queen's virtues acquired the form of songs of glorification and began to reverberate in the atmosphere. Only a short

while before, they had the opportunity of witnessing the queen's unexampled heroism and of admiring her heroism. That event was still fresh in the memory of the people. Just then, they also had the opportunity of seeing the miraculous efficacy of her splendid chastity. In consequence, there arose waves of joy and jubilation in the hearts of the people of Ayodhya as if to compete with the sky-high waves that rise on a full moon day. Not only in Ayodhya but in all the cities around Ayodhya, the story of Queen Simhika's greatness spread filling the hearts of people with joy. Simhika's joy knew no bounds. She was not, of course, perturbed over anything. How could she be? How could there be any restlessness or grief in a person who is pure and perfect in the eyes of the Paramatma and her own soul? Even when evil karmas emerge to the surface and grow efficacious, such a soul remains calm and unperturbed. Yes, one thought repeatedly pierced Simhika's heart like a thorn. She had been experiencing sorrow over the separation from her husband. It was causing worry to her day and night. That thought was that she had caused agitation and anguish to her Lord Nagush. She was grieved by the thought that on account of her he had to experience such great agitation. He had to experience inordinate grief and anguish. She was waiting for an opportunity to relieve her husband of that anguish and soon she got an opportunity. The king's sorrow and agitation at once disappeared. Not only that; his heart began to overflow with an indescribable joy and happiness. Now Simhika had no cause to be unhappy. She calmly meditated upon the Paramatma and became absorbed in glorifying him.

"Dear Queen! The King has come...." Suddenly, Nayana came and informed her of the King's arrival.

"I will come out and receive him", Simhika soon completed her worship of the Paramatma and at once went to her palace to receive the king.

King Nagush had been waiting for her. Queen Simhika looked at him with fixed eyes; folded her hands and prostrated before him.

"Dear Lord ! You have not yet recovered your health fully and you have taken the trouble of coming here I myself would have come to you...." Simhika said in a polite manner.

"I am now perfectly well, my dear Queen", King Nagush said and asked her to be seated.

"You might have recovered your health but still you are weak and run down".

"It is likely that I am physically weak but my mind is perfectly well."

"The Almighty and the spiritual head have bestowed upon us boundless compassion and kindness".

"The Almighty and the spiritual head might have bestowed their kindness upon you; but Queen Simhika has bestowed her kindness upon me".

"No, my dear Lord ! Do not say so, I am but the dust of your feet. Do not attribute so much greatness to one who is so low...." Simhika said in a serious tone.

"Oh goddess ! Though I have lived with you for such a long time I have not been able to realise your greatness. I could not realise and appreciate your tremendous chastity. What a great misfortune it is for us ? Really, I have done a great injustice to you". Nagush said heaving a long sigh with a heavy tone.

"You have not done any injustice to me but all this was the result of the evil karmas of my previous janma. When a person has fallen upon evil days what can any one do to help her ? Yet whatever has happened has happened only for our good".

"Today, I have realised that the kings of the south had to face a bitter defeat at your hands and had to run away from the battle-field because of the efficacy of your chastity. What I thought of you all these days was wrong. I had fallen into the snares of my own illusion. I committed a terrible sin by believ-

ing an untruth". Every word uttered by Nagush revealed his mental agony and anguish.

"My Lord ! What is the use of worrying over it now ? What had to happen, happened. Who can avoid the decrees of destiny ?"

"The King's face revealed his inner agitation and fatigue. Simhika entreated him to take rest. Nagush slept on the queen's luxurious bed. Simhika sat by his bed-side to render service to him. After having taken rest for a few hours, the king returned to his palace taking Simhika with him. The members of the royal family were overwhelmed with delight to see the King and the Queen returning together.

Time's winged chariot kept speeding. In course of time. Queen Simhika gave birth to a son. Nagush's joy knew no bounds.

The birth of the child was celebrated with all grandeur and *eclat*. Food, clothes and money were given as gifts to all destitute and helpless people. Worship and other devotional activities were arranged in all the temples, in the city. The child who was the heir to the throne of Ayodhya became the apple of the eyes of the people of Ayodhya. King Nagush performed the consecration ceremony to the boy and Queen Simhika recited the *Navkar Mantra* in the ears of the child. The King desiring to lay the foundations of a sound education for the child, engaged scholars and saints of outstanding excellence to educate him in all the arts and accomplishments befitting a prince. Yet the greatest teacher was Simhika herself; because the child that is not taught by its mother will remain an unhewn and unchiselled stone. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". This is a great truth.

The duty of a mother does not end with giving birth to a child. Her duty is not merely to feed the child, to dress the child; to play with it and make it play. She has to educate the child and lay the foundations of culture in the child. She has to draw out, develop, and discipline the innate potentialities of a child. The mother has to carry out the following duties :

She must see :

- * That the boy does not eat prohibited food;
- * That the boy does not drink prohibited drinks;
- * That the boy wears the dress and the decorations approved of by his family and his society;
- * That the boy does not develop the habit of seeing the sights which ought not to be seen;
- * That the boy does not associate with unworthy friends and companions;
- * That the boy is obedient to his parents and is polite and respectful towards them;
- * That the boy develops a genuine and permanent devotion for the Paramatma and that he worships the Paramatma with heartfelt devotion;
- * That he treats elders, old people and spiritual heads with the highest regard;
- * That he is selfless in his thoughts and actions;
- * That he is free from the vices of anger and ignorance in such a way that he does not develop the vices of arrogance, petulance and pride.

It is the duty of a mother to inculcate in her son these virtues. She must also train her son to keep up his self-respect in such a way that he does not become avaricious or deceptive.

The duty of a mother towards her son will be complete only when she has inspired such lofty ideals in him and when she has laid a firm foundation for his future. Queen Simhika devoted all her time and energy to shape the future of her son; and to make it radiant, enlightened and elevated. She spent more time in carrying out her motherly duties towards her son than on other duties. King Nagush was fully satisfied with Simhika's

schedule of duties; and he too joined hands with her in educating his son, whenever he found time.

The boy was named Sodas.

In course of time, Sodas grew up to be a radiant boy. As soon as he entered the phase of boyhood he was sent to an *ashram* to be educated there. There he had the opportunity of learning the *shastras* and mastering the art of fighting with various weapons. Within a short time, he attained an absolute mastery over the various princely arts and accomplishments.

Sodas attained mastery over the arts of war and the other arts and accomplishments. Simhika always tried to bring all his attainments and accomplishments under the discipline and sway of spiritual and ethical virtues. He used to spend most of his time during the day in the company of his teachers and preceptors; and he used to spend his time during the nights under the elevating influence of his mother. During night times, Simhika taught him the mysteries of Dharma; and the spiritual duties that ought to be carried out in the human state of existence. She narrated to him inspiring and enlightening stories of all the Tirthankars from the first Tirthankar Bhagwan Rishabhdev; and of all the great men known to history. Sodas heard these stories with enthusiasm and imbibed the lofty ideals embodied in them. In consequence, in his tender heart there arose a strong desire to carry out such sublime austerities and to lead such a lofty life. When he told his mother about the desires that arose in his heart, she swayed with delight.

Sodas had a bosom friend by name Anand. He was the son of the Court-priest; and he was his fellow-student in the *Ashram* school. Anand possessed virtues that his name signified. He always used to be in a state of joy and jubilation. Their friendship that began in the *Ashram* school continued to grow more and more intimate even after they left the school. The result was that Anand used to spend most of his time in the company of Sodas. They used to eat food together; to play together; to move about together and to sleep together. But the way of Anand's life was of a different kind. There was a world of

difference between their ways. Anand could not at all bear with the caution and circumspection that Sodas observed in respect of eating, drinking, moving about, entertainments and in the ways of living. But Anand never said anything that might displease or shock Sodas; or that might bring about dislike for him in his heart. Many times, Sodas severely and sternly admonished Anand regarding his disagreeable habits. But Anand instead of opposing his admonition used to keep quiet.

Once, Sodas and Anand set off on horseback riding for pleasure. They went a long distance away from Ayodhya. They reached a place where they could see neither habitations nor people. They began riding through a dense forest that seemed never-ending.

"Dear friend ! We have come away a long distance".

"I too think so".

"I am feeling very hungry".

"I too am very hungry".

"See if you can find any food here". Anand dismounted from his horse. Sodas stood beneath a huge banyan tree taking care of the horses. Anand searched for food in the surrounding areas. He came back after a few hours.

"Dear friend ! I have been successful in my search. At some distance from here, there are some cottages of peasants. We must go there now". And then, the two friends mounted their horses, and went riding. They reached the place soon. The peasants received them with enthusiasm and hospitality. They were all greatly delighted to see Sodas.

"Food is ready dear sirs", said a peasant; and placed before them mud-plates containing delicious food.

"What vegetables have been used to prepare this food ?" Sodas asked the peasant.

"Dear sir, we have cooked some roots and tubers available here."

"What did you say ? Is the food cooked with roots and tubers ? Then . . . in that case I cannot eat this food. I will never eat prohibited food." Sodas pushed aside the plate that had been placed before him. The peasant was silent. He had prepared the food only according to the instructions given by Anand.

"Dear friend ! You eat this food today. What else can we get in a wild forest except roots and tubers ? To-morrow, you need not eat this food".

"But how can I eat roots ? Instead of eating this kind of food, it is better to die of hunger".

"Do not be obstinate dear friend ! Please eat this food. If you do not eat the food, I too will not eat it. It does not matter if I too will have to die of hunger". Anand said, expressing his displeasure.

"Dear Anand ! Why do you compel me to eat roots and tubers ? Is your insistence proper ?"

"I am insisting that you should eat this food because you do not at any time, eat nourishing food even absent-mindedly. Whenever some nourishing food is offered to you, you refuse to eat it saying that it is prohibited food. In consequence, your body instead of being robust and healthy looks weak and emaciated".

"Dear friend ! You know very well that my mother does not approve of my eating such food."

"How will your mother come to know of this ? And of course I will not insist upon your eating roots in the palace". Seeing Anand in a mood of sadness, Sodas fell into deep thought. They were close friends. He did not like to see his friend in sorrow.

"Very well ? To-day, since you are insisting upon my eating this food, I will eat it; but you should not repeat your insistence". Anand's joy knew no bounds. He made Sodas eat roots and tubers on that day. Sodas had not tasted that food at any time in his life; so he enjoyed it very much and ate to his satisfaction. He ate the food relishing it ostensibly. But in his heart there arose conflicting feelings. "What will happen if my mother comes to know of this ? What shall I do if Anand compels me to eat this food again ? How greatly will my mother be grieved if she comes to know of this ?" On account of such thoughts, he was experiencing great anxiety and worry.

"Anand ! My mother may come to know of this. Then what shall I do ?"

"You are worrying yourself unnecessarily. No one will come to know of it". Anand assured Sodas that the matter would not reach the ears of his mother.

It has been rightly said that a man cannot escape the impact of his association. Anand ate not only roots and tubers to gratify his sense of taste; but also ate meat regularly. His innate idea was to make even Sodas eat meat. He thought that he could have recreational assemblages to eat meat if the prince also joined him in eating meat.

Sodas who was naive and unsuspecting easily fell a victim to the evil design of Anand. He fell into his snares. In the beginning, he feared his mother Simhika. He did not act contrary to her wishes; But secretly, he developed the habit of eating roots. Moreover, he also began to hold recreational assemblages to eat such food. Gradually, there appeared a change in his nature on account of the impact of the food he ate. His gentle and serene temperament became violent. There appeared a change in his conduct and dealings with others. There appeared a difference between his nature and his external behaviour.

Now, he did not take interest in worshipping the Lord and in showing devotion to him. He could not concentrate on any-

thing with a firm mind and in consequence, he could not carry out any meditation. He stopped caring for his mother's spiritual and ethical precepts.

The sudden change that appeared in Sodas could not be hidden from the experienced and probing eyes of Simhika. She put searching questions to him and tried to find out the nature of his thoughts and feelings but on account of his association with his ignoble friend Anand, Sodas had lost his plainness and frankness. So, he tried to conceal the truth from his mother and avoided discovery by taking recourse to some pretext or the other.

After having induced Sodas easily to eat roots and tubers he began planning to make Sodas eat meat. He made efforts to bring about a complete change in Sodas' behaviour and thinking. Simhika had laid the foundations of culture in Sodas in such a way that Anand could not easily bring about a change in his thoughts and actions. He found it almost impossible to change him inspite of all his endeavours. Therefore, sometimes Anand used to make jokes about Sodas. He always used to tell him; "Dear brother! As long as one does not taste some food; one scorns it saying it is prohibited food but when once a person tastes it all his ideals disappear. All his principles disappear and he endeavours to secure and taste that food". Sodas used to give rough replies without any hesitation. He said: "Anand, you should not forget this vital truth. Just because I have begun eating roots and tubers it does not mean that they are not prohibited food and that eating that food is not sinful. Even today, I believe firmly that eating roots is a terrible kind of sinful action. It is only on account of my weakness that I have become a slave to eating roots. I cannot, of course, discard this habit".

At such times, Anand used to smile and avoid further discussion.

As time passed, Anand used to get tasty and spicy food prepared and to induce Sodas to eat it. He induced him to eat such food as would not be prepared in the palace. How could prohibited food be prepared in the kitchen which was under the

supervision of Simhika, a staunch believer in the doctrines of Dharma.

Anand used to get such spicy food prepared that Sodas could not make out the ingredients of the food. Only after, he ate the food Anand used to tell him of what substances, the various dishes were prepared. Sodas could not entertain any suspicion because Anand had won his trust.

Day by day, Sodas kept moving away from Simhika. In consequence, Simhika became naturally anxious and worried regarding her son, Sodas.

XXXVII

THE RUIN OF SODAS

Sodas, day by day, began to relish tasty food and he became greedy of tasty food. He totally forgot the lofty traditions of his family and the cultural ideals that his mother had instilled into him. The evil thoughts and propensities of Anand exercised such a sway over the gentle and noble thoughts and actions of Sodas that the latter could not free himself from the clutches of the former. Of course, Sodas knew very well that what he was doing was wrong and that it would surely stain his name and fame.

Once the great Muni Sheelasundar happened to come to the flower-garden of Ayodhya accompanied by his disciples. The caretakers of the garden offered their felicitations to the Acharya. King Nagush who came to know of the arrival of the muni went to the garden to meet him. He went to the garden accompanied by his Queen Simhika and the other members of the royal family. The members of the Royal family felt blessed on seeing the great muni. King Nagush and Queen Simhika had been impatiently expecting the arrival of such a great muni. As soon as they saw the great muni, there arose in their hearts, easily and spontaneously the desire to renounce worldly life. They bowed to the Acharya and humbly entreated him;

“Oh Lord of compassion ! After seeing you, we have lost all interest in *samsar* and the auspicious desire to be initiated into the *charitradharma* has arisen in our minds. Therefore, Oh Lord ! Kindly initiate us into the supremely sacred *sadhu-dharma*”.

“Oh king ! Your desire is commendable. Auspicious actions should not be delayed.” The Mahamuni said commending the king’s desire heartily.

“Oh you ocean of kindness ! We have decided to spend our life at your holy feet after crowning Prince Sodas, king of Ayodhya. Until then, you kindly stay here”.

After that King Nagush returned to his palace accompanied by his family. He sent for the Chief Minister; and ordered him to make arrangements for the coronation of Sodas as the king of the country. The news that the king was receiving initiation into the *sadhudharma* spread like wild fire. Prince Sodas also came to know that his parents would receive initiation into the *sadhudharma*. He felt hit in the vitals when he heard this news. He had great affection for his mother. Hence, it was natural that he should be grieved over the prospect of her renouncing worldly life. But he knew very well the traditions of the *Ikshvaku* line. He did not like to oppose the tradition that had been in vogue, in his family, from the time of Lord Rishabhdev. Hence, he did not place any impediments on the path of his parents. His coronation took place....but it took place in an inauspicious *Muhurt*. Moreover, it took place in a hurry. The court-priest made a mistake in fixing the time for the coronation. Therefore, knowingly or unknowingly, they committed a Himalayan blunder.

After celebrating the coronation of Sodas, the king and the queen received the *Deeksha* from the great Muni. King Nagush became a Sadhu; and Queen Simhika became a Sadhvi. After the *Deeksha* ceremony was over, the great Muni went away from Ayodhya on his *Vihar*.

Sodas became the king of the vast kingdom of Ayodhya. He always used to keep with him his bosom friend, Anand. He could not bear separation from him even for a moment. This proved a good fortune for Anand. Now, he got an excellent opportunity to gratify his love of taste. He took complete charge of the kitchen; and began getting spicy food prepared out of various

kinds of prohibited items. In course of time, Sodas also developed the habit of eating prohibited food.

Anand entertained the evil desire of inducing Sodas to eat meat. In order to fulfil his desire, he got a dish of meat prepared. He thought, "If Sodas comes to know of my plan, he will never fall into my snares. On the contrary, he would develop a serious contempt for me. If a small quantity of meat is used in the beginning, he would not hesitate to eat the food with relish." He wanted to achieve two objectives thus at one stroke. Sodas would become a meat-eater; and he would make a wrongful gain by duping him. Everything seemed convenient and favourable. If this is not a mockery of fate what else is it? What a mean fellow Anand was! How ignoble! The caretaker himself turns a robber! Sodas reposed great trust in Anand; but he betrayed the trust.

In accordance with his plan, Anand went out by a secret passage. He happened to approach the cabin of the butcher. The butcher was greatly amazed to see the son of the court-priest at his door. He heartily welcomed him :

"Mahakal, I want a favour from you".

"What is the matter? Kindly tell me what service you desire from me. I am prepared to do anything for your sake," Mahakal, the butcher said in a humble manner.

"You have to keep it a secret. It should not reach the ears of anyone else. If anyone comes to know of it...."

"Dear master! You need not worry about it. Nobody will come to know of it. If it reaches the ears of anyone else, you may cut off my head."

"If you succeed in this endeavour, at once, I will make you an affluent man". And Anand's heart overflowed with delight. He was delighted and thrilled to the brims of his being. He ordered Mahakal to convey meat to the kitchen every day secretly; and Mahakal gladly agreed to do so. Anand was immen-

sely pleased. He gave Mahakal five gold coins; and returned home. Mahakal kept staring at Anand who was going away; and muttered, "What a man !"

Anand straight went home; and slept dreaming of the delight of eating meat. The next day, he went to the palace; and sent for the cook; and said to him in a stern voice :

"If you want to retain your position here, you must act according to my instructions :"

"Dear master ! I will surely abide by your orders. I will act according to your instructions. Have I at any time committed any mistake ? Have I ignored your wishes at any time ? I shall obey your commands as if they are the commands of the King himself".

"No, you have not committed any mistake; nor have I been dissatisfied with you for anything. I want you to carry out an important duty".

"Command me to do it and see the result".

"You have to keep it a secret".

"Kindly tell me what it is ? I am ready to carry out your orders".

Then, Anand whispered into the cook's ears the details of his plan. He explained his plan to him fully and then he continued to grease his palms. A man who covets money will do anything for it. He will do anything if he can get money easily. In accordance with this plan, the next day onwards there began arriving baskets full of meat in the kitchen, secretly. The cook, under the guidance of Anand prepared such delicious dishes with meat that Sodas ate the dishes with relish. He did not realize what substances were used to prepare those dishes. Sometime passed thus. Anand's plan of making Sodas eat meat continued unimpeded. One day Sodas and Anand were ready to eat food. Suddenly Sodas said. "Brother Anand ! For somedays past the food has been very delicious. I feel like eating it again and again and I desire to eat these dishes every day".

Hearing the words of Sodas Anand merely smiled. When Sodas looked at the cook he too glanced at Anand and smiled.

"What is the matter ? Why is it that you two keep smiling at each other ? Is there any secret in it ?"

"No, dear King ! There is no such secret in it; we are merely smiling. Your joy has increased our happiness."

"No, Anand ! There must be some secret reason for your smiling. That is why you are smiling. At least let me know what the matter is".

"There is no such secret dear friend".

"Then why are you smiling thus ?" And Sodas began staring at them.

"When the right time comes I will myself tell you what the matter is". Anand tried to give an evasive reply.

But Sodas was impatient to know what the matter was. He realised that they were concealing something from him but he did not say anything. After that, the two friends went to take rest. Sodas again asked the same question.

Anand said seeking the King's forgiveness;

"Oh king ! Kindly give me an assurance that you will not be angry with me. If you give me that assurance I will tell you what the matter is".

"My dear friend ! I love you more than my life. I assure you that I will not be angry with you. Tell me what the matter is. You need not have any fear".

"Dear Lord ! The dishes have been so delicious because they are prepared out of meat".

"What did you say, Anand ?"

Sodas began to shudder with fear. On account of nausea he felt like vomiting.

"My dear friend ! I have done all this only with the desire that my dearest friend who is a king must eat nutritious food. My desire has been only to satisfy you. That is why I have made bold to carry out this plan".

Anand, what you have done is wrong. You might have been prompted by a pure motive; you might have done this with the idea that it will bring health and strength to your friend; yet what you have done is contemptible and absolutely condemnable". Sodas fell into deep thoughtfulness. For some months, he had been eating meat without knowing it and that food had produced its effect on his conduct and behaviour. The creeper of culture that his mother Simhika had grown in his heart had withered away. He had forgotten the noble traditions of his family. He felt greatly shocked when Anand revealed the secret relating to the dishes. He experienced a deep anguish; yet the desire to discard meat-eating did not appear in his mind. Having requested Sodas to take rest Anand went away. He was afraid of staying there even for a moment.

In this manner, Anand's problem was solved and his way was cleared. Now the baskets of meat began arriving in the kitchen openly. Even the ministers came to know that Sodas had been eating meat. All were dissatisfied with him and began to treat him with contempt.

Nobody could do anything to prevent him from eating meat. It was impossible that a change should appear in Sodas. Sodas also began to eat meat openly disregarding all limits of propriety and decency. His habit of eating meat went on unimpeded. The anniversary of the initiation of King Nagush approached. The ministers arranged various ceremonies and celebrations for the occasion. In all the Jin temples, arrangements were made for a eight-day worship and celebration. During that period, throughout the country the slaughter of animals was banned; and the people were ordered to practise the principle of non-violence. The ministers also entreated Sodas to observe the principle of non-violence for eight days. Sodas had to observe the principle of non-violence. There was no alternative left. Of

course he gave his consent to observe the principle of non-violence but he could not place a restraint upon himself. He had become an addict to the habit of eating meat every day; so how could he abstain from eating meat even for one day? In consequence, he secretly instructed the cook to prepare dishes of meat. He received the commands of the king. He searched for meat in every street in Ayodhya. He went to every butcher's shop and to every slaughter-house but he could not get meat. The ministers had issued a stern order that animals should not be killed during that period; so no one could kill animals and sell meat. Even the butchers in the city had unanimously decided to suspend killing animals and selling meat during those eight days.

The cook fell into a strange predicament. He found himself between the devil and the deep sea. Death stared him in his face on either side; so he went searching for meat in every street and lane and then he wandered out of the city of Ayodhya. It was past mid-day. He was terribly hungry. He sat beneath a tree because he was dead-tired. Reclining his head on his hand, he began taking rest. Within a short time he recovered his spirits. When he looked around he suddenly noticed a hillock at a distance. When he observed it closely, he found that a number of vultures and kites were flying over the valley at the foot of the hillock. He got up at once, and went near the hill. All of a sudden, he noticed the dead body of a child lying there. The kites and vultures were pecking at it and tearing it off to pieces. The cook thought for a while; and then seized the dead body. He at once returned to the palace with the dead body. He cut the dead body to pieces secretly; and put the flesh in a vessel and cooked the flesh.

After having cooked it, he went running to the king. On seeing the cook, the king felt greatly relieved and a new life flashed through his veins. He had been waiting for him impatiently. He was terribly hungry. As soon as the cook came he asked him impatiently;

“Have you been able to secure it?”

"What is impossible if the king is gracious towards me".

"Is the food ready?" Sodas asked him touching his hungry stomach with his hand.

"Yes sir. The food is ready. I have come to take you to the dining hall".

"Very good! You are really a very faithful and conscientious servant!" Saying this, Sodas put his gold chain around the neck of the head-cook.

The joy of the cook knew no bounds. He began to sway with delight. He placed before Sodas a gold plate containing dishes prepared out of human flesh. The dishes gave Sodas heavenly delight. Therefore, he began to eat the food with great relish. After taking his meal, he called the cook to his side; and said:

"Ah! How can I describe the excellent taste of this food you served me today! Really you are a wizard who can perform miracles. I wish to kill your hands. I will be greatly happy if I can get this kind of food every day. But you tell me what meat has been used to cook to-day's food".

"Dear King! Today, I could not get animal meat anywhere in the city of Ayodhya. But with great difficulty, I managed to secure human flesh; and I cooked it". The cook said with fear.

"Whatever flesh you might have cooked, the food was exquisite! Ah! yes. From to-day you must cook only this flesh. Do you understand?"

"As commanded by the King!"

A few moments before, he was greatly afraid of what might happen to him. He was at his wit's end; but when he found that the king was pleased with what he had done, all his doubts and fears disappeared. He remembered the precious gold chain given by the king; and he was greatly elated. The gold chain would free him from poverty for generations. He gladly agreed

to secure human flesh; but when he thought of it for a while, he felt rather perplexed. His enthusiasm was damped. Where could he secure human flesh every day? And that too the flesh of a child! He decided to discuss the matter with Anand. Accordingly, in the evening after completing his duties in the kitchen, he went to Anand's residence. Since he had not been well for two days he had not come to the palace.

When Anand saw the cook coming to meet him, all sorts of doubts and suspicions arose in his mind. The cook saluted him; and then mentioned the purpose of his visit.

"Master, I have fallen into a strange predicament. Only you must show me a way out. If not, I will have to face death!" The cook explained to him the problem that had arisen.

"Well, why should you worry about this? Where is the need for any worry at all? When the king himself desires it why should you fear anything? You must find out the boys in the city who are destitutes. Every day you must get one boy for this purpose."

"But, dear sir, this is a hazardous job".

"You see! Those who are cowardly and fearful cannot render any service to the King. Do you understand?"

"Dear master! I am a poor man. If I am caught, I will be ruined".

"Don't fear anything. I will explain to you fully what you have to do. I will suggest a clever plan. In spite of it, if anything happens, I will manage the situation and save you from harm."

"In that case, why should I fear anything?" The cook said feeling assured.

Anand explained to the cook the method by which boys could be enticed to fall into his trap. The cook also liked his plan. Having saluted him, he returned. Anand slept thinking joyously of the sweetness of human flesh.

The next day, in accordance with his plan; the cook took with him a basket of sweets; and stood in the corner of a lane. Some poor boys were passing by that lane, on their way to school. There was a school at one end of the lane. The lane was desolate and silent but for the noise made by the poor boys who were going to school. As usual, the boys were going along that lane towards their school. The cook with apparent affection gave sweets to the boys. The joy of the boys knew no bounds. This plan of distributing sweets went on upto the evening. This was repeated on the second and the third days. On that day, the last boy who came to receive sweets did not return home. When the boy stretched his hands to receive the sweets the cook made him smell a stick. Within a few moments, the boy lost his consciousness. At once, the cook put him in the empty basket; and carrying the basket on his head, ran away from there. Holding the basket tight, he went into the underground vault in the kitchen. Soon he took out the child from the basket; and killed him in a heartless manner.

A man who covets money commits any enormity for it. If necessary, he will set fire to the whole world, without any hesitation. The same thing happened here also. As the cook continued to receive money from Sodas and Anand, his cupidity also increased. As a result of this he became blinded by greed and continued to satisfy his covetousness day by day. He never hesitated to kill in a heartless manner any boy who was tender like a flower.

This practice of killing children went on for sometime. Every day the cook somehow abducted a child; killed it and prepared dishes out of the flesh for Sodas.

Every day a boy was abducted. In the beginning people did not think seriously about this mysterious disappearance of children but when it continued regularly there arose a loud commotion among the citizens. People were unhappy and agitated. On account of fear the people of the city stopped sending their children alone to any place. On account of the repeated complaints of missing children, the ministers became greatly

worried and agitated. A committee of the leading citizens of the city and high state officials met the Chief Minister and made this appeal :

“Dear Chief Minister ! Children are being abducted by someone and the wonder is that the offenders have not been caught so far. This is indeed a reproach on the excellent ethical traditions of Ayodhya. Therefore, we entreat you to get the offenders traced and arrested and thus restore peace and happiness to the city”.

“What you say is right. The ministers and the Government are agitated over this serious problem of the abduction of children in the city. We are thinking seriously of the measures that should be taken to prevent this calamity from recurring. Today I will meet the king and make the necessary arrangements for tracing the culprits. Give up your worry and agitation. The government is seriously thinking of this problem”. The people were satisfied with the assurance given by the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister met the king and explained to him what was happening in the City.

“Your Highness ! The people of the city are greatly agitated over the abduction of children. Every day a child is being abducted. The people of the city are extremely worried and unhappy. We have to take proper steps to prevent this enormity from repeating itself”.

“At once arrange to issue orders in the name of the caretaker of the city to search for the culprits. I think some monster has been carrying away children during night times”.

“Your Highness ! Children are not being abducted in the night times. They are being abducted on their way to school, that is, before they go to school”.

“Then our officers must ask the teachers for an explanation.” Sodas spoke in such a way that he did not seem to be agitated by the problem at all. The King’s indifference towards the problem was not unnoticed by the Chief Minister. At once,

doubts and suspicions arose in his mind. At any rate, after having discussed the problem with the King, the Chief Minister returned home. He arranged a meeting of the ministers. The ministers unanimously decided that immediate steps should be taken to trace the culprits who were abducting the children. The Chief Minister sent for the head of the spies and ordered him to take the necessary steps to find out the abductors.

Accordingly, the department of spies made arrangements to search for the culprits. One spy approached the teacher in the school. Even the teacher was agitated over the strange phenomenon. The spy obtained from the teacher some useful information and then began to hunt for the culprits in the vicinity. He also made enquiries with the boys of the school and collected some information. A new fact came to light. The spy found out from the boys that every day a stranger came and stood in a corner of a lane and kept distributing sweets to the children throughout the day. The officer decided to gather full details about that stranger.

The next day, the officer put on plain clothes and kept sauntering about near the corner of the lane. At the appointed time, that stranger who had put on a disguise came to that place and began giving sweets to children. The officer at once recognized him. He was none other than the cook in the palace. He had put on the guise of a peasant; and was distributing sweets to children. The spy, at once, had a premonition. Suddenly, doubts and suspicions arose in his mind. So, from a distance, he kept a careful watch on his activities and movements. Many boys came there; received sweets; and went away. Some boys were accompanied by their parents or guardians. Thus, some hours passed. The midday sun was blazing hot. Step by step, the number of people passing that way dwindled. Just then, a boy was seen in the lane. He approached the cook. He stretched his hands to receive sweets. The cook looked around to see if anyone was watching him. He could see no one. There was dead-silence everywhere. The cook thought of utilizing this opportunity; and made the boy smell a medicinal herb. As soon as he fell unconscious, the cook put him into his empty basket.

The spy was watching carefully every action of his; but to see what he would do next, he stood silently watching him. Of course, the officer was fully convinced that every day, the same fellow had been abducting children, yet in order to keep track of his movements and to find out what he was going to do, he did not try to stop him. The cook placed the basket on his head; and at once, set off from there hurriedly. The officer secretly followed him. The cook straight went into the palace. The officer also followed him into the palace. He suggested to the guards by means of a sign to follow him. When the cook was about to enter the secret vault, the officer arrested him and asked him sternly :

“Where are you going ?”

“How does it concern you ?”

“I am concerned with it. That’s why I have asked you that question. And what does this basket contain ?”

“Don’t talk unnecessarily. Get away”.

“I will go away; but first tell me what this basket contains”.

“Get away. I won’t tell you what it contains. Do what you like”.

The officer glanced at the guards; and gave them a hint. The guards surrounded the cook, at once. Then the officer sent word to the Chief Minister to come there at once. A guard brought the Chief Minister, at once.

The basket was still on the head of the cook. He began to shudder with fear. His body was drenched in perspiration. His fear knew no bounds. As soon as the Chief Minister came, the cook placed the basket on the floor; fell at the feet of the Chief Minister and entreated him for forgiveness.

“My lord ! Kindly forgive me. I am innocent”.

“What is the matter ? Will you tell me what the matter is or will you merely keep begging for forgiveness ?” The Chief

Minister wanted to know from him the full details relating to the matter.

“Honoured Chief Minister ! Every day I have been abducting a child thus”.

And then he opened the basket in which a tiny boy lay unconscious. The Chief Minister was shocked to see this sight. He, at once, sent for the doctor. A guard went; and brought the doctor at once. The doctor examined the unconscious child. After he was given the necessary treatment, he recovered his consciousness. As soon as he recovered his consciousness, he was sent home. At the same time, the Chief Minister ordered that the cook should be kept in prison; and that he should be produced in the Court, the next day. After that, accompanied by the officer, the Chief Minister went into the secret vault. The foul smell that filled the vault made them feel giddy. The whole atmosphere there had become polluted with the filthy smell. The Chief Minister and the officer covered their noses with their upper-cloths and entered the secret vault. When they saw the heart-rending sight there, they were shocked. The Chief Minister's heart palpitated with horror. The sight there was so terrible and nauseating that no human being could see it with composure. On one side, there was a heap of skeletons of children; the walls were smeared with blood and human flesh. The floor was completely covered with blood !

XXXVIII

THE CANNIBAL

As soon as Anand came to know that the cook had been arrested and imprisoned, he ran away from Ayodhya. Sodas was in great anxiety. He knew very well the nature of the Chief Minister, the people and of the other ministers. The cabinet of ministers would not hesitate to take any step in order to dispense justice. He thought it best to consult his friend, Anand regarding the perplexing predicament into which he had fallen. So, he sent a confidant to search for Anand; but Anand had already disappeared from Ayodhya. Even if he was in Ayodhya, would he come to meet Sodas ?

The Chief Minister accompanied by the other ministers went in the dark night to the prison-house where the cook had been imprisoned.

"If you tell us the truth, we will not pass a sentence of death upon you; on the contrary, we will release you. But if you try to conceal the truth, we will send you to the gallows and nobody would be able to save you." The Chief Minister said sternly addressing the cook.

"Oh you lord of compassion ! This is the truth. I am absolutely innocent".

"Then you tell us who compelled you to commit these enormities".

"I seek your kindness, my Lord !"

"Speak out the truth without any fear".

"Honoured Chief Minister ! The King.... the King is to blame".

"What did you say ?"

"I have been doing all this only according to the commands of the King".

"Since when ?"

"For about a month".

"Who taught you this art ?"

"Anand....the son of our court-priest".

After having gathered all the details from the cook, the Chief Minister ordered him to be locked up again. Then, the cabinet of ministers met in the counsel-chamber for a discussion. Worry and agitation were writ large on the face of everyone. The enormities that Sodas had committed filled everyone with grief and agitation.

"Now, we know the situation thoroughly. What are we to do ? If everyone gives his opinion, it will be easy to come to a decision regarding the action we have to take." The Chief Minister said in a serious tone.

"But what is your opinion ? If you give us guidance it will be easy to untie this knot". The other ministers said looking towards the Chief Minister, with intent eyes.

"My opinion is that we should meet the king and advise him to discard this monstrous habit."

"If he does not accept our advice, what are we to do ?" A minister said expressing his doubt.

"In such a case, the cabinet of ministers will have to take proper steps".

"What are they ? Kindly explain what steps we will have to take so that we too may know what those steps are".

"What do you think are the proper steps?" Another queried.

"My opinion is that if the king rejects our advice, we shall at once, dethrone him; and we shall place the prince upon the sacred throne of Ayodhya." The Chief Minister expressed his opinion rather emotionally.

"What you say is right. If the protector himself turns a destroyer why should we give him any respect or importance?" Another minister said endorsing the opinion of his colleague.

"The first thing to be done is that we should meet the king. We shall try to prevail upon him to discard his devilish habit. Our decision will depend upon what happens at the meeting." The Chief Minister said explaining to them the plan of action they had to carry out. All the other ministers gave their consent to it.

The night had far advanced. All had gone to sleep. The atmosphere was silent and still. There was no sign of any disturbance or commotion anywhere. Yet, it was essential that they should meet the king and hold a discussion with him. Therefore the Chief Minister went to the palace accompanied by the other ministers. He sent a message to the king by a guard.

"The cabinet of ministers desires to meet you".

Sodas also had not slept. He had not been able to get a wink of sleep. In a worried tone, he said to the guard;

"Bring them here".

The Chief Minister and the other ministers entered the King's chamber. For a few moments, all were silent. Then, breaking the ice, Sodas asked the ministers why they had come to meet him at such a late hour in the night. In reply to his question, the Chief Minister said in a serious manner :

"Oh king! You are aware of the fact that for the last one month someone has been abducting children. This has caused a great agitation and discontent among the people of the city".

"I hope you have made investigations", said Sodas fixing his eyes on the ground.

"We have made all the necessary investigations. It is only after making those investigations that we have come to you". The Chief Minister said fixing his probing eyes on Sodas. There was silence everywhere, Sodas was silent.

"I think you know who the offender is and for whom he has been abducting children thus...."

"Yes!" said Sodas suggesting that he knew those details.

"What is done cannot be undone."

"But it is absolutely necessary that a thorough transformation should take place in you. You are the king of the vast kingdom of Ayodhya and you are like the father of the people of Ayodhya. The duty of a father is to take care of his children; not to eat them. Is it proper for a protector to become a destroyer?"

"I know my duty very well. Nobody need teach me my duties...." Sodas said in a voice tinged with anger.

"Yes, dear king. That is true. Who are we to teach you anything? But we have placed before you our suggestion which we thought proper. Giving a suggestion is our duty. That is why we have met you. No king can continue to rule over a kingdom against the wishes of the people".

"Then, what are you suggesting?"

"We appeal to you to exercise a restraint on your love of taste and to stop eating the flesh of children".

"In this matter I will do whatever I like".

"What does it mean, Oh king? What do you mean by saying that you would do what you like?"

"You need not know it."

"Oh King, since I am the Chief Minister of this kingdom and since I am a responsible state official I have the right to know it and you have to tell me. All the ministers have come here only to know it." The Chief Minister said in a voice which was stern and severe. Sodas remained silent for a few moments, on hearing the words of the Chief Minister. He was unable to give any answer to the Chief Minister's question. He realized that the ministers would surely take a stern decision.

"If you do not give us a satisfactory answer we will have to compel you to accept our decision".

"Well, do whatever you want to do. I will show you what I want to do. . . ." and Sodas quickly rose to his feet and went away in a huff, towards his sleeping-chamber.

After that, the ministers returned to their respective homes. All were greatly angry and agitated. As soon as entering the council-chamber, the Chief Minister said to his colleagues;

"Now, we have only one alterative left before us".

"What is it ?"

"We should dethrone Sodas and install the prince on the throne of Ayodhya".

"You are absolutely right. This is the only thing we have to do now".

"But we have also to acquaint the people of the situation", the Chief Minister said describing the course of action that had to be pursued to carry out their plan.

"In that case, we have to discuss the matter with the representatives of the people".

"Let the representatives of the people be invited at once to a meeting", the other ministers said with one voice. It was past mid-night. Silence held its sway over the city of Ayodhya. Now and then, the neighing of the horses of the guards disturbed the silence. Sometimes, the barkings of dogs also came piercing the

silence. Two body-guards of the Chief Minister went breaking the silence of the night to the magnificent mansion of the leading citizen of the city. On hearing their heavy foot-steps the guards at the door of the mansion were startled. They became alert and uttered a code word. Without any hesitation the body-guards of the Chief Minister approached them and said :

“We have to meet your master”.

“At this time of the night ?”

“The Chief Minister has sent him a secret message”.

One guard at once went into the mansion and came back soon. He told the Chief Minister's body-guards to follow him. At once, the two body-guards were taken to the chamber where the leading citizen of the city was waiting for them. They saluted him; and conveyed to him the Chief Minister's message.

The Citizen put on a formal dress; recited *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* and proceeded to the Chief Minister's house along with his body-guards. At the same time, before setting out, he ordered his guards to inform the other representatives of the people also to come to the Chief Minister's house, at once.

Within a short time all the representatives of the people gathered in the house of the Chief Minister. The leading citizen of the city went into the Chief Minister's house accompanied by them. The Chief Minister came forward a few steps, received them and requested them to be seated.

“Dear sirs ! The abductor of children has been arrested and kept in prison”.

“Excellent !” The leading citizen said admiring the step taken by the Chief Minister.

“But the cannibal is, indeed, a strange one. You or I have never even imagined that he would commit such an enormity”.

“Dear Chief Minister ! What do you mean ? Who is that cannibal ?”

"What can I say ?.... Oh ! The protector himself has become a cannibal !" The Chief Minister said in an agitated voice. His heart was deeply agitated and his face was clouded with despair.

"What did you do ?"

"I tried my best to prevail upon him to put an end to his ignoble habit but all in vain. Can we ever store water in an inverted pot ?"

"Did he listen to your advice ?"

"No".

"Then what have you thought of doing next".

"You tell us what steps we shall adopt." The Chief Minister instead of giving a reply put a question to them.

"We are sure that you would have thought of some measure".

"Yes, of course".

"Then why delay".

"No; it's not a question of delaying....yet...."

"You may tell us clearly what your plan is."

"Prince Simharath has to be installed upon the royal throne of Ayodhya".

"And the king ?"

"He must be dethroned and deposed".

"How can this be done ?"

"It is only to discuss that point that I have invited you at this time of the night", the Chief Minister said looking straight into the eyes of the leading citizen. The leading citizen who was a man of shrewd and incisive intelligence, at once, thought of the details regarding the plan they had to implement.

"The commander should be instructed at once to appoint groups of soldiers to stand around the palace. They should not allow the king to come out of his palace until the prince is installed on the throne".

The leader said explaining his plan of action.

"Then ?"

"After the coronation of the prince as the king of the country the soldiers should be withdrawn and the king will certainly leave Ayodhya in disgrace quietly. That way everything will be all right". The leading citizen prophesied events like an astrologer. All listened to his description of his intelligent plan. All supported the plan. The Chief Minister was full of admiration for his intelligence.

After that, they sent a body-guard to fetch the commander. Accordingly, the commander came at once. The Chief Minister explained to the commander fully the situation that had arisen; the story of the abductions of children and all the related facts and ordered him to post armed soldiers around the palace to prevent the king from coming out. The commander gave his consent to the plan suggested by the Chief Minister and set off to carry out the plan. The ministers and the representatives of the people having decided to celebrate the coronation of the prince the next morning went away to their respective homes.

How wonderful were those days !

How cautious and vigilant were the men in power, in Ayodhya, in preserving the sacred traditions that had been in existence from the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev ! Even if the king himself committed a blunder; or an enormity they did not at all hesitate to punish him. This kind of action is not possible unless the people concerned rise above selfish considerations. Such a lofty, spiritual excellence was present in the people of those days.

It was morning. The city of Ayodhya woke up from its sleep. Gradually, the daily activities of the people began with

a new vigour and liveliness. Already, a large number of armed soldiers stood around the palace. Everyone who heard of this was stupefied. A sort of commotion appeared everywhere. The news that King Sodas himself had been the cause for the abduction of children in the city and that many tender children had been killed mercilessly for the gratification of his craving for human flesh spread like a wild fire. The same commotion was discernible everywhere. The people of Ayodhya despised Sodas and spoke of him with utter contempt.

Just then the people of the city heard the noise of drums.

“Here is a proclamation issued by the Chief Minister. Today at nine in the morning in the presence of all the people of the city the representatives of the city, the ministers and officials of the state, Prince Simharath will be crowned king of Ayodhya in the royal court. All are requested to attend the ceremony”.

When Sodas woke up in the morning he found that his palace had been surrounded by armed soldiers. He experienced at once a meteoric fall in his heart. He found that he could not get out of the palace. And in the present situation he did not have the mental strength to bear with what had happened. He became terribly agitated. His agitation knew no bounds. He found his predicament unbearable. The greatest cause of sorrow for him was that he had not been able to get dishes made out of human flesh. In that situation, there was no possibility of his getting human flesh. Now, he could not get such dishes in Ayodhya. He did not care for the Kingdom or for the throne. All that he wanted was human flesh !

In fact, sensual cravings can assume strange and terrible forms. The man who is attached to sensual pleasures slights noble conduct and ethical excellence. Sodas had become a slave to the sense of taste. In consequence, he had fallen very low morally and spiritually. Sodas who was once a high-born, a highly cultured prince who had been brought up by his noble mother and who ruled the vast kingdom of Ayodhya had now changed completely; had fallen to the depths of degeneration; had become the meanest of mortals....a cannibal, a devourer

of children, a monster who committed terrible enormities. That man instead of becoming a great man, a god, had become a cannibal, a devil. What a terrible moral and spiritual ruin ! But all that was the result of evil association, and evil ideas. He had become the very embodiment of evil addictions and diabolical habits. He had forgotten his noble birth and culture on account of his diabolical addiction. He had totally ignored his duties as the king of the country and had lost all power of seeing reason.

The coronation of prince Simharath took place with all grandeur and *eclat*. The commander withdrew the soldiers who stood guard around the palace. Sodas felt relieved to find that the soldiers had been withdrawn. He left the palace and went out of the city. He went far away from his people and his city. No one followed him. No one accompanied him and no one shed a single tear at his incontinent departure.

Sodas had to remain without food or water for three days. He could not relish any food except the dishes made out of human flesh. He went on foot. He walked a long distance thus. On the way, he could not secure any food. His cruel eyes prompted by his Satanic propensity were looking for human flesh. He was passing through a dense forest. All of a sudden, he saw a cottage in the forest. He felt a little relieved. For a moment, a ray of hope flashed and then disappeared. He was dead-tired. Yet seeing the cottage close by he summoned up some strength and proceeded towards the cottage. He heard a new-born child crying in the cottage. He felt extremely happy.

Sodas stood in the yard before the cottage still and silent. There was no one in the cottage. After sometime he placed a few paces forward. He tried, to get a hint of the presence of anyone in the cottage but there was no one inside. Only the new-born child was crying aloud. Walking slowly and silently, he entered the cottage. The child lying in a swing was crying. A few leaves lay scattered near the swing. Sodas could easily guess that the mother of the child had gone out on some errand. She had gone out leaving the door of the cottage open. So it was clear that she would come back soon. His tongue had begun

watering from the time he heard the cry of the child. He hurriedly went into the cottage; took up the child and came out at once. He ran away from there concealing the child, in his hands. But the child did not stop crying; therefore while running away he strangled the child and silenced it for ever and began to tear off and eat raw flesh. In consequence, his hands, his face, his clothes and his body were all covered with fresh blood. He appeared to be terrible like a ghost or a monster. He looked a veritable monster. His hunger was a little appeased. On the way, he drank water to his fill in a lake and then in order to take rest he lay beneath a tree. As soon as he lay down he slept and he began snoring loudly.

Sodas who was once the darling of the noble queen Simhika was now a homeless cannibal, a heartless monster. What a terrible mockery of fate! Such dramas get enacted on the stage of life. How can there be serenity and felicity in such meaningless samsar? It is a mirage. It pleases the mind for a moment, exercising a transient allurements. The Jiva who is plunged in illusory happiness adds fuel to his own funeral pyre; burns himself and becomes ashes. Sodas travelled northwards from there. When he was thus travelling deeply lost in his own obsession he saw a bullock-cart coming from the opposite direction. A man and woman were sitting in the bullock-cart with their two children. No sooner had he seen the children than his tongue began watering. He suddenly fell upon the bullock-cart. In the twinkling of an eye he killed the man and woman and ran away carrying the children. The children began screaming in fear. On hearing the screams of the children the peasants working in the fields came running and began chasing Sodas. Noticing that the peasants were coming to attack him Sodas dashed the children on the ground and killed them mercilessly. Then he pounced upon the peasants who were chasing him. They too had come prepared for a fight. They had with them sticks, swords, spades and other implements and weapons. Seeing the terrible face of Sodas the peasants were terrified but because they were in a group they did not lose heart. They surrounded Sodas on all sides.

The peasants began beating Sodas with sticks. But Sodas was not in anyway inferior to them. He was a man of extraordinary strength. He too attacked them and with one stroke he cut off the heads of two peasants. The peasants were infuriated and attacked him with all their might. In consequence, he became unconscious and fell down like an uprooted tree. As soon as he fell down the peasants attacked him together but very soon he recovered his consciousness and roaring like an injured lion he leaped and ran away. Blood was coming out profusely from his head. His body bore cuts and bruises. Yet he ran away into a dense forest. He was greatly tired. A kind of darkness covered his eyes. Gradually, his body grew weak. Again he fell down unconscious beneath a tree. How strange are the ways of karma! When he was the king of Ayodhya countless kings, and potentates and heads of provinces attended upon him humbly day and night. Countless beautiful damsels and dancers were yearning for his grace. Countless servants always stood around him to receive his orders and to carry them out. That very Sodas now lay unconscious and alone beneath a tree in a wild forest. No guards were there to safeguard him. There were no servant-maids to fan air to him. He lay there to fall a victim to kites and vultures; to wolves and jackals.... almost a dead man.... searching for an animal wandering here and there.... what a cruelty of misfortune!

XXXIX

THE UPLIFTMENT OF SODAS

“Ah ! dear friend ! How is it you are here ? How did you fall into this miserable condition ?” All of a sudden, an unknown person came near him and spoke to him. Seeing that Sodas was in a state of unconsciousness; he came near him; and when he recognized him he was overwhelmed with amazement and anguish; and sat near him. It was he who addressed Sodas thus, in anguish. But how could Sodas give any reply ? He lay absolutely unconscious. A little later, thinking of something, he rose to his feet. He fetched fresh water from a nearby lake in leaves and sprinkled it on his face. At the same time, he began fanning him with his upper-cloth. Within a few moments, Sodas recovered consciousness slowly; opened his eyes; and looked around. Then unexpectedly, his eyes fell upon the man who sat near him.

“Anand ! Where have you come from ?”

“Yes, dear friend ? But who brought you to this miserable condition ?”

“First, I want water. My tongue has become parched on account of thirst. Can we get water here ?”

“Have a little patience. I will fetch water, at once”. Saying this, Anand went running and at once brought fresh water in leaves. Placing the leafy bowl containing water in Sodas’ hands, Anand went into the forest and brought some medicinal herbs. He extracted the juice of those herbs; and smeared it to the cuts and injuries on Sodas’ body. Taking the help of Anand, he got up; and sat leaning against the trunk of the tree. Anand also

sat before Sodas. The faces of both were clouded with gloom, agitation and anguish.

“Anand ! First tell me your story”.

“Dear friend ! As soon as I came to know of the arrest and imprisonment of the cook, I thought first of my welfare and safety. You are not unaware of the harsh nature of the Chief Minister. Therefore, I ran away from Ayodhya in disguise. No city or village seemed safe for me to take shelter because no place is unknown to the spies of Ayodhya. In consequence, day and night, I kept wandering through wild and dense forests. Thus wandering, I happened to come here. I felt that this place was safe from all points of view. There is a fine lake at a short distance from here. Countless medicinal herbs are found in plenty here. Moreover, we can get plenty of edible things here. Even to-day, I came here searching for food”.

After having heard Anand's story, Sodas also narrated his story in full.

“Dear friend ! Now we shall abide here. I will render all service to you. You will not lack anything.” Anand said politely, trying to inspire courage and confidence in Sodas.

“Anand ! Don't you think that it is dangerous to reside in the same place ? Moreover, if we remain in the same place we may not get enough food. So, instead of staying in one place, is it not better to keep wandering from place to place ? Is there anything wrong in doing so ?”

“Dear friend ! We may secure our food from somewhere; but this place is safe and proper for our residence from every point of view. And now I have got the company of a mighty friend. Why should I fear anything when I have a heroic friend like you with me !”

Anand would not give up his insistence inspite of all that Sodas could say. So, he agreed to abide there. Then, the two friends went sauntering and reached the bank of the lake. Anand washed the bruised body of Sodas with the cool waters of the lake. He also washed the blood-stained clothes of Sodas; and then the friends proceeded towards a secret place.

The two cannibal friends had met again after a long time; and they found an opportunity to appease their ignoble craving for prohibited food. What a terrible effect of sinful karmas ! The two friends were immensely happy; and swayed with delight; and became absorbed in gratifying their monstrous craving for human flesh.

The friends stayed there for sometime. In course of time, Sodas began to yearn for a change of place. In consequence, the two friends went southwards. On the way, whenever they came upon a lonely child, they killed him and devoured his flesh.

As soon as they entered the boundary of the southern kingdoms, Anand stumbled; and fell down. Just at that moment, they heard the moaning of a jackal. Sodas, at once, stopped there. He said looking towards Anand :

“Anand ! At every step we are witnessing bad omens. The shadow of some impending calamity has been hovering over us. So, today, we shall stay here”.

“Dear friend ! Why should you care for omens ? Only cowards give importance to them. How can we get on if you entertain such fears ? Look here ! On this path, small foot-prints are visible. If we hurry on, there is no doubt that we will soon get the food that we desire”.

But Sodas did not approve of Anand's proposal. His body had become weak and withered. He did not have the enthusiasm to place even one step further. So, he said reluctantly, “Anand ! I will stay here. You go at once; search for food; and bring it”.

Anand proceeded hurriedly. That day, he was wearing a turban decked with colourful peacock's feathers; in his hands, he carried a bow and an arrow; over his back hung a large quiver full of arrows; he wore around his waist the skin of a tiger; and he wore wooden sandals. The son of the court-priest had become a forest-hunter; and was hurrying through the forest. He had lost his destination obsessed with his desire for

flesh. He had become completely oblivious of his surroundings. He was running concentrating all his attention on the small foot-prints, impelled by his desire to secure human flesh. He did not at all look around. On all sides, there was the dense forest with huge trees, high mountains and deep valleys. The path was stony and flinty and the land was uneven, rocky and barren, for miles around. A huge lion sat on a rock and was looking for prey. All of a sudden, its eyes fell upon Anand who was blindly running through the forest. At once, it roared in a terrible manner, leaped and stood before Anand staring at him. Anand was nonplussed by this unexpected event. The bow, and arrow fell off his shaking hands. He began to shake like a dry leaf. The lion's horrid claws tore off Anand's body; and he fell down.

Anand who set off in search of prey became a prey himself. He became a play-thing in the hands of fate. Sodas waited long for his friend; but how could he return? Taking rest there for a day, Sodas entered the territory of the southern kingdom. Suddenly, his right eye shook. He saw some women coming from the opposite direction.

The sparrows began chirping. The atmosphere was filled with a new consciousness on account of the melodious cries of birds.

Sodas did not entertain the desire of eating human flesh as he did every day. He kept walking straight ahead. He thus continued to travel till noon without taking rest. The sun-god was blazing bright over his head, playing with his own light. Just then, he noticed a lake full of cool and pellucid water nearby. A huge peepal tree stood on the bank of the lake. Sodas drank the cool water of the lake; and then, he lay beneath the peepal tree to take rest. Having rested for a while, he got up and began walking to and fro enjoying the fascinating sights around. Just then he saw something extraordinary.

A great muni sat immersed in meditation beneath the peepal tree and the wild animals of the forest were playing around him. The face of the muni was radiant and full of sublime ten-

derness. His body was emaciated and his clothes were soiled. For a few moments, Sodas stood still and silent fixing his eyes on the great muni and what a miracle ? Like a piece of iron attracted by a magnet he was attracted by the muni. Slowly he went near him. Noticing the arrival of a stranger the animals of the forest stood around the muni. The sudden commotion disturbed the muni's meditation. He completed his meditation and looked at Sodas with overflowing love and affection. Sodas said in a humble manner....

"Oh great muni ! The sight of your face has filled me with boundless serenity and felicity. Kindly teach me the secrets of dharma".

The great muni kept looking at him for a few moments. He with his probing eyes visualized a dormant and latent potentiality in his heart. Of course, outwardly he did not seem to be worthy of being taught spiritual doctrines but seers and sadhus do not determine the worth of a person on the basis of his external appearance. On the contrary, with their spiritual vision they visualize the innate spiritual potentialities of a person.

"Dear child ! Our first and foremost duty is to preach the secrets of dharma to those who desire spiritual knowledge".

"In that case kindly teach me the secrets of dharma, oh Gurudev !"

"All right, noble man, I will".

After that the great muni spread a cloth on the ground and sat upon it. Sodas sat near him with a bowed head. Cuckoos began singing on the branches of the peepal tree.

"You must treat other jivas as you treat yourself. This is dharma. You should not cause sorrow, agitation or violence to other jivas by word, thought or action".

"Oh lord, I have a doubt".

"Tell me what your doubt is. I will clear it. We practise the principles of dharma in order to attain peace and felicity. Is that not so ?"

“Yes”.

“If we get peace and felicity by killing other jivas can it not be deemed dharma?”

“Dear child ! A jiva can never attain real peace and felicity by causing violence to other jivas. Even if one gets some peace and felicity by that method they will be transient and illusory. But it is almost impossible to attain liberation from the karmas earned by committing such violence. Moreover, on account of those sinful karmas the jiva has to experience hellish torture and grief”.

The effects of sinful karmas are to be experienced in the next janma. In this janma we experience peace and felicity; do we not ?

“Never forget the great truth that the jiva has to experience the first fruits of sinful karmas in this life and even in the next life he has to experience the bitter fruits of sinful karmas. The jiva that commits violence has to experience in this life various kinds of agonies and physical, mental and inherited ailments. If you scrutinize your soul you will realize that the jiva who causes pain, sorrow and agitation to others can never attain happiness. Can a jiva who causes agitation and anguish to others, ever attain peace and felicity ? Those who try to attain happiness by means of violence will have to be prepared to experience inordinate hellish tortures and unbearable anguish.”

Sodas assimilated the meaning of every word uttered by the great muni. Suddenly his past life appeared before him like a vision. From the time he began eating meat, boundless agitation and anguish had entered his life which was once peaceful and happy. Of course, he experienced some pleasure in eating meat, but that was momentary whereas on account of the effect of those sinful actions he had to experience countless agonies. The people of Ayodhya began to despise him. He lost his throne and kingship. He had to run away from home. He had to become homeless and wander away from his country. He had to wander through dense and wild forests. Even common people beat him sometimes. He became separated from his family and

friends. He lost his status and prestige. But how long did the pleasure of meat-eating last? It gave pleasure only as long as it was in his mouth. He did not experience its sweetness after swallowing it.

His experiences showed that the Mahamuni's words were true and so he became greatly fascinated by his utterances. He became spell-bound and kept listening to the great muni.

"Noble man! Violence increases hostility. You will develop hostility against other jivas. In consequence, the man who commits violence will himself become a victim of violence".

"Gurudev! What you say is true! My own experience illustrates the truth of your words."

"Not only that; the hearts of those who commit violence become cruel, with the result that they do not hesitate to commit sins. They do not think that their actions are sinful; and they do not also think thus: "What will happen in my next life?" The name of the Paramatma is forgotten by them. When that is so, where is the question of their acting according to the commands of the Paramatma? Just as people keep off violent animals, they keep off violent men also. In consequence, a man of violence, has to keep wandering from door to door. In this manner, filled with despair the jiva has to keep wandering through the eighty four forms of life".

Hearing the sublime words of the Gurudev, Sodas was deeply moved. He got up and with abounding faith and devotion he fell at the feet of the great muni.

"Oh Lord, kindly elevate me and enlighten me....I am a terrible sinner. I am Sodas who flouted the noble cultural traditions that had been in existence from the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev; I brought disgrace upon the *Ikshvaku* line by my ignoble actions and I am the despicable mortal who was the king of Ayodhya once....I am now a cannibal....a frightful monster. I have committed terrible sins".

As he said this, his voice became choked with emotion and the tears flowed from his eyes.

“Sodas ! If you pursue the path of dharma and if you seek the refuge of dharma the burden of your sinful karmas will partly decline”.

“Oh Lord ! Give me refuge and elevate me”.

“So be it. But you must make a determination that in future you will not cause violence knowingly to any jiva. You must vow that you will not speak falsehood. You must vow to give up stealing anything. You must vow to practise the principle of non-attachment. You must also vow that you will not seek pleasure from the company of other women”.

“Oh Lord of compassion. I swear that I will carry out your commands”.

After that, Sodas formally received the vows from the great muni. He explained to Sodas the nature of God, spiritual head and Dharma. Of course, Queen Simhika had taught him all these things even while he was a boy. Yet, when the great muni taught him the doctrines again his past spiritual qualities which were dormant and latent in him became patent. He saluted the muni with great devotion and then experiencing the satisfaction of having attained a new life he went away from there.

“Oh, how strange human life is ! Sodas who was a cruel and despicable cannibal a little while ago became within the twinkling of an eye kind and tender-hearted. He became again a caretaker and protector of men. Fall and rise, descent and ascent, spiritual ruin, spiritual degeneration and spiritual regeneration ! As long as the jiva remains in the samsar these contradictions continue to exist”.

In the history of the ancestors of Shri Ram only the life of Sodas passed through such contradictory phases. In his life we see the depths of spiritual ruin. Of course the sublime line of Bhagwan Rishabhdev appears splendid when we see it against this background. Sodas rose from the depths of degeneration effecting a lasting transformation in his life. The river of his life began to flow on the sublime path of spiritual elevation.

Sodas set off from there. The great muni became enshrined in his heart. He realized the greatness of the dharma expounded by the muni. Sometimes he shed tears recollecting his state of degeneration. Sometimes he shed tears of repentance and sometimes he floated on the lofty waves of spiritual excellence and elevation. In his wanderings, he happened to reach the boundary of a city called Mahapur. There was a beautiful and fascinating garden outside the city. Sodas began taking rest beneath a mango tree in that garden. A few young men were sitting at a short distance from him. They were engaged in some conversation. Suddenly, Sodas' mind was drawn towards their conversation.

"Oh dear brother, the ministers have revealed their foolishness by throwing on an elephant, a dumb animal the responsibility of choosing the leader of a great kingdom".

"There is no rule that only human beings can take intelligent decisions in all matters. Ah! In many matters and in many situations an intelligent being like man fails to take the right decision. Though an elephant is a dumb animal its intelligence is well-known throughout the world." An elderly looking man said, interrupting the young man and expressing his opinion. But the young man was not satisfied with it. He again began to argue.

"Then, according to you there is no man in Mahapur who is more intelligent than an elephant".

"There may be many intelligent men but very few are impartial and impersonal like the elephant. Such impartial men are very rare".

"Do you mean that the elephant is impartial. I think that is what you mean. Is not an elephant partial to its master?"

"No, no, that is not the point. An elephant may be partial to his master but its master is no more. Now, it will choose a worthy master. Probably, you have not seen it. From the morning, the elephant has been going round in the city but till

now it has not sprinkled the holy water upon anyone. Is this not enough to prove its impartiality ?”

The subject of their conversation was an unpleasant event which had taken place unexpectedly in Mahapur. The king of Mahapur had died suddenly. He had no children. Therefore, in order to choose a new king the ministers had taken recourse to an ancient tradition, a time-honoured measure. Accordingly, they placed a gold vessel containing holy water on the trunk of the chief elephant and it was let loose in the city, to choose a king by pouring that holy water upon the man whom it considered worthy. At the same time, it was announced that any person upon whom the royal elephant poured the holy water would be installed upon the throne of Mahapur. So, from the morning the elephant had been going round the city. The ministers and the representatives of the people were following the elephant.

The elephant after performing one complete circumambulation around the city, slowly went out of the main gate of the city. Seeing that the elephant was coming towards the garden all those who were engaged in that conversation stood up and began moving towards the elephant so that it might notice them. Sodas remained where he was sitting. He did not make any movement. The elephant entered the garden. After having paused for a moment at the gate of the garden, it went hurriedly towards Sodas, Sodas was greatly astonished when he saw the elephant running towards him. Yet he remained in his place calmly. On approaching him, it trumpeted in tremendous joy, and the very next moment, it poured the water on Sodas, consecrating him. The cries of jubilation and victory uttered by the people reverberated in the skies. The city of Mahapur secured a new king.

After that, the ministers and the people came forth a few paces; saluted Sodas respectfully; and entreated him thus;

“Oh great man ! The royal elephant has poured holy water upon you; and has chosen you the new king of Mahapur. Therefore, Oh lord, kindly mount the elephant and hallow our city.”

For a few moments, Sodas experienced heavenly felicity and amazement. He closed his eyes; and offered a heartfelt salutation to the Paramatma : and said: "Oh Lord ! All this is the result of your boundless compassion." The ministers offered him a crown studded with gems; royal robes were presented to him in gold-plates. Sodas recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra*; and put on the royal dress and decorations. The Chief Minister with the assistance of the Court-Priest, decorated the king with the crown. Sodas mounted the royal elephant. The effect of inauspicious karmas had ended in his life. Again auspicious karmas were showing their effect. His royal splendour appeared again on his face. No one there knew that he was once actually the king of Ayodhya, and not an ordinary man.

Then, the king was taken in a procession with all grandeur and eclat. Sodas was at the head of the procession, seated on the royal elephant. The minister, the leaders and representatives of the people and the officials followed him in their chariots. At the main gate of the city, the new king was received with great honour. Holy grain was flung at him; and he was decked with *Kumkum*. Girls stood in the balconies and showered flowers upon him as he proceeded along the streets. The atmosphere reverberated with auspicious songs and sweet melodies. Everyone swayed with joy and jubilation. The people of the city were greatly delighted to see Sodas' charming face and features.

XL

THE UNIQUE TRAVELLER ON THE PATH OF RENUNCIATION

Soon, Sodas attained spiritual as well as materialistic elevation. No jiva is wicked for ever. In course of time, even such a person changes. He discards his ignoble propensities and acquires noble propensities. He rises from the depths of ruin and degeneration to the heights of regeneration. In the same manner, Sodas, the cannibal became the king of Mahapur. He organized the government and the administration ably; and implemented many plans to bring about development and progress in the country. He spent all his time in endeavouring to achieve the welfare and progress of the people. Yet he used to be agitated and sometimes, absent-minded. Every moment he used to think of the great Muni. The exhortations of the great Muni always remained fresh in his mind. He used to remember the noble and exalted lives led by his ancestors; and these memories left a deep impression on his mind, and heart. He desired to carry out severe atonement for his past sins. He always desired to make the people of Ayodhya know that their king would never again stain the noble traditions of the royal line of Bhagwan Rishabhdev.

After deep spiritual contemplation and much reflection, he sent a messenger to Ayodhya. The messenger carried a secret message to be conveyed to the king of Ayodhya. After travelling for some days, the messenger reached Ayodhya. He straight went to the palace. He gave a suggestion to the guard that he wanted to meet the king. The guard conveyed the message to King Simharath.

"Your excellency ! The messenger who has come from Mahapur seeks your permission to meet you".

"Bring him in !" King Simharath said a little surprised.

The messenger appeared before King Simharath, saluted him and then communicated to him the message he had brought from the king of Mahapur: "May the king be victorious. I have come from the King of Mahapur bearing a message from King Sodas to you".

"Dear brother, Mahapur is a friendly kingdom. The king of Mahapur has been our friend. The great hero Kirthidhaval is the king of Mahapur. Then who is this Sodas who has sent us the message ?"

"Your excellency ! Probably you do not know that King Kirthidhaval died an untimely death. Since the king had no children, the ministers decided that they should install upon the throne anyone whom the royal elephant chose by consecrating him with holy water. Accordingly, the royal elephant was sent out with a vessel of holy water. It poured the holy water on a traveller by name Sodas who possessed extraordinary heroism and who was radiant with many virtues. As a result of this, Sodas was crowned the king of Mahapur."

"We are extremely grieved to hear the news of the death of King Kirthidhaval but we wonder how the royal elephant chose Sodas who is a cannibal. Well ! An animal has consecrated an animal. Even this looks proper from one point of view !"

Simharath's jeering laughter shook the walls of the palace.

"Your excellency ! You will come to know later whether the animal chose an animal or a great hero. Our king's message is this: "You must at once accept the overlordship of king Sodas and you must become his subordinate king. This will conduce to the welfare of Ayodhya".

"Oh you mean fellow ! Stop your prattle. Do you realise where you are standing ? Do you dream that the king of

Ayodhya would accept the overlordship of that despicable cannibal? Since you are a messenger, we cannot kill you. According to political ethics, a messenger cannot be killed; otherwise...."

"You will know in the battle-field who is fit to be killed and who is not, oh king!"

"The messenger went away from the court. After he went away King Simharath fell into deep thoughtfulness. He was unable to believe that his father who was a cannibal was crowned king of Mahapur. How could such an impossible thing take place? Though he thought deeply about it, he could not solve the riddle of the coronation of Sodas.

The messenger went away from the court. After he went to Mahapur. He narrated to Sodas all that had happened in Ayodhya. Sodas had already guessed that such an event would take place. At once, he sent for the commander and ordered him to make preparations for a war. When the commander made enquiries he found out that the king was planning to invade Ayodhya. He was stupefied to hear this. He thought deeply about it for sometime.

"What are you thinking of, dear commander?"

"Your Highness! The kingdom of Ayodhya is not an ordinary one. It is a vast and mighty kingdom. The army of Ayodhya is unique and heroic. The Kings of Ayodhya have been mighty and heroic. In such a situation, invading Ayodhya..."

"Invading Ayodhya is a thoughtless venture. Is that what you mean? But you seem to have forgotten one vital truth. The man who lacks the spirit of adventure is not a *Kshatriya*. He is not worthy of being a king. Am I not a *Kshatriya*? Do I not possess the radiance of a true king? Please go and make arrangements for the invasion of Ayodhya. There is nothing to worry about in this. I will lead the armies and I will lead the campaign". Sodas said with a smiling face.

How could the commander know that Sodas was a heroic warrior of outstanding militaric prowess? How could he know that Sodas himself was once the king of Ayodhya? Within a short time, trumpets were blown from the towers of the palace of Mahapur. The sounds of battle-drums reverberated throughout the city. Within a few moments, the plains before the palace were filled with thousands of armed soldiers. The women of the city put the *Tilak* as a mark of victory on the foreheads of their brothers or husbands. The whole city of Ayodhya was floating on the waves of tremendous enthusiasm.

The news of the unexpected invasion of Ayodhya created a commotion in the minds of many kings. They were filled with various kinds of doubts and fears. Many felt that Sodas was making a thoughtless venture. Many thought that it showed his impatience. If some thought that Sodas was courting death and disaster by this step, some thought that it would surely bring about the ruin and destruction of Mahapur. Some however thought that it showed Sodas' incomparable heroism. The invasion of Ayodhya, a vast and mighty kingdom by the King of Mahapur, a petty kingdom, according to some indicated Sodas' incisive intelligence and far-sightedness but of course, nobody could prevail upon Sodas to give up his attempt. Those who tried to dissuade him from the attempt had to return unsuccessful. Sodas laughed at every suggestion and gave evasive answers.

Sodas set off on his campaign at an auspicious moment. The whole world shook with the noise of the conch-shells. When Sodas blew upon his conch-shell, the soldiers felt tremendously inspired. The whole atmosphere was filled with the trumpetings of the elephants and neighing of the horses. All were rushing forward with enthusiasm.

Taking a large army with him, Sodas marched towards Ayodhya. After camping at several places, he reached the boundaries of Ayodhya. Simharath also was ready to encounter his father. He was surrounded by thousands of soldiers, heroic potentates, friendly kings and warriors. The two armies camped opposite to each other and were impatiently waiting to begin fighting.

Sodas recited *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* and slept in his tent. It was midnight. There was silence everywhere. Now and then, the silence was disturbed by the loud cries of armed guards and watchmen. Just then, Sodas began ranging through the firmament of dreams.

All of a sudden, a Mahamuni slowly entered his tent. As soon as Sodas saw the muni, he stood up and saluted him bowing his head. The Mahamuni stood in his place. He raised his right hand and blessed him saying *Dharmlabh*. Then breaking the silence the Gurudev said in a serious tone :

“Dear child ! I know very well your secret motive for waging the war. Your innate desire is to defeat your son in the war; to make him the ruler of Mahapur and Ayodhya and then to seek my refuge. Your desire is to be initiated into the *Sadhudharma* and to render your life fruitful”.

But you have to prevent the terrible massacre of people that will take place in this war. Before dawn send your Chief Minister to the camp of Simharath with this message : “To attain our selfish ends causing the death of countless people is not proper. Instead of a war why should we not fight a duel ?” Simharath instead of scoffing at your message will gladly welcome your proposal. Your victory lies in this manoeuvre. Moreover, all the people of Ayodhya will bow to you and admire your decision and they will express their gratitude to you. This will remove the stain on your name”.

“What a sublime dream !” Suddenly, he opened his eyes and looked around but the muni was not to be seen anywhere. He sat up. He looked around his tent, but there he saw no one except the guards and the sentinels. For a few moments, he kept thinking and then spreading a white cloth on the ground, he sat upon it and became absorbed in scriptural studies and contemplations. In the beginning, he remembered Sri Arihant Bhagwan with devotion. Then he uttered the name of his revered Gurudev and became absorbed in reciting *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra*.

In the eastern horizon, the early rays of the sun shot out. The horizon appeared reddish. Birds began twittering on the branches of trees. Sodas called his guard. At once, the guard came into the tent and bowed to him.

“Bring the Chief Minister, at once”.

Within a short time the Chief Minister came into the tent, saluted the King and sat down.

“Dear Chief Minister! I want you to go to the camp of Simharath, the king of Ayodhya”.

“As commanded by the King”.

“You have to convey this message to him. “The king of Ayodhya and the king of Mahapur can fight a duel and settle the matter. What is the use of causing the death of all the soldiers? We both are descendants of Lord Rishabhdev. So it is not proper for us to cause the death of thousands of people to attain our objectives.” You have to convey this message to Simharath.”

“All right, I will go at once”.

“And you must take our chief commander also with you”.

“Where is the need for this, dear king? On account of the boundless grace of Bhagwan Jineshwar, I am absolutely fearless. I do not fear anything.”

You may go. The Paramatma will safeguard you.”

The Chief Minister went up to the door of the tent and then stopped for a while. Then he remembered and recited the *Namaskar Mahamantra* and set off towards the camp of Simharath. He straight went to the camp of the king of Ayodhya. The guard at the entrance stopped him and said :

“Who are you? Where do you want to go?”

“I am the Chief Minister of Mahapur and I want to meet the king of Ayodhya at once”. Hearing the words of the Chief

Minister, the guard was astonished. Seeing his unexpected arrival, he felt eager to know what might happen.

“Dear Sir, you please wait here a little. I will bring my chief”.

Within a short time, the guard returned with his Chief. The officer received the Chief Minister respectfully and led him to the tent of the king of Ayodhya. The guard who was standing at the entrance of the tent moved back. The Chief Minister entered the tent.

“Dear Chief Minister ! You are most welcome. Please come in”, said Simharath and requested him to be seated in a seat of state.

“What may be the purpose of your honoured visit to us ?” The Chief Minister of Ayodhya who was present in the tent asked him politely.

“Your excellency ! I have come to convey to you a message of the king Mahapur”.

The Chief Minister looked around. There was no one in the tent except the king and himself. Looking towards the king, the Chief Minister of Mahapur said;

“Oh king ! Our king desires that instead of a war which causes the massacre of countless people on both sides it is better if he and you fight a duel”.

“Then is the king of Mahapur terrified by the vast army of Ayodhya. Is he already vanquished ?” Simharath said sarcastically.

“No, that is not true. Would king Sodas fear any enemy ?

In fact, there is no one in this world who can vanquish him. He is capable of vanquishing the greatest heroes of the world. Yet his message is this, “We are both carrying on the lofty traditions set up by Bhagwan Rishabhdev. We are the flowers of his noble line. Therefore, it is not proper on our part to cause the death of countless others for the attainment of our

selfish objectives. So we two shall fight a duel and decide who should be the victor and who the vanquished. This is absolutely proper." The Chief Minister said in a serious tone communicating fully the message of the king.

The King of Ayodhya thought for sometime over the proposal and gave his silent consent. He gladly accepted Sodas' challenge. The Chief Minister of Mahapur saluted him and then went away taking leave of him.

Then a proclamation was made in both the camps accompanied with the sounds of conch-shells. "There will not be a war between the two armies. Instead of that the two kings Simharath and Sodas will fight a duel." This is the peculiar way in which the samsar moves. A conflict between the father and the son. The son preparing to fight against his father. Such people were also Shri Ram's ancestors. They were the descendants of the line of Bhagwan Rishabhdev. Call it the mockery of fate which confounds even the greatest men of world.

In consequence, the soldiers on both the sides discarded their weapons and became the silent spectators of the duel between the two kings. The two kings entered the battle-field seated in their chariots. Within the twinkling of an eye the two chariots stood face to face.

Then, Sodas blew upon his conch-shell and said in a loud and lofty voice.... "First you begin fighting."

Accordingly, Simharath took up his bow and arrow and shot an arrow aiming it at Sodas. The arrow went with a swishing noise and whizzed past his ears. In response to this, Sodas shot ten arrows at the same time. Simharath by releasing efficacious arrows broke Sodas' arrows into pieces and soon releasing five arrows wounded the horses of Sodas' chariot.

In consequence, Sodas became excited and angry. He released arrows and shot off into the air. Simharath's crown which had been studded with gems. At the same time speedily he drove his chariot very near the chariot of Simharath.

Simharath threw away his bow and arrows, took up his mace and attacked Sodas with it. They began to fight with maces. The sparks flying from their maces spread like electric flashes over the battle-field. As if there was a universal explosion, on account of the tremendous noise of their fighting, the three worlds began to shake and shudder.

Sodas skilfully attacked Simharath's hand with the result that Simharath's mace fell down. When he bent down to take up his mace Sodas pushed him down and pressed his chest with his foot, made him lick the dust and then taking out his spear he sat upon his chest.

The cries of victory issued by the armies of Mahapur reverberated in the sky. Sodas' flag of victory was hoisted over Simharath's chariot. The Ministers of Ayodhya humbly saluted Sodas. Sodas descended from his chariot. He came forward a few steps; lifted up Simharath who was lying on the ground and embraced him affectionately.

"Dear child! I do not desire your kingdom. On the contrary, I want to hand over my kingdom to you. I did not hand over the kingdom of Ayodhya to you. The ministers gave it to you but today I am willingly handing over to you both the kingdoms of Ayodhya and Mahapur."

"Revered father. Kindly forgive me". Simharath held the feet of Sodas and said in a voice choked with emotion. When the ministers and the armies of Mahapur came to know that Sodas was formerly king of Ayodhya they were greatly overwhelmed with delight. They offered him the highest veneration. Sodas said addressing them....

"Henceforth, Simharath will be your king. You shall carry out his commands as you have been carrying out my commands so far".

"But you"

"I.... I do not desire to be king anymore. I do not desire to be the master. I want to be a servant. I want to be the servant of the Jin and I will try to make atonement for my sins".

"Oh you ocean of compassion ! Without you Ayodhya will be helpless and weak".

"It is wrong to think so. As long as Ayodhya follows the lofty traditions of self-sacrifice which have been in existence from the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev it will be strong, capable and famous, and regarding myself I wish to say that I want to follow the footsteps of those great men who in the past renounced everything and carried out endeavours to attain spiritual welfare. Indeed those great men were blessed. Though living in the samsar they were men of sublime character whereas I am a sinner a despicable creature. I have committed terrible sins. In fact, by my wicked actions I have brought disgrace to the noble woman, Simhika and I have stained the illustrious name of my family".

The Ministers of both the kingdoms, the representatives of people and all those who were present there shed tears of joy. The atmosphere besides being serious also was imbued with the darkness of sadness.

"Oh Lord ! Kindly pardon our offences. We did a great injustice to you. We treated you improperly and our offences are unpardonable. Until you forgive us we cannot have peace of mind". The Chief Minister of Ayodhya said in a voice shaken with grief.

"Dear Chief Minister ! You did not do anything improper. What the ministers of Ayodhya did at that time was absolutely right and proper. Dethroning and deposing a devilish cannibal was absolutely right and just".

"Then kindly be so graceful as to come to Ayodhya", the Chief Minister repeated his entreaty.

"I do not need Ayodhya now. I am eager to surrender myself at the holy feet of my Gurudev. I desire to seek refuge at the holy feet of the Gurudev who bestowed upon me a new life; who impelled a new consciousness to run through my veins; who inspired me to follow the path of righteousness; who changed me from a cannibal to a human being, from a monster to a

responsible king and who elevated me from the level of mortality to the level of sublimity. The Gurudev is calling me. Therefore, I cannot delay even for a moment. Now, I seek the refuge of the Arihant."

Sodas decided to renounce his worldly life on the battle-field itself and in consequence he discarded all his valuable dress and decorations and put on the dress of a sadhu. The whole city of Ayodhya was moved to hear about the transformation that had taken place in King Sodas. Thousands of men, women, and children thronged the battle-field. Everyone bowed to the holy feet of the saintly king.

In this manner, the story of the illustrious ancestors of Shri Ramachandra becomes complete. This story illustrates the highest objective of human beings namely the victory of renunciation over attachment. The highest aim of human beings who are steeped in attachments and infatuations must be to renounce everything. Living a life of attachment until the last breath, is totally contrary to the lofty cultural traditions of Bhagwan Rishabhdev. This truth is illustrated here.

XLI

DASARATH

The history of Shri Ramachandra's ancestors is as illustrious and glorious as the history of Shri Ramachandra himself. Countless mighty heroes such as Simharath, Brahmarath, Chaturmukh, Hemarath, Shatarath, Udarapruthu, Varistha, Indrarath, Adityarath, Virasen, Pratimanyu, Pratibandhu, Ravi-manyu, Hiranyakashyap, Punjasthal, Kankusthal, Raghu sat on the throne of Ayodhya and ruled over the kingdom ably, stably and nobly; but all these kings, in the latter part of their lives renounced their Kingdom, Royal throne, and their prosperity and splendour and pursued the path of detachment; shown by Bhagwan Rishabhdev; observed the principles of the *Charitra-dharma*; and became travellers on the path of salvation and many of them proceeded on the path that leads to the heavenly world.

Two sons were born to Anaranya, the king of Ayodhya and his Queen-consort, Prithvidevi. One was named Anantrath and the other, Dasarath.

Sahasrakiran, the king of Mahishmathinagar and Anaranya were bosom friends. They were bound by the bondage of deep friendship. They had decided that they should live worldly life together and if they renounced the worldly life, they should do so at the same time. Such was their determination; and they were determined not to be separated from each other throughout their lives either as householders or as mendicants.

After being disgracefully defeated by Lankesh Ravan on the Bank of Rewa, Sahasrakiran surrendered his life at the holy feet of his father who was a great Muni; and at the same time,

following his friend's example, Anaranya renounced his incomparable wealth and royal splendour and embraced the *Sadhudharma*. His son, Ananthrath also embraced the *Sadhudharma* unable to bear with the separation from his father. In consequence, even at a very young age, Dasarath had to take upon his shoulders the responsibility of ruling over the kingdom.

But Dasarath the young king possessed sublime *Punya* or merit. As he continued to grow, his might and heroism also increased. As the beauty and splendour of his form developed, his virtues also increased. His mother, Prithvidevi devoted all her time and energies to help her son, Dasarath attain an all-round development.

Dasarath always observed the principles of the Dharma expounded by Bhagwan Rishabhdev. He gave protection to jivas; and rendered help and charity to the helpless and the destitute; he acquired absolute firmness in respect of nobility; of character and conduct and he also attained an absolute mastery over the various *Shastras* and militaric arts. Above all, he became immensely and widely popular among his people.

Queen Prithvidevi celebrated the marriage of her son, Dasarath with Aparajitha, the princess of Dabrasthالنagar. Grand celebrations and jubilations were organized. Religious celebrations were organized in the temples. The city of Ayodhya shone like a newly decorated bride.

In course of time, the fame of Dasarath spread far and wide, It spread to other kingdoms too. The king of Kamalpur sent a message that he was desirous of giving his daughter, Sumitra to Dasarath in marriage. Queen Prithvi happily accepted the offer; celebrated the marriage of Sumitra with Dasarath and received her as her daughter-in-law. Dasarath married a third wife by name Suprabha. Dasarath became absorbed in sensual pleasures with his newly married wives and lived like Indra, the king of Gods. But in his enjoyment of sensual pleasures, he did not neglect his spiritual endeavours and his duties as the king of the country. Every day he went to the temple of

Bhagwan Rishabhdev and became absorbed in rendering devotion to the Lord.

An incident happened one day !

King Dasarath was seated on his throne in his court. The court was full of ministers, subordinate officials, courtiers and state officials. The activities for the day, in the court, had begun. Unexpectedly, the divine sage Narad came to the court of Dasarath. Dasarath descended from his throne and received the divine sage with due honour. All those who were present in the court bowed to the divine sage with heartfelt veneration.

"Divine sage ! We extend a hearty welcome to you !" King Dasarath said folding his hands and moving towards the divine sage, a few paces.

"I hope the King of Ayodhya is well !" The divine sage made a polite enquiry and expressed his wishes for his welfare.

"Kindly be seated. Oh divine sage ! You have come after a long time and you have rendered Ayodhya holy by visiting us. Be so gracious as to occupy this golden throne and to bestow upon us your benedictions. Dasarath entreated the divine sage to be seated near him. Accordingly, the divine sage Narad sat upon a golden throne and breathed a long sigh.

"You Lord of compassion ! I think you have travelled a long distance and that you are greatly tired".

"Yes, Oh King ! You are right, I had to visit you after travelling a long distance. There is a reason for this".

"Kindly let me know what service I may render to you," Dasarath said in a polite manner showing the highest regard for Narad. For a moment, Narad kept his eyes closed. He sat silent and still for a while. It was as though he was trying to take rest, having been tired of travelling a long distance. Then, he said in a voice which was resonant like the thunder.

"Oh king ! I happened to go to Purvavideh".

"What was the purpose of your going there, my dear sir?"

"I went there to be present at the ceremony of the *Deeksha* of Bhagwan Simandar Swami, and thus to render my life blessed. I was greatly thrilled and delighted to witness the *Deeksha* ceremony which had been organised by the greatest gods and men of outstanding spiritual excellence. I was overwhelmed with delight and elation. From there, I went to the peaks of the *Meru* Mountain. I rendered devotion to the permanent Jin images on the *Meru* peaks and from there I went to Lanka".

"What was the purpose of your unexpected visit to Lanka?" said Dasarath.

"Oh king! I went there to see personally the city of Lanka ruled over by the *Prathivasudev* Ravana, and to learn the details of the way in which he was carrying out his unexampled administration. After going to Lanka, first I visited the temple of Lord Shanthinath and rendered my heartfelt devotion to the Lord and then I went to the magnificent court of Ravan. I went there with a certain purpose but what I saw there was different. I learnt there something totally contrary to what I had expected to learn. I heard such a thing there that I had to retreat from there and come to you...."

"Oh divine sage! What did you hear at Lanka?" Dasarath became eager to know what had happened at Lanka.

"A certain extraordinarily intelligent Soothsayer had come to the court of Ravan from a great distance. The King of Lanka received him with due honour. With the purpose of testing the depth of his knowledge and brilliance, Ravan asked him a recondite question: "Oh you might scholar! The Jiva that keeps wandering in Samsar takes birth and dies. The heavenly beings are said to be immortal; but their immortality is apparent. Even they have to experience death".

"What you say is true, Oh king!" said the Soothsayer.

"I am not afraid of death. If death comes to me I will receive it with a smiling face. Yet, I desire to know whether

I am going to die in a natural manner or whether I will be killed by somebody”.

Hearing the recondite question of Ravan, the Soothsayer sat silent for a while. Then, he closed his eyes; and fell into deep thoughtfulness. All were eager to know what the great scholar might say. All desired to know the answer to the question of the King of Lanka. There was silence everywhere. Sometime later, the Soothsayer opened his eyes. He looked around intently; glanced at Ravan and then sat still.

“Oh great scholar ! Tell us clearly what you want to say. Great scholars never make any ambiguous statements; nor do they utter untruths.”

“Oh great king ! You are not going to die a natural death,” the Soothsayer said clearly.

“Then, how am I going to die ?”

“Dear king ! What is the use of knowing it ?”

“So that I may take some precautions”.

“Whatever precautions you may take what has been decreed to take place cannot be altered”.

“A valiant man does not yield to the decrees of fate; on the contrary, fate has to yield to a man of heroism,” Ravan spoke with the pride, natural to him.

“Oh king ! If you are determined to know, I will tell you. Listen. You will die on account of a woman-another man’s wife”. Silence prevailed in the entire court when the Soothsayer made this prophecy. All were greatly agitated. The ministers looked at one another greatly shocked and amazed. The state officials and others who had gathered there were astonished to hear this.”

“Oh Dasarath ! After hearing the prophecy of the Soothsayer, I too felt eager to know what he would say next”.

“Oh you great scholar ! What you have said is absolutely true. Once a great man possessing extra-sensory perception

told me the same thing. Then I took a vow not even to touch a woman against her wishes". Ravan said in a firm voice.

"You may not touch another woman but fate's decree is that your death must take place on account of a woman, another man's wife." The Soothsayer said firmly. Then Ravan sought a further clarification.

"Dear sir ! Who is that woman ? Who is going to kill me ?"

"Oh king ! Her name is Janaki and you will be killed by King Dasarath's Son. This is the decree of fate and this decree cannot be altered by any power in this universe; nor can any power reduce its severity".

"But who is Janaki?"

"Janaki will be born as the daughter of Janaka, the King of Mithila".

"How many sons has Dasarath ?"

"Now, Dasarath has no sons but in future, he will beget sons".

"Oh ! Dasarath ! On hearing the prophecy of the Soothsayer Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravan became furious. His blood began to boil with anger. Suddenly, he stood up. Taking out his sword he said waving it ferociously....

"Stop all this nonsense ! It is absolutely foolish and stupid to say that one who is not yet born is going to kill Ravan, the heroic King of Lanka. This is absolutely absurd. Ravan the valiant will not be killed thus. Instead of it, this sword of mine shall cut off the heads of Janaka and Dasarath".

"Hearing the furious words of Vibhishan, Ravan, the King of Lanka became greatly elated but I could not bear to hear it. At once, addressing Vibhishan, I said".

"Oh Vibhishan ! The endeavour to alter the future can never succeed. We do not know what is concealed in the womb of future."

Hearing my words Vibhishan suddenly began to glare at me. Restraining himself a little, bowing to me, he said.

“Oh divine sage ! What you say may be true but I will surely falsify the prophecy of this Soothsayer. I am going to kill both Dasarath and Janaka. If I kill them both, there will not be any danger. If I kill them, Janaki will not be born and Dasarath will not have sons. When the roots are cut off how can there be branches ?”

Ravan approved of Vibhishan's decision and said, “Vibhishan! You have spoken aright. When the roots are cut off there can be no branches”.

Vibhishan became absorbed in making preparations to carry out his determination. He was planning to invade Ayodhya and Mithila. Soon Ravan dismissed the court for the day. All went back to their homes. I too came out slowly. Countless conflicting thoughts arose in my mind, “Dasarath is a noble king. My first duty is to save his life. Therefore, I should warn Dasarath against this impending calamity and tell him to get away to some place even before Vibhishan arrives. Thinking thus, I came here from Lanka directly without wasting a moment”.

Narad completed his narration and heaved a heavy and, long sigh. Dasarath and his minister began to discuss this matter seriously. Narad was silent for a while and then said interrupting their discussion :

“Now, I have to visit Janaka at once. It is absolutely necessary that I should save him also from this calamity”.

Dasarath rendered his heartfelt devotion and service to Narad and bade him farewell. On account of his visit, a political storm arose in Ayodhya. It filled the king of Avodha and ministers with worry. All were in great agitation. Everyone was thinking of warding off the impending calamity. The radiant face of Dasarath became serious and dark. A little later turning towards his Chief Minister, Dasarath said. “Have you been able to think of any solution to this problem ?”

"I am thinking of it".

"But where is the need for worrying over this matter. Let Vibhishan come. The countless able warriors and heroic potentates of Ayodhya will extend a proper welcome to him," said the supreme commander of the forces of Ayodhya putting forth a few steps in a heroic manner.

"Dear commander! You have spoken the truth. Our warriors trained and led by you are indeed formidable and invincible. Yet...."

"What is your doubt?"

"If a war takes place, countless jivas will die. We should not also forget the truth that Ravan rules over half the country of Bharath. His armies and his militaric prowess are tremendous. His ability is incomparable". The Chief Minister said explaining the situation.

"Then, do you suggest that we should bow our heads to our enemy or seek refuge at his feet?"

"That is not what I suggest".

"Then, let us know clearly what your suggestion is?"

"We should make such a plan that you will not have to seek his refuge and that there will not take place the death of countless people in a war. We should make such a plan!" said the Chief Minister revealing his shrewdness.

"What the Chief Minister has said is absolutely right. We should not forget this vital truth that Vibhishan is not coming here with the ambition of acquiring territory. His purpose is to kill me". Dasarath said endorsing the opinion of the Chief Minister. Finally, leaving the responsibility of solving the problem to the Chief Minister, Dasarath dismissed his court for the day.

King Dasarath and the Chief Minister went into the counsel-chamber to discuss the matter, in detail. A chosen guard

was stationed at the door to prevent anyone from entering the chamber. When Dasarath had taken his seat, the Chief Minister said;

“Oh King! My plan is that we should ensnare Vibhishan in a confounding labyrinth.”

“How is that?”

“This is my plan. This very night, you must get away from Ayodhya in disguise, unknown to anyone. You must go far away from Ayodhya”.

“But when Vibhishan does not find me here, he will hunt for me in the three worlds.”

“But the question of his searching for you will not arise. We will plan it in such a way that he will kill an artificial Dasarath and will go away without making any mess.”

“Artificial Dasarath! What exactly do you mean? Please explain your plan clearly. I am unable to understand your plan”.

“Dear King! In your absence, we will get a beautiful image made. It will be like you and it will be made of a special kind of clay. It will be filled with lac. It will be laid on your bed in your sleeping chamber. It will be covered with sheets; only the face will be visible. Lights in the chamber will be dimmed, so that he may not see things clearly. This is an excellent plan. It will surely save your life.”

“Yes, the plan is excellent!”

“Thus, we can overcome the danger! No one should come to know of the plan. It should not reach the ears of a third person. No one in the palace should come to know of it.”

“It shall be so. You need not worry about it”.

“Another point, dear King!”

“Yes, what is it?”

"For some time, you should not return to Ayodhya because even after Vibhishan goes away, his spies will stay here. Therefore, until you get my message, you should remain incognito."

"All right, I shall do so".

"That's all. I will take care of the rest".

Dasarath was immensely pleased with the Chief Minister's political sagacity. He praised the Chief Minister's incisive intelligence. Then, the Chief Minister took leave of him; and proceeded home. Just when he had gone upto the door, Dasarath called him; and said :

"What will happen to King Janak ? We have to think of him also."

"Dear King ! I have thought of that point also. It is certainly a matter to be thought of". And the two began to think about it deeply. After a few moments, Dasarath asked him if he had been able to find any solution to that problem.

"Dear Chief Minister ! I will straight go to Mithila. I will explain to him our plan and ask him to adopt the same plan. Then we two shall go away; and live incognito".

Dasarath completed what he wanted to say and looked worriedly towards the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister approved of the King's plan; but he suggested to the king that he should leave the city only after dark.

Dasarath went into the palace. He decided to take rest for a while. He sat reclining on his arm-chair waiting for the evening. The Chief Minister gave instructions to the Court-sculptor to make an image of Dasarath as soon as possible.

The sun set in the west. The goddess of the evening gracefully made her appearance. The sky grew red. Cool breezes began to play over the world. The stars began to twinkle in the sky. Imperceptibly evening gave way to the night. Dasarath

was waiting for this opportunity. He got up; and began to put on a disguise. When the guards were getting ready to close the gates of the city; there appeared a Yogi, at the main gate unexpectedly. He was riding a horse and was in a hurry to go out of the city.

“Get out soon ! We are going to close the main-gate.” The guard said in a thundering voice, showing his power freely. The Yogi stopped a little, and then, as if he had not heard the guard’s words, rode off hurriedly.

The horse went galloping towards Mithila. As the night advanced, the rider went nearer and nearer Mithila; and the Yogi approached his destination. The Yogi was hefty and his face was radiant. His active eyes began looking round. The horse was galloping. After having travelled throughout the night, he entered the territory of Mithila by the morning. It did not take much time for him to reach the outskirts of the city. The gate of Mithila was closed. He wondered what he should do. Thinking about the situation for a while, he knocked on the gate repeatedly;

“Who is it ?” The gate will not be opened yet. Whoever you may be, wait a little outside.” Someone said in an indifferent tone, from outside.

“Open the gate at once. I have some urgent work.” The yogi said aloud revealing his impatience.

“Who are you ? Whence have you come ? Whom do you want to meet ? The gate will be opened only a little while later. It is not yet time to open the gate”.

“Hurry up. I have no time”.

Sometime later, one door of the gate was opened. A guard came out of the gate. It was still dark. He carried a light in his hand. He raised the wick a little; and tried to see the stranger. The Yogi went near the door; and said,

“I am a Yogi coming from another kingdom. I want to meet king Janaka of Mithila. The purpose of my meeting is very

important and secret. Please take me to him at once." The Yogi spoke rather authoritatively. The guard observed him carefully. He felt convinced of the genuineness of his words. At once, he opened the gate. Holding the reins of the horse, the Yogi entered the city on foot. The next moment, the gate was closed.

The Yogi entered the palace led by the gate-keeper. The guard at the palace asked him :

"Who are you ?"

"I am the caretaker of the fort," said the gate-keeper who had led the Yogi there. The guard came near him. The caretaker whispered something into his ears. For sometime, the two had a little discussion. Then, the guard glanced at the Yogi from head to foot with a searching eye; and said;

"May I know who you are ?"

The Yogi took out a signet-ring from his waist-belt; and placing it in his hand, he said; "You must convey this to King Janak at once".

The guard took the ring; and hurriedly went into the palace. He called the guard who was watching at the door of the king's bed-room; and said;

"The king is awake. You can meet him."

The guard entered the chamber; saluted the king; and said.

"May the king be victorious !"

"What's the matter ?" Janak asked him, a little surprised.

"A certain Yogi desires to meet you. He has given this signet-ring to be conveyed to you." The caretaker of the fort moved a few paces forward and respectfully placed the ring in the king's hands. King Janak saw the ring in the hazy light; and at once, he stood up :

"Where is that Yogiraj?"

"He is at the door of the palace".

King Janak at once went out hurriedly; and embraced the Yogi who was standing at the door. He could not contain his joy at meeting him. The caretaker of the fort and the other guards were greatly amazed. Taking the Yogi with him, Janak went into his chamber.

"Oh king! If we delay, we will have to face a terrible calamity which is hovering over us. Whatever you have to do, complete it at once. Staying here even for moment is dangerous". Dasarath who was in the guise of a Yogi, said occupying a seat studded with gems.

"But dear king of Ayodhya! When I saw you, I felt greatly eager to know why you had put on this disguise."

"Your curiosity will be gratified if you also put on this disguise". Dasarath said to Janak smiling.

Then, the two friends held a secret discussion.

"Dear King! Did Narad visit you".

"Yes, he did".

"You heard what he said, I think?"

"Yes".

"What have you thought of it?"

"Let us encounter Vibhishan."

"Have you thought of the consequence of such an encounter?"

"Your meaning?"

"The massacre of countless innocent beings and added to it, the disgrace of defeat. Probably you do not know that, Ravan, the King of Lanka is a *Prativasudev*. He is invincible

as a hero and warrior. He is also equally deceptive. His ability and military skill are indeed unique and incomparable. He is a hero of tremendous potentialities. Therefore, we should use not strength but cleverness to avoid the danger."

King Janak was silent, thinking something deeply for some time.

"Dear King! This is not a time for thinking. We have to carry out our plan at once. You must do what I do." Dasarath said in a friendly tone.

"What are we to do?"

"I will tell you presently what we have to do. Please send for the Chief Minister."

King Janak rang the bell.

At once, a body-guard came in; and bowed to the king. The King ordered him to bring the Chief Minister, at once. Bowing to the king, the guard went out. Meanwhile, Dasarath explained everything to him; and proposed that they should leave the city in disguise before it is morning; and that they should live incognito.

The Chief Minister entered the chamber; and saluted the king.

"Dear Chief Minister! Salute this Yogi also", Janak said with a smile, pointing towards Dasarath.

The Chief Minister closely observed the Yogi; and at once recognized him. With a smile on his face, he saluted Dasarath. Dasarath requested King Janak to explain everything to the Chief Minister.

"You kindly explain it to him".

Then Dasarath narrated to the Chief Minister the entire story; and he also explained his plan to him. The shrewd Chief Minister liked very much the plan of Dasarath. Hence, he heartily approved of it; and endorsed it.

“Please hurry up. At once, get the dress of a Yogi”.

“I will get it immediately”.

At once, the Chief Minister arranged to get the dress of a Yogi. King Janak put on the dress of a Yogi. They looked at each other and smiled; and at once set off on horseback.

At the entrance to the palace, two horses stood ready. The two Yogis sat on horses. They offered a heartfelt prayer to Bhagwan Rishabhdev and set off on their horses, which ran galloping.

XLII

KAIKAYI'S SWAYAMVAR

"Vibhishan ! It will be good if Khar and Dushan accompany you on your campaign."

"No. I will go alone. I can manage it myself. I do not need anyone's help or assistance".

"Oh dear brother, you have to travel a long distance".

"I will travel even upto heaven if necessary".

"Your heroism is really commendable".

Wearing a gold crown studded with gems; blazing gold earrings decked with precious stones; an impenetrable armour, a green silk cloth at his waist with a dagger beneath it; a sword hanging from his waist, a trident in his hand and wooden sandals, Vibhishan looked a formidable warrior. Vibhishan getting ready for war, was about to set off towards Ayodhya. He had come to Ravan, his elder brother and king of Lanka to obtain his permission and benediction. Ravan advised him to take with him able warriors like Khar and Dushan; but the valiant Vibhishan did not think it necessary to take them with him.

Vibhishan set off through the sky cutting through the air at a tremendous speed. Flying over several kingdoms, by midnight, he reached the Kingdom of Ayodhya. He saw the sky-high fort of Ayodhya; and felt greatly impressed by its unexampled beauty. He saw a number of guards and sentinels watching at the towers and turrets and found that Ayodhya was being ably administered and safeguarded.

From there, he went straight to the centre of the city of Ayodhya and proceeded towards the palace. He saw able-bodied and armed guards watching at the gate of the palace, with great vigilance; and walking to and fro. For a moment, he thought, "Why should I not challenge the guards and make them know that I have come." Just then the voice of his conscience said, "Hurry causes worry. It is not yet time for an open challenge. First achieve the purpose with which you have come. Then you can show your mettle to the soldiers and sentinels and teach them a lesson".

By virtue of his magical and supernatural powers, he became invisible; and entered the palace; and went straight to the door of Dasarath's bed-room. He killed the guards at the door with his sharp-pronged trident; and went in.

The lights were glowing dim, in the sleeping chamber of Dasarath. In the dim light, he saw Dasarath sleeping on his bed. At once, his anger flared up. He took out his sword; and cut off the head of Dasarath. The screams and cries of the wounded guards created a commotion in the palace. A storm arose among the guards of the palace. The peace in the palace was marred when the soldiers began running hither and thither. Maids and attendants gathered together in large numbers. When the news reached the harem, Aparajita and the other queens began lamenting loudly. They all gathered in the sleeping chamber. The Chief Minister and the other ministers also came. The Chief Minister displaying feigned anger said aloud;

"Dear Commander ! Chase the wicked assassin. Do not allow him to run away. He must be punished severely for this enormity he has committed."

The commander took a large number of soldiers and proceeded in the direction in which Vibhishan had gone. A large number of subordinate kings and able warriors set off with the determination of capturing Vibhishan. Vibhishan was eager to display his mettle. He was eagerly waiting outside for the commander and the soldiers of Ayodhya. He shouted arrogantly when he saw the commander. His mocking cries and derisive

laughter began to reverberate everywhere. The soldiers of Ayodhya risking their lives began to shoot arrows at him. Vibhishan also shot powerful arrows and broke their arrows to smithereens and waving his blazing trident with war-cries that cracked the skies he pounced upon the potentates and warriors. He slew many soldiers; and began proceeding towards the main gate of the palace. Within the twinkling of an eye, the soldiers of Ayodhya surrounded him on all sides, Vibhishan thought. "My objective has been achieved. Furore and lamentations have arisen throughout Ayodhya. I have already shown my mettle. Now, what is the use of my fighting?". Thinking thus, he by virtue of his supernatural power, rose to the sky; and went away from Ayodhya.

The Chief Minister stood outside the sleeping-chamber. Nobody was allowed to go in. He consoled the members of the royal family and the others who were bemoaning their bereavement; and ordered the performance of the funeral rites.

When the next morning, the people of Ayodhya came to know that King Dasarath had been assassinated by Vibhishan, the younger brother of the King of Lanka, they were plunged in grief and indignation. They felt deeply grieved by the calamity and gathered in groups at the main gate of the palace. Within a short time all the people of Ayodhya gathered there. Clouds of sorrow covered the whole kingdom. The Chief Minister took great care to see that no one could know that the entire thing was a drama; that the real king Dasarath had not been killed and that only his clay-image had been cut by Vibhishan.

The great men who possess political shrewdness and wisdom know very well how to keep certain political matters a secret and how to prevent it from reaching the ears of the common people.

Vibhishan gave up the plan of going to Mithila. He thought. "Dasarath has been killed and how can Ram be born to Dasarath who is no more? When Ram is not there why should we fear Janaki?" Vibhishan thinking thus and giving up all his worries proceeded to Lanka.

Dasarath and Janak who together set off from Mithila began travelling towards the northern kingdoms. They went from village to village, from city to city; saw many things, had various experiences and then kept proceeding towards their destination. When on their way, if they found any Jin temple they worshipped the Jin with devotion; mingled with sadhus and munis and heard their spiritual discourses. Their devotion for Bhagwan Rishabhdev inspired in them courage and composure. Sometimes, they took rest in some way-side choultries and then they spent some nights sleeping among trees and bushes and creepers in forest areas. Travelling thus a long distance they at last reached a city by name Kautukmangal. The city was magnificent and radiant. It, at once, captivated the hearts of the beholders. As soon as they entered the city they heard that King Shubhamati was renowned throughout the area and that he always respected virtues. They also came to know that within a short time King Shubhamati was arranging a *Swayamvar* to enable his beautiful daughter princess Kaikayi to choose a bridegroom. Dasarath and Janak decided to remain in the city of Kautukmangal until the time of Kaikayi's *Swayamvar*.

Every day, regularly they went into the city to see its artistic and architectural rarities and curiosities. The people of the city were greatly impressed with the appearance of the two yogis who possessed an extraordinary radiance. They found out the day on which Kaikayi's *Swayamvar* would be held and the various kings and princes who would attend the *swayamvar*. They also heard from the people of the city the abilities, the affluence and influence and intelligence of the various kings and princes who would come to attend the *swayamvar*.

The two yogis put up in a temple of Lord Shiva situated on the bank of a river far away from the city. Gradually, the people of the city began visiting the temple. The yogis welcomed those visitors from the city and found out from them cleverly, as if incidentally many necessary details about King Shubhamati, princess Kaikayi and the city of Kautukmangal.

As the day of the *swayamvar* approached about thirty kings and a number of princes arrived at Kautukmangal. King Shubhamati had made excellent arrangements for the stay of the visitors who came to attend the *swayamvar*. It was night. Cool breezes were blowing over the city. Peace reigned supreme everywhere. Some birds in the trees kept fluttering their wings.

The two yogis sat in the temple of Lord Shiva conversing together. Just then, suddenly four or five devotees came to the temple from the city. They saluted the yogis and sat near them.

"I think everything is going on well in the city. Has anything new happened?"

"Gurudev ! Several kings, princes and potentates have come from other countries. The whole city is swelling with enthusiasm and joy". One of the visitors said with irrepressible enthusiasm.

"Has any special guest arrived today?"

"Yes, Gurudev ! Emperor Harivahan of the northern kingdom who is renowned for his valour came today. Our king received him with great pomp and grandeur. What a splendid atmosphere prevailed at the time of the reception ! Oh ! It is impossible to describe it. I do not find words to describe the splendour of the reception. We are coming from there. It is as if Kautukmangal has assumed a new form".

Dasarath glanced towards Janak and was silent.

"Gurudev ! We hope that you too will attend the *Swayam-var*". One visitor said looking towards the yogis.

"Why not ? We have come from a long distance and it is only to see the *Swayamvar* that we have remained here for so many days. We would like to see the *swayamvar* since we have got this opportunity", Dasarath said smiling.

"True Gurudev ! Indeed, this *Swayamvar* is worth seeing. We do not know whom our princess will choose for her husband. We do not know which prince is fortunate as to be chosen by

her and to be her husband. It is indeed a great delight to see it all”.

“Dear brother ! He whom the princess garlands at the *Swayamvar* will be blessed indeed !”

“Oh young man ! Why are you so impatient ? Within a day or two it will be known. Where is the need for the mirror to see your palm” One of them saying this turned towards Dasarath and continued.

“Gurudev ! Today, are you not holding any prayer ? Are you not singing any devotional songs ?”

“Why not ? We will offer prayers and sing songs,” said Dasarath who was in the guise of a Yogi; and began clapping, beating time with his hand and singing songs. No one knew how time passed. After the prayer was over the visitors returned home.

There was silence but for the melodious murmur of the river that flowed near the temple and the sounds of the foot-steps of the animals of the forest.

The two yogis became absorbed in thinking of their past and their future.

“Oh king, should we attend the *Swayamvar* ?” said Janak with a little surprise looking at the serene face of Dasarath.

“Why ? What is your idea ? Such valiant kings and emperors as Harivahan have come. All this is a game in which one tries to surpass the other and one excels the other. Can we succeed in this game ?”

“What exactly do you mean ?”

“Mighty warriors have arrived at Kautukmangal. Added to all that, there is the invincible hero of the north, Emperor Harivahan who has come to attend the *Swayamvar*”.

“Oh you king of Mithila ! You are speaking like a child. It is one thing to be the emperor of a great empire and it is a

different thing to captivate the heart of a beautiful damsel. We should attend the *Swayamvar* to put this matter to the test. Let us see who is more fortunate...." Dasarath said trying to remove king Janak's doubt and then both fell into deep thoughtfulness.

"Shall we go to the *Swayamvar*, in this disguise?"

"Yes, king! We have to remain in this disguise yet; and this is proper for us because the news has spread everywhere that King Dasarath has been killed by Vibhishan." Dasarath said calmly.

"But the news of my assassination has not yet reached our ears." Janak said with natural eagerness.

"It is likely that Vibhishan has been satisfied with killing only *Dasarath*".

"Then where is the need for my being in disguise?"

"You are right. But it is also necessary that we should find out what the various kings and princes attending the *Swayamvar* may say about us. It will be proper if you discard your disguise afterwards".

"Let it be so. I too think that that is the right way."

And the two kings kept discussing their future plans late into the night. Neither got a wink of sleep. Both went to bed reciting the *Namaskar Mahamantra*. It was past midnight. They could get sleep only some hours later.

King Shubhmati got a magnificent pavilion built for the *Swayamvar* of his dear daughter Kaikayi. At the time fixed for the *Swayamvar* many emperors, kings and princes were seated in resplendent thrones in the hall. King Shubhmati stood at the entrance of the hall with his ministers; and received all the visitors with due honour.

One after another, emperor, kings and princes came into the hall exhibiting their royal splendour. The whole atmosphere

reverberated with the songs of glory sung about them by their respective bards and sycophants who flattered them mentioning their titles and attainments. The leading citizens of the city and all the high state officials also came. Large crowds of people thronged the pavilion eager to see it and to watch the *Swayamvar*. The hearts of all were filled with eagerness, wonder and delight. At the end, two Yogis whose faces were resplendent, also arrived. King Shubhmati saluted the Yogis and received them.

Later, the King entreated them to be seated on wooden seats in a prominent place, from where they could watch the whole assembly. Moreover, all could see them when they sat there.

Just then, the voice of the court-priest began to reverberate in the atmosphere;

“The Muhurt fixed for the *Swayamvar* has arrived. Be aware of what is to be done. Princess Kaikayi born of an illustrious Royal family; the very embodiment of unsurpassed beauty and purity, the very image of all excellent virtues may be brought into the hall of the *Swayamvar*.”

“As commanded by the revered one !” Saying this, a venerable, elderly woman who wore valuable dress and decorations, proceeded towards the inner chamber.

For a few moments, all eyes were fixed upon the door of the inner chamber.

A little later, Princess Kaikayi who possessed angelic beauty, came into the *Swayamvar* hall placing her steps showly and gracefully. It was as if the full moon emerged from behind the cover of dark, dense clouds. Joy and cheerfulness radiated from her resplendent face. All who were sitting in the *Swayamvar* hall were astonished to see her beauty and grace. Within a few moments, the pride of all the princes who thought highly of their appearance melted away when they saw the beauty of Kaikayi.

All of a sudden, musicians began to play on various musical instruments. The melodies emerging from those instruments began to reverberate in the sky. The melodies of the clarionet filled the atmosphere and the princess Kaikayi walked slowly with the graceful gait of a peacock keeping pace to the rhythmic beat of the musical drums. Holding a garland of fresh and fragrant flowers, she went forth. Her godmother walked slowly before her and behind her, her friends and companions followed her.

Her godmother stopped for a while before every prince, every king and every emperor; and described the abilities, the accomplishments and the royal splendour of every one of the kings and princes. Kaikayi heard the descriptions, stopped for a few moments and then proceeded to the next. As soon as she placed one step forward the king or the prince whom she rejected became dull and dispirited; and began cursing his misfortune.

She thus kept moving from one king to another, from one prince to another but she did not like any one of them; nor did she garland anyone. His daughter's behaviour filled King Shubhmati with deep worry. All the people and the ministers present there were greatly worried and agitated.

"We wonder what has happened to Kaikayi? What a mad girl she is! We wonder what she has in her mind. Though there are so many worthy kings and princes, she has not liked anyone. We wonder whom she would garland". These thoughts flashed like lightnings through the minds of all those who were present there. The kings and princes who were rejected by her were furious, because they thought that whatever had been done at the *Swayamvar* was done with the intention of dishonouring them and making fun of them.

Kaikayi kept going forth slowly. There was pin-drop silence in the hall. Her godmother was walking before her silently. After having gone a few paces, Kaikayi suddenly stopped. Unexpectedly, her eyes fell upon a yogi who was sit-

ting on a wooden seat and who appeared to be a man of tremendous valour and intellectual brilliance. At the very first sight of the yogi, Kaikayi was thrilled by his looks. She felt magnetically drawn towards him. She experienced a sweet thrill which shot to the brims of her being with electric rapidity. She at once went near the yogi and within the twinkling of an eye, she decorated his neck with the garland.

All were stupefied at what had happened. The valiant kings of the North such as Harivahan, Meghavahan, Simharaaj and Yaksharaaj began to burn with anger. King Harivahan suddenly stood up and roared: "Who is this beggarly mendicant? Who allowed him to enter the *Swayamvar* hall? What does he think of himself? Does he think that the princess is like alms to be taken in his begging bowl or to be carried in his swing? Wait. I will make you realise what consequences you have to face if you should win the hand of the princess. Soldiers! Come forward and surround this mendicant. See that he is trampled upon by elephants. Cut his body into pieces and throw them to dogs. That is what he deserves".

At once, the *Swayamvar* hall became a battle-field. Commotion raged everywhere. All were angry. The atmosphere which was full of joy sometime ago was now blazing with the flames of dissatisfaction and discontent. King Shubhmati thought, "He may be a Yogi but my daughter has garlanded him and chosen him for her husband and so he is my son-in-law. Safeguarding him is my first duty" and he came hurriedly and stood before King Dasarath, who was in the guise of a yogi, to shield him against possible attacks.

King Dasarath heard the ignoble utterances of Harivahan and said smiling in a voice that possessed the dignity of the waves of an ocean.

"You hypocrite! You meanest of mortals! You can never dream of surrounding me with your soldiers. Even now there is time. Swallow your anger and get away quietly; otherwise you will have to lose your life. I do not want to stain your

resplendent heroism by killing you; nor do I want to defame you. If you are intent upon fighting against me, well, bring your soldiers and commanders. Let us fight a war. Then you will surely see the miracle that the mendicant's hand can perform”.

In consequence, King Harivahan and all the other kings and princes who had gathered there began to fret and fume and went to their respective tents and began making preparations for the war. The atmosphere which was festive and jubilant became dark with the prospect of the war.

King Shubhmati also ordered his soldiers to get ready for a war. Dasarath, who was in the guise of a yogi, made a sign to Janak to discard his disguise. King Janak took Shubhmati with him to the secret chamber. There he told King Shubhmati the truth about himself and Dasarath and put on the dress of a king. Shubhmati was unable to believe all this. Then Janak smiled a little and went to Dasarath, taking Shubhmati with him.

“Dear friend, we have to clear the suspicion of King Shubhmati”.

“Dear King! Have you not recognised us? This is my friend Janak, the king of Mithila and I am....” he lowered his voice as he revealed the secret of his identity.

“And you are...? Shubhmati asked him with amazement.

“I am his bosom friend”. Dasarath said in a calm voice.

“May I know your name?”

“Not yet. You will know everything at the proper time. Now, let me teach a lesson to this haughty King Harivahan. What does he think of himself? He seems to think that he is invincible”.

Later, King Shubhmati and King Janak took up arms, sat in their chariot and entered the battle-field. Dasarath thought

a little and then turning towards Kaikayi said : “Oh beautiful one ! Will you please drive my chariot”.

“As commanded by my Lord. I feel blessed to be your charioteer”. Kaikayi said with a little shyness. She innocently looked towards Dasarath and expressed her consent. Kaikayi was not an ordinary princess. She was an extraordinary woman who had mastered countless arts and accomplishments. She had attained an absolute mastery over the skill of driving a chariot.

A chariot was ready for King Dasarath. He ascended the chariot. Kaikayi held the reins of the chariot. Dasarath wore an impenetrable armour; took up a bow and arrows and other weapons. As soon as he gave a sign, Kaikayi drove the chariot towards the battle-field. The chariot went forth with the speed of a lightning.

XLIII

THE MARVELLOUS INCIDENT AT KAUTHUKAMANGAL

“Oh you greatest of heroes ! Your abilities are immeasurable. Your courage and stolidity are commendable. Your art of fighting and your militaric prowess are absolutely great. Really, you have displayed your tremendous valour and heroism by routing Emperor Harivahan, the invincible emperor of the North. Indeed, we do not find words to describe your greatness as a warrior adequately”.

King Shubhmati holding the strong and stolid shoulders of Dasarath commended his extraordinary heroism. In the battlefield King Dasarath leaving Shubhmati and Janak aside, fought against the warring kings and princes displaying his tremendous valour. Seeing this, Shubhmati's heart began to dance with delight.

“Oh king ! This victory is not mine. The credit for this victory goes to your able daughter. If she had not driven my chariot with such astounding dexterity, undoubtedly, we would have tasted the bitterness of defeat. Therefore, we should be grateful to her.”

“Oh you valiant hero ! Why do you say so ? I personally witnessed the war. Indeed, your heroism is unique and incomparable. Now you must tell us your name and reveal your identity. The radiance of the sun cannot remain concealed behind clouds for long”.

At once there appeared a smile on the sublime face of Dasarath. Janak, the king of Mithila also could not conceal his elation.

"Come on. Frst, let us go to the palace. There we can talk about everything at leisure" said Dasarath in a serene voice, making Shubhmati sit by his side in his chariot. Kaikayi also sat beside her father. The chariot went speeding towards the city. The commander followed them having put Harivahan and others in wooden cages. The people of the city showered flowers and scent over Dasarath and began dancing on the roads in joy and jubilation.

After having taken a bath, King Shubhmati, King Dasarath and King Janak dined together. By then, the courtyard of the palace had been sprinkled with scented water. Fragrant flowers were strewn upon it; and three thrones had been placed there. Behind the thrones, there were some seats of state. Shubhmati, Dasarath and Janak sat on the thrones. Kaikayi accompanied by her mother, the members of the royal family and other women sat in the seats of state. The courtyard was filled with the ministers, the state officials and the leading merchants of the city.

"Dear King! First of all, I seek your pardon because on account of me, all of you had to face unnecessary trouble". Dasarath said commencing a conversation.

"We will pardon you only when you satisfy our curiosity regarding your identity which has caused this trouble to us!"

King Shubhmati said this in a serious tone. But his question pleased all those who had gathered there and cheerfulness appeared in the faces of all people.

"We have no objection to the King of Mithila's explaining your identity".

"Surely, I will".

For a few moments, Dasarath and Janak looked at each other and laughed.

"He is the great hero, King Dasarath of Ayodhya".

At once, King Shubhmati stood up. Kaikayi was greatly delighted and astonished and she kept looking at Dasarath with fixed eyes. The people who had gathered there were thrilled to hear this.

"I am speaking the truth. Your son-in-law is King Dasarath of Ayodhya".

"I am unable to understand anything. At least, let me know what the matter is", King Shubhmati said again sitting on his throne.

"You are amazed because you believe that King Dasarath has been assassinated. Even this is not false. The news that has spread regarding this is also true" said Janak giving a clarification.

"King Janak ! Please tell us clearly what you want to say. Please do not speak in riddles. What is the truth ?" Shubhmati asked impatiently.

"Oh King ! Do not be impatient. The truth is that King Dasarath was not actually assassinated. Even before Vibhishan came to Ayodhya, Dasarath had left the city. Vibhishan merely cut off the head of the clay-image of Dasarath".

"Then Vibhishan has been deceived !"

"Yes, he was clearly deceived. He thinks even now that he has killed Dasarath. Thinking that he had killed Dasarath, he went away from Ayodhya and the truth is opposite to this." Then, King Janak narrated the entire story of how Narad came to Ayodhya and of how Dasarath's clay-image was cut by Vibhishan. On hearing the entire story, King Shubhmati, the queen and princess Kaikayi were astonished and delighted. Kaikayi blessed her good fortune for having secured such an ideal hero as King Dasarath for her husband.

The night had far advanced. All were feeling sleepy and were impatient to go to bed. Therefore, postponing further discussions and deliberations, they all went away.

Dasarath's bed-room was decorated with special articles of artistic beauty and grandeur; and a rare kind of fragrance filled the chamber. The chamber had been decked with countless garlands of colourful flowers. Lamps had been lighted in the chamber; and it was filled with an extraordinary effulgence. The ceiling and the walls had been decorated with countless curious carvings and paintings. Costly carpets had been spread on the floor. The bed-chamber had been decorated so colourfully that it would fascinate anyone. In it, an excellently decorated bed had been spread on a magnificently decorated cot.

Within a short time, Dasarath entered the bed-room with Kaikayi. The attendants received them with joy and jubilation. The maids attended upon them, with a delightful sense of hospitality and honour. The attendants, sprayed scent upon them. The singers sang songs of jubilation. The melodies emerging from the *Veena* reverberated in the air. The noise of the percussion instruments echoed in the air. Dancers who possessed extraordinary beauty danced with joy and jubilation. The whole atmosphere looked fascinating.

One by one began to leave the chamber as it was past midnight. The music and the dances ended. King Dasarath honoured all of them giving them precious presentations. The singers saluted Dasarath and Kaikayi and went away. Now, there were only two persons in the chamber; and they were Dasarath and Kaikayi.

For a while, there was absolute silence.

"Dear angel ! I am supremely pleased with your mastery of the art of war". Dasarath said breaking the silence.

"My dearest lord ! My mastery of the art of war is nothing compared to yours. It is like the difference between a mole hill and a mountain".

"My heroism and success depended on your dexterous charioteering".

"Your astounding valour sharpened my skill, dear lord".

"Whatever it may be, your charioteering simply thrilled me. Your skill is really excellent ! It is on account of your skill that my prestige was saved and I could hold my sway over the whole battle-field. Therefore, the King of Ayodhya desires to honour you. You ask for any boon from him".

"This is the magnanimity of the king of Ayodhya".

"Dear Queen, ask for a boon. At present, I am immensely pleased".

"Should I ask for it now ?"

"Yes. You must ask for it now".

"I will ask for the boon when an occasion arises. Till then may the boon be with you".

"What a perplexity has arisen !"

"Do not worry. I will surely ask for the boon but I will ask for it when an occasion arises".

"Let it be as you desire".

The lights had grown dim. The night had far advanced. Kaikayi slowly closed the door of the chamber. The sentinel rang the bell to indicate that it was past midnight.

In this manner, four months passed in Kauthukmangal. Nobody knew how so much time had passed. The members of the royal family were in great happiness. Once, finding an occasion, Janaka said to Dasarath.

"Dear King ! For some time past, a thought has been repeatedly rising in my mind".

"What thought is it ?"

"The thought of going to Mithila".

“Why so soon ?”

“Oh king ! What is the use of staying here ? Wise people do not stay in a place for a long time unnecessarily”.

Dasarath fell into deep thoughtfulness. At the very thought of a separation from his friend, he felt sad and depressed. He became agitated with worry.

“Dear king ! The time is not yet convenient for your returning to Ayodhya but I have no danger to fear at Mithila. Therefore, I seek your permission to return to Mithila”, said Janaka making his point clear.

“You are right; but I do not like to be separated from you”.

While they were thus conversing, suddenly King Shubhmati came there.

“I think the two kings are engaged in a discussion. May I know what they are discussing ?”

“The King of Mithila desires to return home” replied Dasarath turning towards Shubhmati.

“Well ! The king of Mithila has to return to Mithila sometime or the other. But is there any need for such a hurry ? He can go sometime later”.

“It is not wise to leave the throne unoccupied for a long time. Oh king ! You too are a master of political wisdom. Am I wrong ?” Janak said explaining the reason for his returning to Mithila.

“You are right but the ministers of Mithila are renowned for their loyalty. When that is so, why should you worry at all ?” Dasarath said.

“But I keep thinking of Mithila and the thought has been agitating me. After all it is my city. It is natural that I should remember it again and again and that its memory should be fresh in my mind. My welfare and progress lie in the welfare and progress of the people of Mithila.”

After the discussion, it was decided that King Janak should return to Mithila. King Shubhmati sent a large number of soldiers on horses and elephants to escort him. Dasarath and Janak embraced each other and shed tears. Shubhmati was also sad.

King Janak's chariot set off at a great speed. "Oh King! You must always remember Kautukmangal and its people" King Shubhmati said in a voice shaken with emotion.

"O king! I can never forget the city of Kautukmangal. Kindly visit Mithila when you find time".

"I will surely visit Mithila as soon as I find an opportunity".

"Victory to Jinendra!"

"Victory to Jinendra!"

And then the chariot began speeding away. In a few moments, the chariot went out of sight.

Leaving Ayodhya in disguise..... Meeting king Janak at Mithila.... Janak also accompanying him in disguise..... wandering through wild forests...arriving at Kautukmangal unexpectedly..Kaikayi's *Swayamvar*..Attending the *Swayamvar*..being garlanded and chosen by Kaikayi unexpectedly... the indignation and hostility of Harivahan and others a violent conflict; a terrible war...routing the enemy-kings in the war and king Janak's departure to Mithila.

These events flashed before the mental eyes of Dasarath like pictures. Though he lay in bed, he could not get a wink of sleep. He was greatly agitated. He was mentally traversing the past and the future. Sometimes, he was happy; sometimes he was unhappy...sometimes he felt hopeful and sometimes he felt desperate....sometimes he experienced joy at the recollection of happy events. Sometimes he visualised terrible calamities in the future in a vague manner. He lay thus experiencing conflicting emotions. It did not take much time for Kaikayi to notice that her Lord Dasarath was experiencing some deep conflict and deep commotion.

"My Lord ! You seem to be worried about something. You have not been able to sleep to-night".

"Dear Queen ! What you say is true".

"What problem can worry the king of Ayodhya ?"

"What can worry me ? Do I look worried ?" Dasarath said to remove the tenseness of the atmosphere and to render it natural.

"Yes. My lord ! Something has been worrying you and you are trying to conceal it from me", Kaikayi said in a firm voice moving closer to him.

"That is not true. The truth is after having met you I have not experienced any worry". Dasarath said in an affectionate manner looking towards Kaikayi.

"Then, why are you not able to sleep ?"

"A thought has been occurring to me again and again".

"If it is not something that should be concealed from me, you may tell me what it is."

"How can there be anything that has to be concealed from my dear queen ?"

"There can be much !"

"How so ?"

"Is it possible to administer the Kingdom of Ayodhya without concealing many things from women".

"Oh ! You know very well the deeper aspects of political matters". Dasarath laughed as he said this.

"My Lord ! Kindly tell me what actually the matter is".

"You are unnecessarily giving importance to the matter. All right ! If you want to know it, you listen to me. I want to leave Kautukmangal."

“What will you do after leaving Kautukmangal ?”

“I want to conquer some new Kingdoms”.

“After that ?”

“I desire to live there peacefully for a long time”.

“When will you return to Ayodhya ?”

“Sometime has to pass”.

“But what will happen to the Queens Aparajita and Sumitra if you do not return to Ayodhya ?

“I will send for them as soon as I conquer a new kingdom.”

“Which Kingdom do you desire to conquer ?”

“The kingdom of Magadha”.

As soon as Kaikayi heard the name of Magadha, she was startled. She sat up on her bed; and began staring at Dasarath. “My Lord ! Conquering Magadha is easy for a mighty hero like you. But we have to make some special plans to achieve victory over Magadha. It is not so easy as you think it to be”.

“You are right. It is certainly difficult to achieve a victory against King Yashodhar of Magadha without a proper plan”.

“My dear Kaikayi herself should prepare the plan. That is my desire”, Dasarath said with a smile, moving closer to Kaikayi.

“Dear Lord ! You have to achieve this objective. I am merely your shadow.”

After the departure of King Janak to Mithila, Dasarath felt it was not proper on his part to remain in his father-in-law's house for long. He also did not like to return to Ayodhya without knowing the state of affairs there. Therefore, he decided to conquer a new kingdom and to stay there. He thought that the kingdom of Magadha was suitable for his purpose from every point of view. He thought it beneath his dignity as a warrior

and hero to invade small kingdoms. Accordingly, he informed Kaikayi of his opinion.

Kaikayi was a gem among women. She was the very embodiment of purity, nobility and heroism. Her intellect was incisive and sharp. She possessed an extraordinary genius for making plans. She possessed the ability to carry out successfully any difficult task she undertook. After hearing that her husband desired to capture Magadha, she began making a plan to help him to achieve that objective.

When King Shubhmati came to know of the desire of Dasarath, he met him; and discussed the matter with him in detail; and assured him of his active assistance in his campaign against Magadha. As a part of his plan, he decided to release the able northern kings like Harivahan and to make them his allies in the campaign. Accordingly, he decided to discuss his plans relating to the campaign against Magadha with King Harivahan and others and to seek their co-operation in the campaign.

In accordance with their plan, early next morning, King Shubhmati and Dasarath went to the prison to meet those kings. At the entrance to the prison-house, two sentinels were keeping guard with drawn swords. On seeing the king, the sentinels bowed to him and moved back.

"Open the doors of the prison". Shubhmati said to the sentinels. As soon as they heard the command of the king, the sentinels opened one after the other the three doors. Shubhmati entered the prison-house accompanied by Dasarath.

In a chamber, in the prison-house the northern king Harivahan lay on his bed. He was like a lion kept in a cage. As soon as he heard the noise of the opening of the door, he looked towards the door to see who had come. He wanted to know this before doing anything. When he saw king Shubhmati and Dasarath, he stood up and moved two steps forward.

"A hearty welcome to the Emperor" said Shubhmati in a tender voice as soon as he entered the chamber.

"I am not the Emperor. It is this hero who must be given the title". Harivahan said pointing his hand towards king Dasarath.

"No dear king ! Do not say so. I am a friend of the Emperor of the north".

For a few moments, there was silence everywhere. Dasarath's penetrating eyes watched the feelings that were expressed on the radiant face of Harivahan.

Breaking the silence, King Shubhmati said trying to begin a conversation again, "Dear Emperor ! You are our honoured guest. I desire that you should come to the palace and receive our hospitality".

"Dear King ! I will surely accept your invitation".

King Shubhmati came out of the prison-house accompanied by King Dasarath and Harivahan. King Shubhmati ordered the head of the prison-house to release the other kings and to extend to them honour and hospitality and to treat them as royal guests. After that all the kings were released and were taken to the royal guest-house.

After having carried out his duties, King Shubhmati went to the residence of King Dasarath taking Emperor Harivahan with him. King Dasarath received them with honour and offered them seats of state.

"O King ! I desire to know who this great hero is. To which noble royal family does he belong ? He must be a descendant of an illustrious royal family because no ordinary man can possess such strength, such intelligence and such ability as he has". Harivahan said looking towards Shubhmati.

"You are right in thinking so".

"Then you tell me who he is".

"Dear Emperor ! He belongs to the Ikshvaku line".

"That means.....I don't understand".

"That means.....He is....."

"Is he Dasarath, the king of Ayodhya?"

"Yes....He is Dasarath".

At once, Emperor Harivahan stood up and embraced King Dasarath and patted on his back.

In response to this, King Dasarath touched the feet of Harivahan and expressed his high regard for him.

"Dear King! Kaikayi has done the right thing in choosing for her husband, a heroic king belonging to the most illustrious royal family in Bharathkand."

"But without your blessings, everything would be in vain."

King Shubhmati said making use of the opportunity.

"I have lost the worthiness of blessing them. I unknowingly committed an improper action in fighting against Dasarath. I foolishly strained the sacred relations between our kingdom and Ayodhya."

"Dear King! Do not say so. In fighting against me you acted in the manner in which a noble king should act. You need not regret your action," Dasarath said.

"This only shows the greatness of the King of Ayodhya".

For a moment, king Dasarath kept looking at Harivahan with unshaking eyes. Though Harivahan had passed his prime, he looked strong, sturdy and fascinating. The ruddiness of valour and the splendour of prosperity irradiated his face. His eyes which were brilliant revealed his political wisdom, administrative ability and incisive intelligence. His adamant shoulders showed that he possessed immeasurable physical strength by which he could decimate enemies. In the same manner, his wide chest was a silent witness of his luxurious and happy life.

After that there took place a long discussion among the three friends. During the discussion, King Shubhmati entreated King Harivahan to stay at Kautukmangal for a month enjoying his hospitality. Dasarath also insisted upon his staying there. Emperor Harivahan could not reject their entreaties.

King Dasarath decided to make speedy arrangements to carry out his plan.

XLIV

PLANNING THE INVASION OF MAGADHA

“My dear lord ! What kind of co-operation has Emperor Harivahan promised to extend to you ?”

“The emperor has agreed to send his Chief Commander with ten thousand chosen soldiers to assist me in the campaign”.

“Have you received any news from Mithila ?”

“Sunand, the Chief Officer of Mithila came yesterday”.

“What’s the news ?”

“It seems King Janak himself wanted to come here; but thinking that it was not proper to give that trouble to Janak, the Chief Officer dissuaded him from coming here”.

“Then..... ?”

“Somaprabha, the Chief Minister of Mithila has already set off with five thousand able soldiers to assist us”.

“What does the Chief Officer Sunand think of Somaprabha ?”

“Somaprabha is indeed a gem ! He is the gem of Mithila. Even King Janak has nothing but admiration for Somaprabha’s valour and heroism”.

Kaikayi was happy to hear all this. Dasarath greatly valued her intelligent co-operation and advice. Already, Dasarath had benefitted by Kaikayi’s skill and intelligence. Therefore, he desired to make use of her incomparable intelligence and her invincible strength and ability even in his campaign against

Magadha. In consequence, he consulted her on every matter and sought her advice; and kept her informed of every development.

When King Dasarath sat engaged in a discussion with Kaikayi in the secret counsel chamber, a guard came in; placed an envelope in his hands; and stood aside with a bowed head.

King Dasarath opened the envelope and read the message in one breath and said to the guard.

“Where is the messenger who brought this message?”

The guard went out; and in a few moments brought in the messenger.

The man was aged about thirty. He appeared to be very intelligent; and his face was radiant. He possessed a strong and well-built body. A long sword hung from his waist. His white face revealed his heroism. At the very first sight, he struck one as a great hero. His deep black eyes revealed his loyalty to his duty.

At the very first sight, Dasarath was impressed with his appearance. He felt greatly pleased to see him looking at him. Dasarath asked him; “Did the Chief Minister Shrishena send you?”

“Yes sir!” He said politely bowing his head.

“Do you know why the Chief Minister has sent you here?”

“I know only that I should meet the King of Ayodhya; and render service to him”.

“Good! What kind of service can you render us?”

“I can render this kind of service.....” saying this, the messenger took out his dagger from his waist and placed it at the feet of King Dasarath.

“I hope the dagger will not bow to anyone else except to the feet of the King of Ayodhya”.

"I think the King of Ayodhya is dishonouring my loyalty." Within a moment, the face of the messenger grew red with anger.

"I am not dishonouring your loyalty; on the contrary, I am honouring it." Dasarath said looking towards him with a smile.

"Not now! You can honour me after our victory over Magadha". The face of the messenger reddened with the emotion of heroism.

"Very well! As you like it. Go and take rest for a while. You have travelled a long distance. First, go through the necessary activities of taking a bath and eating food. Then, we shall meet at leisure".

"As commanded by the King of Ayodhya'."

The messenger's name was Virdev. He had come from Ayodhya. Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya had sent him to render service to King Dasarath. Virdev had been brought up and educated at the *ashram* of Acharya Shivbhadra. He had obtained his education at the *ashram* of Acharya Shivbhadra situated at a distance of about twenty four miles from Ayodhya. There was no one in Ayodhya who could equal him in the knowledge of the scriptures; and in his mastery of the use of various weapons. He had achieved such extraordinary heights of excellence at the *ashram* by the grace of the Acharya. There existed a deep intimacy between Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya and Acharya Shivbhadra. Shrishen visited the *ashram* often and discussed with the Acharya various things relating to Dharma and political policies and principles. During those visits he had observed Virdev closely. He was greatly fascinated by Virdev's ways and activities. Therefore, once or twice, Shrishen had enquired of the Acharya regarding Virdev's background and achievements. Whenever he asked the Acharya any question about Virdev, he was silent and tried to evade answering the questions. He did not like to reveal the facts relating to Virdev's birth and family.

When the Chief Minister received a secret message sent by Dasarath from Kautukmangal, he thought about it deeply. Shrishen thought that Dasarath had taken a proper decision in planning to conquer Magadha. Therefore he began to search for able and capable warriors who could be of help in the campaign.

There were many capable and intelligent men in Ayodhya each surpassing the other, but the Chief Minister could think of only Virdev who was in the *ashram* of Shivbhadra. He placed his idea before Acharya Shivbhadra. The Acharya at once, approved of Shrishen's proposal. Virdev also showed his readiness to render the necessary service in the campaign. In consequence, Shrishen explained to him the first phase of the action; and sent him to Kautukmangal to meet King Dasarath. Travelling a long distance for many days he reached Kautukmangal. Leaving his horse in the cool shadow of a tree at a short distance from the palace, he went to meet Dasarath.

After Virdev went away Kaikayi looked towards Dasarath.

"Dear Queen! He has come from Ayodhya".

"He is the very image of heroism. He looks radiant with valour".

"The Chief Minister has sent him on a special purpose".

"Will not the Chief Minister come?"

"No. He will reach Magadha".

"That means.....?"

"The Chief Minister will go to Magadha with five thousand invincible soldiers; and will enter Magadha secretly. He will collect information about the state of political and strategic affairs there and will prepare the ground for our invasion."

"The King's farsightedness is really commendable".

"And Virdev will go to Magadha in disguise; he will meet Shrishen and will carry out the important task of conveying to us all the essential information."

"Then, will Virdev go to Magadha alone or are you sending anyone with him?"

"Can we send anyone with him?"

"What is the use of sending all sorts of persons with him? That will not serve our purpose. We should send with him such a person as would be of help to him at times of calamity because as soon as he enters Magadha, he will have to cope with the people of Magadha who are extremely capable, intelligent and patriotic. It is likely that he will have to face serious encounters with them. If the occasion needs it, he will have to use even political scheming. In such a case, it is better to send two instead of one".

"Dear Queen! Your suggestion also deserves a deep consideration. Yet before we take any decision regarding this matter, it is better to consult Virdev about it."

"When do you intend to set off on your campaign against Magadha?"

"We shall plan it out after Virdev returns."

It was past mid-day. They had not yet had their food. Kaikayi accompanied Dasarath to the dining-chamber.

Virdev who went to the guest-house, took a bath; worshipped the Lord; and then began waiting for Dasarath's message. Before that he had seen Dasarath at the time of his coronation as King. He had been fascinated by Dasarath's winsome looks. Now and then while at the *ashram* he used to hear about the lofty virtues and miraculous achievements of Dasarath; and he was thrilled to hear those things. Often, he had dreamt of rendering service to him to show him his valour and loyalty. Hence, that day, he had the opportunity of meeting such a great man; so he was thrilled to the brims of his being.

Virdev was valiant. He was a mine of unexampled strength, but he was not yet experienced in political affairs. He possessed heroism but he did not possess the patience and experience necessary to evaluate and realize the nature of a political situation. Dasarath who was sensible, knew this truth very well. Therefore, he thought it proper and necessary to send some worthy and capable person with him to Magadha. Dasarath discussed the matter with Kaikayi. Kaikayi, when consulted about the matter, kept thinking for a while, because they had to send with Virdev a person whose nature, heroism and ability were known to them very well. Moreover, he should be an ideal companion and assistant to him in every respect. Not only that; his loyalty should be above all doubts and suspicions.

Kaikayi was lost in deep thoughtfulness. She thought of every remarkable person in Kautukmangal; but she could not decide upon choosing anyone as being worthy of that high office. Even while Kaikayi was thus thinking of the matter, her younger sister Anjali came there.

“Dear sister ! I think today you are deeply worried about something”.

“Ah !”

“Sister ! Are you awake or are you lost in the dream-world ? Ah ! You were not so deeply worried even at the time of your *Swayamvar*” Anjali said making fun of her in a genial manner.

“Tell me, Oh Queen ! What the matter is. I wonder what problem has been worrying you thus !” Saying this, Anjali sat in Kaikayi’s lap. For a moment, Kaikayi kept looking at her. Anjali also kept looking at Kaikayi’s face which was full of agitation.

Anjali had returned home after having completed her education at the *ashram* of Gurudev Gaudpad. Of course, the Gurudev desired that she must carry out studies for some more time; but she came home to attend Kaikayi’s *Swayamvar*. King Shubhmati

had sent her at the age of eight to the *Ashram* of Gaudpad to be educated. For about seven years she had remained there carrying out studies; and attaining mastery over the various accomplishments. She was a scholarly and virtuous lass. She had attained such a mastery over the skill of playing on the *Veena* that very few people in those days, could compete with her on that instrument. The Gurudev himself had admired her mastery of that art. Moreover, she had obtained adequate training in matters relating to politics and diplomacy.

“Anjali! Only you can free me from this worry”, said Kaikayi passing her hand affectionately over Anjali’s head.

“But how can I do anything without knowing the cause for your worry?”

“You have to go to Magadha on a very important task”.

“But may I know what that important task is”.

“On the way, Virdev will tell you what it is”.

“Virdev? Who is he?”

“He is a great warrior of Ayodhya. You have to accompany him”.

“I hope the Queen of Ayodhya would say anything only after thinking about it deeply”.

“Yes, my dear sister! I am saying this in all seriousness. If you go to Magadha with Virdev, it will be easy for the King of Ayodhya to achieve success in his endeavour”.

For a few moments, Anjali was lost in deep thoughtfulness.

“Instead of this, you can think carefully and give me your opinion tomorrow”.

“You must inform father of this and get his consent”.

“All right”.

Anjali went away. When she came, she was active like a deer but when she went out her radiant face had grown serious and thoughtful. Kaikayi was happy; and relieved as if a great burden had been removed from her head. She was confident that Anjali would act with incisive intelligence and carefulness. She visualised success for Dasarath's endeavour as she thought of Anjali going with Virdev to Magadha.

When Kaikayi was lost in her thoughts, King Dasarath came there. She was flabbergasted and stood up. She woke up from her deep thoughtfulness. King Dasarath sat on a seat of state. Kaikayi sat at his feet.

"My dear Queen ! I have made you sleepless by entangling you with political problems. Unnecessarily, I have caused much agitation to you".

"No, my dear Lord ! I enjoy supreme happiness in the presence of the King of Ayodhya. Why should I be agitated when I am doing my duty for my Lord".

"I had a discussion with Virdev".

"How did you feel ?"

"I felt very happy. 'Virdev is the very embodiment of heroism, valour and loyalty. Certainly, he is commendable. Such loyal officers are very rare indeed".

"Then, whom shall we send with him ?"

"We have to send with him a person of sharp and incisive intelligence because it is a long distance to go and on the way, they have to face many difficulties and calamities. The way is hard and the task is an extraordinary one".

"Then, what have you thought about it ?"

"I have chosen such a worthy person".

"Dear Queen ! Who is that heroic person ? Let us also know it".

"Shall I tell you?"

"Surely, I am eager to know who the person is."

"Anjali!"

"Anjali....?"

"Yes, my younger sister, Anjali."

For a few moments, Dasarath kept looking at Kaikayi with fixed eyes. Involuntarily Kaikayi's face became ruddy.

"Is the King of Ayodhya doubting my words?"

"I am not doubting your words but I am really wondering whether...."

"Is it because Anjali is yet a young maid?"

"She is young. Moreover, she lacks experience".

"Then don't you attach any importance to the education and training she obtained for seven years in the *ashram* of Gaudpad?"

"Surely I do; but here....in this matter...."

"You need not worry. I know her very well. She possesses all the worth, ability and skill which we are looking for."

Dasarath was silent. He did not utter a single word.

Kaikayi said again:

"There is a point....."

"What is it?"

"We have to give Virdev a suggestion".

"What is it?"

"The suggestion is this. Virdev has to act heroically; and the planning will be made by Anjali, Virdev will have to act according to her plans."

"We shall give him this suggestion".

"Then, you may think that your objective is as good as achieved".

Dasarath stood up, at once. He did not want to waste even a moment. He wanted Virdev to set off as soon as possible. He decided to send Virdev the every next day to Magadha.

Kaikayi obtained King Shubhmati's permission for her plan of sending Anjali with Virdev in connection with the campaign against Magadha. At first, he opposed the idea of sending Anjali but when Kaikayi explained the whole matter to him, he happily gave his consent.

After that Dasarath, Kaikayi and Shubhmati gathered together in the council chamber. They sent for Anjali and Virdev. After they came there Dasarath turning towards Virdev said :

"Virdev, during your travel to Magadha Anjali will be with you".

"As commanded by the King of Ayodhya".

"And you must bear this vital point in your mind. Your duty is to act heroically according to Anjali's plans".

"I agree".

"Tomorrow, before dawn, you must set off to Magadha."

"But I have a suggestion to make", Anjali said.

"Anjali ! What is your suggestion ?"

"We should take with us five picked riders on horse-back".

"It will be arranged. Anything else ?"

"Yes. Your blessings".

"Bhagwan Jineshwardev will safeguard you" said the King of Ayodhya enthusiastically.

“And yes. You should first go to Gurudev Gaudpad’s *ashram*. You have to proceed further only after seeing and saluting him. That will bring you success”, King Shubhmati said to Anjali. Anjali agreed to do so.

Then Anjali and Virdev returned. King Shubhmati went back to his chamber. Dasarath and Kaikayi were alone together. They looked at each other. Their eyes revealed that they were both happy and satisfied.

XLV

RAJGRIHI

In those days, Rajgrihi, the capital of Magadha easily reminded one of Alakapuri, the heavenly city. Yashodhar, the emperor of Magadha had done everything necessary to make his capital Rajgrihi splendid and magnificent. With its gorgeous mansions, beautiful gardens, fascinating playing halls, with its roads paved with marble stone, artistic gateways, with its sculptured arches, the city of Rajgrihi captivated everyone. The flags of affluence waving over the sky-high mansions of affluent merchants, reminded one of the fabulous wealth of Magadha. The golden chariots, the silver chariots and the chariots made of costly alloys, moving along the roads of Magadha showed the incomparable prosperity of the city.

As soon as night fell, the white mansions of the dancers reverberated with the melodies emanating from *veenas* and other musical instruments. The sons of the affluent merchants of Rajgrihi went to those mansions wearing costly dress and decorations; enjoyed heavenly delights in the company of beautiful damsels, thus making their affluence fruitful.

The emperor of Magadha had taken extraordinary measures for safeguarding Rajgrihi. The city was surrounded by an impregnable fort built of unhewn stones. The battlements of the fort were so wide that at the same time, three chariots could be driven abreast of one another along them. The fort, and its gates were built with extraordinary engineering skill. There was a wide and deep moat around the fort always full of water. The secret passage leading into the fort lay concealed in this moat. At eight places across the moat, strong bridges had been

constructed. The bridges were built in such a way that they could be lifted at anytime.

The fort had eight gates all built of adamantine steel with incomparable engineering skill. The soldiers of Magadha always kept watching these gates with great vigilance. During nights, one thousand soldiers used to stand guard on the battlements, with drawn swords.

The Emperor had made extraordinary arrangements for the security of the Magadha Empire. The responsibility of safeguarding the city was placed on the shoulders of Sugupta, the chief commander of the empire. Moreover, by virtue of the extraordinary intelligence and wisdom of the Chief Minister, Maniratna the empire of Magadha, intoxicated with prosperity and happiness, seemed to parallel the heavenly world.

The emperor of Magadha extended co-operation to those who killed animals. In Rajgrihi often sacrifices were performed at which animals were killed. At those *Yajnas* innocent animals were killed without any hesitation. Sometimes, even human sacrifices were carried out. Greedy and hypocritical people organised feasts at which animal flesh and human flesh were eaten. Some members of the royal family did not like these sacrifices but they were helpless because of the authoritative policies of the Emperor himself.

For about ten days, in all the roads and streets of Rajgrihi an interesting and curious discussion was going on among people. It became a topic of special discussion among the members of the royal family and courtiers,

A tall and well-built person used to walk about along the roads of Rajgrihi. The people of Rajgrihi saw him and were fascinated by his splendid physique. This great man was none other than Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya. The people of the city said everywhere that after King Dasarath had been assassinated by Vibhishan, the kingdom of Ayodhya had become anarchic; and that law and order had disappeared in the kingdom. People also said that the Chief Minister Shrishen was

planning to take advantage of the situation; and that he was planning to become the King of Ayodhya; and that he had come to seek the assistance of the Emperor of Magadha. It was rumoured that Shrishen had come to Rajgrihi with this secret purpose. This is what people were saying everywhere in the city.

Ten days had passed since Shrishen arrived at Rajgrihi. On the very next day of his arrival, he met the Chief Minister of Magadha and had a long discussion with him. On the third day also, he carried out secret discussions with Maniratna for three hours in the morning and for three hours in the evening.

On the fourth day, he met the Emperor of Magadha. On that occasion, he held a long discussion with the Emperor and the Chief Minister, Maniratna.

Shrishen's residence was located in the centre of the city. Within ten days, he met all the political heads of the Empire and developed contacts with them. All the state officials, who had a close knowledge of the royal family and the political affairs and who possessed political wisdom had been captivated by Shrishen's versatility. Shrishen was a master of political strategy and diplomacy. He was also a master of religious and ethical philosophy. He was an extraordinary devotee of the Dharma based on non-violence expounded and disseminated by Bhagwan Rishabhdev. He desired to develop close contacts also with the people of Rajgrihi. So, he began giving away gifts and presentations. He kept giving charity to the distressed and the destitute. The result was that his residence was thronged throughout the day and night by beggars and destitutes. Moreover, his fame spread throughout the city. All were full of admiration for him.

One morning, Shrishen sat in the courtyard of his residence giving food and clothes to beggars and destitutes. The priests of the city also came and stood in a line to receive gifts from him. One who received gifts from him praised him and moved on to be followed by another. This went on for a long time. All of a sudden there was an uproar on the main road of the city.

Shrishen's concentration was disturbed. He looked towards the road. A Jain Bikshu was coming down the road. He wore soiled and torn clothes. In one hand, he held a wooden bowl; and in the other, he held a long stick. Some priests were coming behind him rebuking him and making jokes at his expense. When the Bikshu came up to his residence, Shrishen stood up; went up to the Bikshu who was walking along the road, saluted his feet with heartfelt devotion; and stood near him. Many others saluted the Bikshu. The priests who were coming behind the Bikshu were amazed to see this. One came forward; and said.

"Oh noble man ! You are a magnanimous person. You have come here from another country. Your fame has spread throughout the city; but this action of yours appears peculiar to us".

"Dear priest ! If you think seriously about my action you will surely visualize the truth in it."

"Do you think that there can be truth in this polluted *Dharma* ?" ..

"I think you have stained your fame by saluting such a dirty *Bikshu*..."

"Indeed, it is proper to think about purity and impurity in *Dharma*".

"He does not take a bath; and does not carry out scriptural studies and spiritual activities; nor does he perform *Yajnas*. How can his *Dharma* be pure ?" said one of them angrily.

"Dear sir ! Do not speak thus of the Muni. He has bathed himself in the waters of celibacy. He meditates upon the soul and the supreme soul. He has mastered the scripture *Dwadashangi*. His *Yajna* is his non-violence. Seeing his outward dusty appearance; and his soiled clothes, do not treat him with contempt". Shrishen again saluted the feet of the Muni. Those who were making fun of him also treated him with regard.

"Oh you noble man ! You are leading the life of a Mahamuni. We committed a sin in ill-treating you. Kindly suggest an atonement for our sins."

"Oh you noble men ! Salute this Muni and seek an atonement from him."

Then they sought atonement from him. The Muni who wore soiled clothes was given great honour. All praised his principle of non-violence. But those who liked to carry out *Sacrifices* with violence were angry. The news of this event reached the ears of Maniratna, the Chief Minister.

Shrishen who was in disguise had with him five thousand soldiers. His soldiers stood at all crucial points in the city in disguise. Only Shrishen had openly camped at Magadha. Moreover, one thousand soldiers of Ayodhya put on the guise of Brahmins and stood here and there in the city. Shrishen developed close contacts with all the top officials of Magadha and had understood clearly the political situation there. He secured very important information in a secret manner. Now, he was merely waiting for Virdev.

Shrishen also in a very intelligent manner began disseminating the culture of non-violence started by Bhagwan Rishabhdev but it brought some difficulties. Some people of the city were angry with him. Even some members of the royal family were angry with him. Many rumours spread in the city about Shrishen's activity.

"Your excellency, we have received very secret information from our frontiers". Suman, the Chief Commander of Magadha approached the Emperor and said expressing his doubts and fears.

"What information has been received ?"

"We have received information that the soldiers of Ayodhya have come to Magadha and are scattered all over the city".

"How many may be there ?"

"About two or three thousand".

"This need not worry us".

"My lord ! How can you say that ? Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya has already camped in Rajgrihi. Is this not a matter to be seriously thought of ? Is it not a thing to be worried about ?"

"Shrishen has already met me and our Chief Minister, Maniratna. We have also had secret discussions. His plan is entirely different".

"What you think about him may be true but all this appears to be peculiar to me".

Suman said with grief and then stood silent. Just then, the Chief Minister of Magadha came there. Along with Maniratna, the commander Sugupta also came there. Following him, there came also, Suryadev who was the Chief political adviser. All bowed to King Yashodhar and took their seats.

"I think our Chief commander has told you about the situation", the Chief Minister said beginning a conversation.

"Yes, but I do not think that the situation is so serious as to cause us agitation," the Emperor of Magadha replied in a cool manner.

"What problem can cause agitation to your excellency ? Yet carefulness and vigilance are essential in political matters."

"You are right, dear Chief Minister".

"Dear King ! You please listen to what Suryadev has to say about the matter. You know he is a master of political affairs".

"What does Suryadev wish to say ?"

"Dear King ! I think it is absolutely necessary that we should keep a vigilant eye on the activities and movements of Shrishen. He has become famous in Rajgrihi. He has been

disseminating the Jain Dharma. Many are becoming the followers of Jain mendicants deeming it an honour."

"When we held a secret discussion with Shrishen, we could not find anything to say that he was trying to deceive us".

"Then why should he stay here ?" Suryadev asked angrily.

"His only objective is to make Ayodhya come under the domination of the Emperor of Magadha. It was in this connection that he held discussions with us".

"My Lord ! You are right; but his activities and movements are causing suspicion in our minds. We cannot make out what his real intention is but one point is certain. The Chief Minister of Ayodhya Shrishen is not such a fool or such an ignorant person as to walk into bondage and slavery. His influence on Ayodhya is deep and intact. Since the time the event of Dasarath's assassination took place, he has been carrying on the administration ably. The wonder is that so far a new king has not been installed upon the throne of Ayodhya. Even the people have not been demanding it and there has been no lawlessness in the country. All this shows Shrishen's political wisdom and his mastery of political affairs".

On hearing the opinion of Suryadev, for a few moments, the Emperor of Magadha fell into deep thoughtfulness. All sorts of fears and doubts appeared in his mind.

"What is your idea ? What should be done now ?" The Emperor said turning towards Maniratna.

"At once, Shrishen should be arrested and put in prison". the commander Sugupta said a little angrily.

"No. No. If we do so, unnecessarily there will be a big commotion in Rajgrihi and the people will entertain all sorts of doubts and fears. Moreover, if we arrest him the reaction may be against our interests."

"Then ?"

"Orders should be given to spies to keep a vigilant eye on Shrishen and his residence. At the same time, we should caution

our forces on the frontier to be vigilant. Our frontier must be well guarded. No outsider should be allowed to enter our territory. This task should be carried out by Suman, the commander”.

“As commanded by the Emperor”.

“Not only this, wherever we see the spies of Ayodhya we should arrest them at once or kill them,” the Chief Commander Sugupta said issuing special orders.

“At the same time Shrishen’s activities and movements should be carefully watched,” the Emperor said to Maniratna.

“As commanded by the Emperor of Magadha”, said Maniratna bowing his head and agreeing to carry out the Emperor’s orders.

Shrishen at once came to know of the secret discussions that the Emperor of Magadha had with his state officials. This was nothing compared to his diplomatic wisdom. At once, he planned out his future action and began writing a secret letter. After writing the letter, he read it once; closed it and sealed it with his signet-ring; and keeping it in a secret box, he went out of his chamber.

Outside a poor brahmin was waiting for Shrishen impatiently. As soon as seeing Shrishen, he came in. Shrishen placed his hands upon his shoulders; went close to him and then said in his ears;

“Any news about Virdev ?”

“Yes sir, he has entered the territory of Magadha”.

“When will he reach Rajgrihi ?”

“In about three days”.

“Very good !”

Shrishen gave him the necessary instructions and then sat in a palanquin to go to the palace. The poor man went away by a secret passage.

XLVI

TOWARDS RAJGRIHI

After saluting Gurudev Gaudpad and obtaining his blessings, Virdev and Anjali set off to Rajgrihi. Their horses went galloping. Virdev's horse was going ahead. Anjali's horse followed it. Behind her, five riders on horseback were following them.

For about three hours, they went riding thus. Then, when he saw a beautiful pasture, Virdev affectionately patted his horse. The horse began to move slowly. At the same time, all the horses began to move slowly. Anjali spurred her horse and began riding abreast of Virdev. For sometime, the two horses went abreast of each other. Anjali breaking the silence asked Virdev :

“Virdev ! What is the purpose of our journey ?”

“We have to go to Rajgrihi and meet Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya. We have to act according to his instructions”.

“So, is the Chief Minister of Ayodhya in Rajgrihi ?”

“Yes.”

“Openly or in disguise”.

“Openly”.

“Alone ?”

“No. There are with him five thousand soldiers of Ayodhya but they are in disguise”.

“Ah, what courage !”

"It is not courage but foolhardiness;" a subtle smile appeared on the face of Virdev.

"In that case, we have to reach Rajgrihi as early as possible". Anjali said a little seriously.

"Why ?"

"If you go to the Chief Minister, you can be of great help to him".

"O you mad creature ! Already four thousand soldiers who are as valiant as I, have reach Magadha".

"They may be able soldiers but they cannot be equal to you. Indeed your heroism and valour are unique".

"Oh ! Where have you seen my valour ?" Virdev felt thrilled to the brims of his being.

"Is it necessary to say it ?"

"But where have you seen my valour ?"

"In your face Where else can it be ?"

"It cannot be"

"In your able and adamantine shoulders".

"No, even this cannot be true".

"In this" Virdev at once took out his sharp and shining sword and began waving it.

At once, Anjali smiled. She spoke in a cheerful and affectionate manner.

"Virdev, I have greater confidence in you than the confidence you have in your sword."

It was already past mid-day. They spent many hours travelling thus. Therefore, Virdev looked around for a suitable place

where they could take rest. At a short distance a cottage was visible.

"Anjali, shall we take rest in that cottage?"

"No, we shall not take rest in a hut built of straw and grass".

"Why so?"

"Don't you see that this cottage is on the highway. We should take rest in a place a little away from roads."

"Why do you fear anything?"

"It is not a question of fearing anything. It is a question of being careful and cautious".

"All right let it be so. After all we have to act according to your plans, you see".

Virdev dismounted from his horse and began walking forth slowly holding the reins in his hand.

A little away from the main road; there was a grove of trees. They decided to take rest there and went towards that place. Indeed, the place was fascinating. They tied their horses to the trunks of trees. Since the place was surrounded by trees, no one could see them from outside. Then they sat in the cool shadow of the trees. The soldiers brought the vessel which they had with them and placed it before Anjali. Anjali took out the food from the vessel and served it to the soldiers and then Virdev and she ate the food.

After finishing their meal, Virdev slept on a tiger's skin. The soldiers lay down a little away from them. Anjali slept reclining on the trunk of a tree.

The day reached its last phase. The evening was approaching. Yet no one woke up. They were all sleeping soundly without any worry. The sun was declining in the west. There was still time for the appearance of the evening. Suddenly, Anjali woke up. She awakened Virdev. The five soldiers also woke

up. The horses were got ready and then all set off on their journey.

"We shall travel at least for six hours; then we will have gone nearer our destination". Anjali said turning towards Virdev.

After travelling for about six hours, they reached a dense, wild forest. The horses and the riders were greatly tired. Moreover, travelling through the forest in the dark night appeared dangerous. Therefore, they thought of halting there till dawn. Within a short distance, they found a lake. The horses were taken to the lake to drink water and then they put grass before them.

They took rest there for sometime and woke up before dawn. They began travelling in the semi-darkness of the early morning. Thus, having travelled for three days and three nights, they reached the land of Magadha.

"Virdev, now we should proceed very carefully and cautiously."

"We are cautious and circumspect."

"Now, we are travelling in the enemy territory. We should not forget this fact."

"We may have to encounter the enemy also".

For a few moments, Anjali kept staring at Virdev's face which was radiant with heroism. Virdev suggested that they should halt at a choultry which stood nearby. Anjali gave her silent consent to this. Virdev turned his horse towards the choultry. He stopped at the gate of the choultry for a while. At the very first glance he saw there five or six pilgrims resting. His attention was drawn towards the horses when they neighed. When Virdev entered the gate, he heard some loud and rough noise.

"Who is there ?"

"We are pilgrims".

"Where have you come from ?"

"From the northern kingdoms".

"Where are you going ?"

"To your house.... Wherelse ?" As he said this, Virdev's anger grew intense. He began to shake with anger. A frown appeared on his forehead. At once, he placed his hand upon his dagger which was hanging at his waist. He was about to take out the dagger to attack him but Anjali hurriedly came to him. She placed her hands upon his shoulders and pressed him. The five soldiers also came there. The people who were in the choultry lighted a torch. One of them approached him. Anjali observed the entire choultry in the light of the torch. The man watched the strangers with fixed eyes. First of all, his eyes fell upon Virdev. Then he saw Anjali and the five soldiers. When he saw Anjali, he was surprised. He felt fascinated by her beauty. In fact, he was beside his wits.

"Ah what a beautiful girl ? Really, she is fascinating". He said in a loud voice looking at his companions. Even before, he could complete his sentence, involuntarily, Virdev's sword flashed out with electric rapidity and cut off his neck. His huge body fell down like a severed tree. A hoarse scream emerged from his throat and thus he died. On account of this incident, the others who were there were angry. They took up weapons like a sword or a spear or a trident and attacked the strangers. A terrible fight ensued. Virdev keeping Anjali behind him; rushed forward with his blood-stained sword. The five soldiers also attacked them. The enemies also were not weak. The fight continued. Virdev killed two more. The other three decided to run away but the soldiers surrounded them. One of them summoning all his strength stabbed a soldier with his spear and tried to run away but even before he ran a few steps, he fell a victim to an arrow that came swishing. He gave out a loud scream and fell down dead. This arrow was shot by Anjali. She shouted, "Catch the other two".

Then the soldiers took away the arms from the other two and tied their hands behind their backs. The burning torch lay on the ground. Anjali took it up and went near them. The bodies of the two bore a number of stab-wounds. They were groaning with pain.

“Who are you ?” Anjali’s voice was powerful and strong.

“We belong to Magadha”.

“Are you soldiers or ordinary citizens ?”

“We are soldiers”.

“Are there any other soldiers in this vicinity”.

“No; not even one”.

“Look here; if you utter a single lie, you will have to share the lot of your friends”.

“Kill those two dogs. They should not be allowed to live”, Virdev said roaring.

“What do you desire ? Life or death ? If you co-operate with us, you will be allowed to live; otherwise you will die”. Anjali said rebuking them.

“We surrender ourselves to you. Oh Lord !” The soldiers of Magadha said humbly.

“Ah ! What are you doing ? Throw them into a corner. Later, we shall think of them”. Virdev said angrily. Then Anjali went to the soldier who was wounded. Blood was surging out profusely from his stomach. She sprinkled upon the wound some herbal juice; bandaged it and made him lie down on the ground.

Two soldiers took the torch and began searching inside and outside the choultry for any soldier that might be lurking there. When they carefully examined the place, they found that one room in the choultry was locked up. They tried to open it but

the door could not be opened. They tried to break the doors of the room. Then one of them said.

"Please unbind me. I will open the door".

Virdev, at once, unbound him. He easily opened the door of the room.

"What is there inside ?" Virdev asked.

"Weapons !"

"Anything else ?"

"Yes. Some spies of Ayodhya who have been caught and bound."

"How many are there ?"

"About five".

"When were they arrested ?"

"This afternoon".

"Are they alive ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on. Let us see them".

It was pitch-dark in the room. Nothing was visible there. Virdev and Anjali entered the room. The soldiers of Magadha went ahead of them carrying the torch. Virdev and Anjali saw there various weapons like daggers, spears, tridents, swords, arrows and maces lying in large heaps. Inside the room, there was another inner room. There, they saw in the light of the torch, five soldiers bound hand and foot, lying there. Their hands were tied behind their backs. Virdev went forward and tried to unbind them. But the soldier of Magadha himself unbound them.

The five soldiers were led out of the room. There was silence everywhere. Turning towards the soldier of Magadha, Virdev said;

"Friend ! What is your name ?"

"Shambal".

"You have to do me one more service".

"Surely, I will do what you desire me to do. Command me".

"Will you do it ?"

"Surely ! You need not doubt my word."

"In that case, Virdev will trust you risking his life."

"I deem it my good fortune".

Ordering the other soldiers to take rest, Virdev, Anjali and Shambal went and sat beneath a peepal tree.

"Shambal ! Which is the by-way to Rajgrihi ?"

"I will lead you by such a path".

"Then we shall start tomorrow before dawn."

"But when we travel on a by-way it is better to travel during night time than during day time."

"Then, we shall set off in the night".

"Even that is a good idea; but we have to be very careful".

"Careful ? Then what is the use of my sword ?"

"Naturally, on our way at every point, the soldiers of Magadha would be keeping guard; but we shall travel by such a way that we will not have to face many obstacles."

"Very good. Why should we not take rest for a few hours ? That way we can refresh ourselves." Said Virdev glancing towards Anjali.

"No, Virdev ! Rest is harmful. We should set off at once."

"That means ?"

"This night we have to forego sleep".

"Surely".

The cool breeze from the west kept sporting over the area. Now and then, they could hear the cries of the wild animals of the forest. Shambal slept reclining on the trunk of a tree, at a short distance. Anjali moving towards Virdev said in a soft voice; "We shall meet the arrested soldiers and find out from them any details that they know relating to our purpose".

"Come on. Let us go".

Ordering their soldiers to keep a vigilant watch around the choultry, they both went into the choultry.

"Do you know any news about Chief Minister, Shrishen?"

"Yes, sir. The emperor of Magadha has ordered that the activities and movements of Shrishen should be strictly watched. His suspicion is that camping at Rajgrihi, Shrishen has been trying to play a deep political game. The soldiers of Magadha have been ordered to keep a strict watch on his movements and actions".

"Did you get any instruction?"

"Yes. Because we received instructions, we came here. But even before we came here, the soldiers of Magadha had gathered and established a base here".

"What instructions have you received?"

"As soon as Virdev comes, information should be conveyed to Chief Minister Shrishen. This is the instruction we have received:"

"How will you convey this information to him?"

One of them came forward and whispered something into Virdev's ears; and then he tried to see the feelings appearing on the faces of Virdev and Anjali.

"Then why delay?"

"My lord! You...."

"Yes. I am Virdev. Within three days we will be in Rajgrihi".

Two of the five soldiers went into the room, in the choultry. In a corner on the right side of the room, a colourful stone had been fixed in the boundary-wall. They began to press the stone with their feet. Slowly, the stone moved; and in a few moments, a passage appeared there. When the soldiers had gone in, the stone again covered the passage.

Shambal, approached Virdev and entreated him to make preparations for their journey. Within a short while, all got ready. The other three soldiers also joined them. They were all equipped with the necessary weapons.

One soldier of Magadha remained bound in the choultry. Before setting off, Anjali said to Shambal.

"What are we to do with this companion of yours?"

"Leave him here. Let him face the mockery of his fate". Virdev said showing utter indifference to him.

"No, Virdev! That will be a source of danger to us." Anjali said interrupting him.

"Instead of that, why should we not take him with us?" Shambal said, pausing a little. Virdev also approved of his suggestion. Shambal released him and brought him with him. Virdev took away his weapons; and honoured Shambal by giving him weapons.

Thus a caravan of seven riders of horseback and five on foot, proceeded. Shambal was in front showing the way to others. He was proceeding speedily. Virdev and Anjali followed him on horseback carefully. Behind them four were going on foot; and at the rear there were five riders following.

The journey continued through the night. The sun rose. The sky was red with the tender rays of the sun. Cool breezes

were blowing. Birds were flying actively from one branch to another. Some animals of the forest could be seen moving about. Shambal thought of halting at a place, finding it convenient. They took rest during day-time and travelled during nights. Till now, they had not encountered any obstacles. But Shambal had given them a warning that they might have to face unexpected dangers in the vicinity of Rajgrihi. Therefore, all were vigilant and watchful.

They began their journey on the third night. Anjali, Virdev and the others were proceeding with great care and caution. Shambal also remained vigilant and continued to show them the way. Thus they travelled upto midnight.

Just then, they heard a noise in a bush nearby. It seemed as though some people were hiding in the bush and were watching their movements carefully. Shambal gave a secret signal. Virdev stopped the horse and took out his sword. Anjali also took out her dagger. Even as they were thinking of the situation, suddenly there came an arrow with a swishing noise from somewhere before them. It whizzed by the ear of Virdev. Virdev took up his bow and arrow and shot the arrow in the direction from which the arrow had come. Within a few moments, they heard a terrible scream made by someone in the bush and immediately about twenty-five soldiers of Magadha came out of the bush. They were planning to attack their enemies but Virdev and Anjali sent a shower of arrows against them. At the same time their soldiers attacked them with various weapons. Shambal also did everything in his power to show his mettle. He at once killed two of the enemy soldiers; but the soldiers of Magadha made four soldiers of Virdev lick the dust. Virdev unable to bear with the occurrence jumped off his horse, taking a dagger. He attacked the enemies in such a way that they were completely confounded. Within the twinkling of an eye, he killed five of the enemy soldiers. Yet the enemy soldiers did not lose courage. With increased vigour, they began to fight against Virdev and Anjali. Seeing an opportunity, Anjali manoeuvred to take Virdev's horse to a safe place and then she took up arrows. Shambal came nearer and said in a low tone.

"Dear lady, I think, the enemies are large in number. If we do not adopt some tactics, our destruction is certain. Therefore, the best thing is to run away from here at the earliest opportunity."

Even before Shambal completed his sentence, they heard Virdev's shriek. An arrow had pierced his back and he was surrounded by the soldiers of Magadha. Advising Anjali to remain there Shambal took swords in both his hands and rushed forth. He appeared terrible. As a result of this, the enemies leaving Virdev alone rushed towards Shambal. Virdev was badly wounded. He collapsed on the ground. Anjali began to burn with anger. She rushed in a terrible manner towards Virdev fighting the enemies. She lifted up Virdev who was unconscious; placed him on the horse and rode away.

Shambal with the purpose of deceiving the enemies began to play hide and seek with them. The darkness of the night helped him in this game of his. Shambal knew that Anjali had taken away Virdev; so for their safety, he kept tantalizing the enemies for a long time. Of course, he desired to join Virdev and Anjali as soon as possible. His other companions also had disappeared. So, taking advantage of the darkness of the night, he too ran away from there. When the soldiers of Magadha found that the enemies had cleverly disappeared, they began chasing them but they could not find them. Their hopes were shattered, but they gave up their worry because at every point on the way to Rajgrihi there were Magadha soldiers keeping a vigilant watch. They thought that the enemies would be caught somewhere.

Anjali was riding fast. Shambal also was running fast to overtake her. Suddenly, he feared a danger to Anjali. He called out aloud to stop Anjali and to save her from the imminent danger but his plan failed. When he went running a little distance he saw Anjali surrounded by a large number of soldiers. They carried torches. Anjali was alone while they were large in number. The situation was dangerous. So, Shambal offered a prayer to his god and ran forth using all his strength, to help Anjali so that he might be of help to her.

XLVII

THE MARCH FOR A WAR

Anjali soon realized that she was surrounded by enemies. Moreover, her horse also had become completely tired. Of course, Virdev had regained his consciousness. But she felt it improper in that situation to fight against the enemies; and so she surrendered to the enemies.

The cries of victory issued by the soldiers of Magadha reverberated in the skies. They held torches in their hands, arrested Virdev and Anjali; and handed them over to the soldiers.

"Imprison him in a cave. Be vigilant. Do not allow him to escape!"

"What shall we do with this terrible witch?"

"There is no need to imprison her. She can be useful as an object of amusement to our soldiers." The commander stared at Anjali as he made this joke. Then, he thought for a while; and dragged her towards himself, holding her hand. Releasing her hand from his hand, she followed him silently. The Commander overwhelmed with joy began to gabble and babble. He said in a loud voice; "Dear friends! Eat well! Drink to your fill; and enjoy yourselves to your heart's content. To-day, we shall have a recreational assemblage. Dance to the tune of musical instruments and make your lives fruitful by enjoying the beauty of this maid".

An impetuous wave of joy and jubilation rose in the hearts of the soldiers of Magadha. They began to sway with joy. Their tiresomeness and fatigue disappeared in a moment. Looking towards Anjali, the commander said in a mocking tone.

"Dear Queen ! Won't you dance ?"

"Surely. I will".

"And won't you drink ?"

"I will drink".

"Singing ?"

"Definitely."

"Wonderful my dear ! Wonderful !"

And the commander's eyes widened with infatuation. Wounded by the artificial arrows of love released by Anjali, he became totally maddened by his sensual cravings. She paralysed the commander's valour, with her devious glances. He became maddened by infatuation.

The commander and the soldiers went to a plain. The plain was level and clean. On all sides, it was surrounded by trees, plants and creepers. Since the plain was in the midst of trees and plants, it was not visible to others. There was a deep trench on one side of the plain; on the other side there was a vault-like structure. Anjali, at once, realized that it was a base of the soldiers.

The soldiers stood around the area. There was an expensive seat in the centre of the plain. The commander sat upon it. A temporary dais was put up on one side of the commander. Large casks of wine were placed on the dais. By the side of the casks of wine, there were placed large plates containing various dishes made out of meat savoured with spices. The soldiers of Magadha, looking at those things again and again began dancing and shrieking. Anjali cautiously looked around; and saw at a distance, Shambal in the midst of the Magadha soldiers. Her eyes fell upon him. He too looked at her; and communicated a secret message to her through his eyes.

Anjali began dancing. The commander and the soldiers grew mad watching her fascinating dance and her graceful

movements. They lost their senses and began to shout in frenzy; and enthusiasm. The whole plain began to reverberate with their enthusiastic cries and the commotion they made. Anjali, while dancing went close to the commander and made him mad with infatuation by her graceful glances and fascinating and captivating movements of her body. The commander impatiently got up from his chair and staggering in intoxication, tried to hold her hand. Anjali cleverly evaded his attempts to hold her hand; took up a beaker of wine and poured it into his mouth. In this manner, she went to every soldier and made everyone drink wine beyond all limits. Within a short time, the spell of wine and woman fell upon the whole assemblage and they began to sway in maddening intoxication and blinding infatuation. All the soldiers began to dance looking at the fascinating form of Anjali.

Anjali displayed all her skill in dancing. After having made them drink wine excessively, she made them eat large quantities of meat. She made the commander drink wine and eat meat excessively with the result that he became totally devoid of sense. He got up from his place in a staggering manner; and tried to embrace her, but she clapped her hands; and cleverly eluded his grasp. When she found that the commander was dead drunk; and that he was totally intoxicated; and was about to swoon, she produced such resounding and mesmeric melodies on the Veena that every soldier began to fall into deep and inebriate sleep. The commander had already fallen into deep sleep; and was muttering something and then even the muttering stopped. Anjali found that all were in deep sleep. At once, she took out her dagger and cut off the head of the commander. He was covered with hot blood.

"You wretched fellow ! Lecherous fellow ! . . . You dare to outrage my modesty and purity !" Anjali kicked the dead-body of the commander; and went away hurriedly. At a distance, Virdev and Shambal were waiting for her on two horses. Anjali's horse also was ready for her. With one leap she sat on the horse and the three disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Even before dawn, the three riders on horseback reached the outskirts of the city of Rajgrihi. They alighted from their horses and began walking slowly towards the city. All of a sudden Virdev heard a code sound. The three at once stopped there. They took out their swords and were ready to face any attack by the enemies.

“Virdev”.

Hearing this unexpected call, Virdev was shocked. He looked around sharply and he noticed a shadow coming out of a clump of trees towards him.

“Who are you ?”

“Ikshvaku”.

Virdev looked at him with fixed eyes. The shadow handed over to him a letter. Virdev opened the letter. Shambal struck two flint-stones; and made a little fire with dry grass. In the dim light of the fire Virdev read the letter. It had been written by Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya. After having read the letter he put out the fire.

The three went forward. The shadow giving back to him the reins of the horse disappeared.

“Anjali ! We are now safe, as long as we are within the limits of the Chief Minister’s residence and until we reach his residence” Virdev whispered these words into the ears of Anjali. The day dawned. The gate of the city was opened. The three entered the gate of the city.

“Who are you ? Where have you come from ?” Suddenly the guard at the gate asked them stopping them.

“Brother ! We are travellers. We have come to see the splendour and prosperity of Rajgrihi. We have come from the north”. Anjali said without any hesitation and turning towards Virdev said, “This is really amazing. Magadha is not ashamed of dishonouring travellers who come from other kingdoms”.

"There are many marvellous things to be seen and known in Rajgrihi.... This is but a beginning...." Virdev said sarcastically.... and then the three proceeded towards their destination. The foolish guard kept looking stupefied by the infatuating beauty of Anjali, the grace and charm of her body.

The Chief Minister Shrishen was eagerly waiting for Virdev. He felt happy to see Anjali, Shambal and Virdev arriving safely. After some time, they sat together with the Chief Minister in the dining hall. Virdev introduced Anjali and Shambal to the Chief Minister. He heartily praised the young lady.

After dinner, the three took rest for sometime. After that the Chief Minister held a secret discussion with Virdev and Anjali.

"That means, is there no need of my going to Kautuk-mangal?"

"No, I have already sent a secret message to the king".

"Then what are your instructions to me?"

"You must camp to the north of Rajgrihi and you must assume command of five thousand soldiers of Ayodhya".

"And Anjali?" Virdev looked towards Anjali and said in a soft voice.

"What is her desire?" The voice of the Chief Minister echoed in the chamber.

"I will remain with Virdev."

"But his company will not be convenient to you".

"The question of convenience or inconvenience does not arise when I am carrying out my elder sister's instructions".

"If you stay here you can be of help to me".

"But I have been ordered to be with Virdev and assist him".

"And what about Shambal?" Shrishen asked.

"Dear Sir! I too wish to stay with them. Yet I am prepared to act according to your orders", Shambal said in a humble voice.

"That's all right. You too stay with Virdev". A broad smile appeared on the face of the Chief Minister. He patted on the back of Shambal commending him.

"All right, set off this very evening. Our camp is not very far. You can reach that place in an hour or two".

"And soldiers?"

"They will start coming there from tomorrow. Proper instructions have been given to all already".

"When the Chief Minister Shrishen sensed that Yashodhar the king of Magadha and Maniratna the Chief Minister had entertained suspicions regarding him he, at once conveyed to the king of Ayodhya by spies all the secret information he had collected. He had done this also with the idea that there might be no need to send Virdev to Kautukmangal and that he might stay there and assist him in the arrangements for the war".

The spies went to Kautukmangal; and communicated to king Dasarath all the secret information relating to the war. King Dasarath considered all those details with deep concentration and understood everything. He was profoundly impressed with Shrishen's incisive intelligence, incomparable loyalty and ability in managing political affairs. Having read the letter he asked the spy.

"Has Virdev reached Rajgrihi?"

"It was only after the Chief Minister received information about Virdev's entry into the Magadha territory that he sent me".

The Chief Minister had written all the details in the letter relating to the situation in Magadha. Kaikayi and King Subh-

mati also read the letter with concentration. At once, Dasarath planned in his mind the future course of action.

Vikramaraj, the Chief Commander of emperor Harivahan had already reached that place with ten thousand able soldiers. Somaprabha, the Chief Minister of Mithila also had reached Kautukmangal with five thousand valiant soldiers. King Shubhmati had kept ready for any emergency one thousand soldiers on elephants, ten thousand cavalry, five thousand chariots and ten thousand soldiers on foot.

King Dasarath had sent a spy to Ayodhya and ordered the despatch of ten thousand soldiers.

Before setting off on the campaign, King Dasarath invited commander Vikramaraj, Chief Minister Somaprabha and King Shubhmati to a discussion and explained to them the whole plan.

"Dear Vikramaraj ! You have to begin fighting at the south gate of Rajgrihi."

"As commanded by your highness !"

"In connection with it, you will be receiving from time to time code-instructions from our commander Virdev."

"The instructions will be effectively carried out, my lord !"

"Dear Somaprabha ! You must destroy the western gate of the city and enter it".

"The king's commands will be carried out ! But the desire of King Janak of Mithila was that I should always remain with you like your shadow", Somaprabha said in a humble voice, bowing his head.

"If there is any need we will send for you."

"So be it".

"King Shubhmati ! You must assume command over the soldiers on elephants and invade the main gate of the city.

Shrivatsa, the commander of Kautukmangal shall lead soldiers on horses and soldiers on foot and commence fighting against the enemies and shall make them lick the dust”.

“Dear lord you ?”

“The chariots and the soldiers from Ayodhya will be with me. My task will be to go to any spot where help is required.”

“Ah ! What an excellent plan !”

“Virdev, our commander has already reached the northern side with five thousand soldiers”.

The responsibility of safeguarding and defending Kautukmangal was given to Kaikayi. Of course, Kaikayi's innate desire was to be with Dasarath. She also entreated him to comply with her request but King Dasarath did not agree to it. In spite of her efforts, she had to remain in Kautukmangal.

The campaign set off with overflowing enthusiasm. The sounds of the trumpets and the reverberating war-cries of the soldiers deafened the horizons. King Dasarath's chariot was at the head of the army. King Shubhmati followed him with a vast army of elephants, chariots, horses and thousands of soldiers on foot. After having gone a long distance from Kautukmangal the two kings pitched their camp. From there commander Vikramaraj and the Chief Minister Somaprabha proceeded to carry out the plan relating to them. And the two kings Dasarath and Shubhmati stayed there for sometime. During this time for two days the two kings held secret discussions relating to the war. They set off on the third day.

On the way, they noticed a rider on horse-back coming from the opposite direction at a great speed. After approaching the kings he unfurled the flag of Ayodhya, dismounted from his horse and went up to King Dasarath. He handed over to King Dasarath a letter. King Dasarath read it; tore it off and then turning, towards King Shubhmati said, “The King of Magadha has put Shrishen in prison”.

"It does not matter. Very shortly, King Dasarath will put the King of Magadha in that prison".

"The King of Magadha is making preparations for a war".

"He must be doing so It is natural".

"But the soldiers of Magadha have already tasted Virdev's valour and able leadership".

"Very good ! But how ?"

"We will know it only after reaching Rajgrihi. But for the time being Nandan, the prince of Magadha is in the possession of Virdev".

"Really ?"

"This has enraged the King of Magadha and he is burning with anger. He is making expeditious preparations for the war".

"First he should release the prince of Magadha from the clutches of Virdev and then he should make preparations for the war. Virdev has given the king of Magadha a warning already".

"How is it ?"

"Release Shrishen and your son will come back to you safe".

"Yashodhar is very haughty. He may not agree to do this".

"Another warning also has been given".

"What is it ? Let me also hear it".

"If any harm is done to Shrishen, at once the prince will be sent to the Kingdom of death".

"Hurrah Virdev ! Hurrah ! I am really pleased with your intelligence". Shubhmati was all praise for Virdev.

"Oh King, you are bestowing all your praise on Virdev. Kindly spare some of it for Anjali also. It is really amazing to

note that Anjali's extraordinary intelligence and skill are working behind Virdev's valour. The plan was originally made by Anjali and Virdev merely carried it out".

Now, they began to travel speedily. Soon, they reached the boundaries of Magadha. The commander Vikramaraj and the Chief Minister, Somaprabha were eagerly waiting for them. All met; sat together and discussed their plans fully and after having planned to proceed further, all went to their tents to take rest.

XLVIII

THE INVASION

Suddenly, a spy came to King Yashodhar of Magadha; and said ;

“My Lord, King Dasarath of Ayodhya has arrived with a vast army and has invaded Magadha”.

“What did you say ? King Dasarath of Ayodhya....No ! No ! This is impossible. This can never happen. King Dasarath was killed by Vibhishan, the brother of Ravan, the king of Lanka when that is so how can this happen ?”

“All that is untrue ! King Dasarath has entered the territory of Magadha with a vast army”.

On hearing this unexpected news, the Emperor of Magadha was stunned. He suddenly became pale. He had not even dreamt of such a possibility. He became terribly angry with Chief Minister Shrishen. The flames of anger shot to the brims of his being. On one hand, the abduction of prince Nandan; and on the other hand the invasion of Magadha ! For a few moments, he fell into a confounding dilemma. Just then, the Chief Minister of Magadha, Maniratna, Sugupta the Field Marshal, the commander Suman and Suryadev, the great master of political strategy arrived. All were greatly agitated by the situation that had arisen and began to burn with anger.

“Your Highness. The two thousand soldiers who were sent to liberate our prince were killed mercilessly in the mountainous region in the north. Virdev is not alone there. He has with him five thousand able soldiers of Ayodhya”.

The Commander Suman was greatly grieved to hear this and he sat with a bent head.

The news enraged the emperor of Magadha. At once, he stood up; drew out his sword and said in a ferocious voice;

“You cannot carry out this task. I myself will go. Let me see who that fellow Virdev is”.

“May the Emperor of Magadha be free from all worries. Why should he take pains to carry out such a trivial task as this ? The necessary arrangements have been made already”. The Chief Minister Maniratna said rising to his feet.

“But only this arrangement will not be adequate. Dear Chief Minister ! Didn’t you hear the King Dasarath of Ayodhya had invaded Magadha with forty thousand soldiers ?” Suman said trying to restrain himself; his voice shivered with fear and he was breathing heavily.

“But dear Suman ! You seem to have forgotten that the soldiers of Magadha will surely rout them and compel them to take to their heels. The soldiers of Magadha are not inferior to any other soldiers. I am sure that they will surpass any other army in strategic skill and tactics.” Field Marshal Sugupta said trying to inspire confidence in the commander. Suryadev, the master of political strategy who had been silent till then interrupting the discussion said in a serious and elevated voice.

“Dear Commander ! I agree that nobody can question or suspect the incomparable valour and heroism of the soldiers of Magadha. Yet nobody can deny this truth that Virdev has in a wicked manner, massacred two thousand soldiers of Magadha in the mountainous region in the north. This truth is very well known to us. At the same time, today we have also heard the other truth that King Dasarath has tricked Vibhishan, the brother of Ravan who is a *Prativasudev*. Not only this; King Shubhmati of Kautukmangal is extending active co-operation to King Dasarath along with his army of twenty-five thousand soldiers. Vikramaraj, the world famous hero, the supreme com-

mander of the forces of Emperor Harivahan of the northern Kingdom has been harassing Magadha, has been routing the soldiers of Magadha and has been rushing and leaping towards the capital like an intoxicated and ferocious lion. Moreover Somaprabha, the heroic Chief Minister of Mithila renowned for his political insight and incisiveness has been leading the armies towards our capital.

Therefore, my suggestion is that in this calamitous situation when clouds of peril have covered the empire of Magadha we should make a firm determination to scatter and dispel those clouds of calamity and make the necessary plans towards that end. Moreover, before it is too late, we should do all that is in our power to check the advance of the hostile forces."

The suggestions given by Suryadev inspired fresh courage and confidence in Sugupta. He stood up and entreated emperor Yashodhar to invite the heads of the various sections of the army and to give them proper instructions and orders.

The emperor at once issued his orders. In accordance with the commands of the emperor, Sugupta at once sent for those heads of the army. Then the leading citizens of the city, the guards of the fort, the guards of the city-gates, the leaders of all faiths and other important persons were also invited. They were informed about the fear that had appeared in the minds of the common people on account of the sudden invasion by Dasarath and were requested to extend their co-operation in safeguarding and defending the country. The emperor assured them of the fullest protection and security. Then turning, towards the Field Marshal he said,

"How many soldiers are there in the city?"

"At present, there are two thousand elephants, ten thousand cavalry, five thousand chariots and forty thousand infantry", Sugupta said after making some mental calculations.

"How many are there outside the city?"

"In all, there are about ten thousand soldiers in various centers in the territories of Magadha."

"Very good. Then we are not really weak or powerless. Maniratna, the Chief Minister shall encounter the enemies with ten thousand cavalry at the main gate of the city. Sugupta shall with twenty thousand soldiers stand on the fort and destroy the hostile armies. The Chief Commander Suman's task is to bring to our presence dead or alive, Virdev, the commander of the forces of Ayodhya whose army is coming like a cloud of locusts. I will proceed with two thousand soldiers on elephants and make the king of Ayodhya lick the dust and then the ten thousand soldiers shall be sent in two directions. Five thousand chariots shall be in the rear of the Chief Minister so that when an emergency arises they might take part in the war."

After that, Emperor Yashodhar ordered his soldiers to blow the trumpets. As soon as the drum-beats of war were heard, all the healthy and able-bodied citizens of Magadha got ready for the war. Strict watch was kept on Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya who had been imprisoned.

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The city of Rajgrihi was enveloped in dense darkness. Nothing was visible. Dead silence prevailed everywhere. On that day, the homes of entertainment and the sky-high mansions of the dancers were not decorated with lights and were not reverberating with music and dances. On the other hand, everywhere the trumpeting of elephants and the neighing of horses were heard. Every nook and corner of the city was reverberating with the clangour of swords and the whizzing noises of bows.

The gates of the city of Rajgrihi were closed before time. Sugupta kept watch on the battlements of the impenetrable fort with twenty thousand able soldiers looking for the arrival of the hostile forces. In the same manner as a part of the security arrangements the bridges that lay across the deep moat around the fort had been lifted. On one side of the moat, Chief Minister, Maniratna had pitched his camp on the eastern side. Ten thousand cavalry, five thousand chariots and soldiers were ready on the bank of the moat.

Somaprabha, the valiant Chief Minister of Mithila was proceeding towards Rajgrihi with five thousand warriors, taking care to see that the silence of the night was not disturbed. He was coming from the western side. Before midnight, he reached his destination safely. As soon as he arrived at his destination, there appeared a human form who seemed to be able-bodied, magnificent and intelligent with a shining sword in his hand. He said in a serious voice.

"I think you are Chief Minister Somaprabh".

Somaprabh was greatly amazed to hear his name uttered by that unknown person who was standing before him. He took out his sword from the sheath which had been studded with gems. On seeing his action, the stranger laughed loudly. Somaprabh turned pale for a moment hearing his loud laughter.

"Well, well. Please follow me in this condition".

"But who are you ?" said Somaprabha staring at him.

In response to this, the stranger again laughed aloud. After a moment's silence, the stranger said :

"I am Virdev".

"Oh !"

Somaprabha and Virdev at once moved towards each other and embraced each other.

"Dear Virdev ! What are your commands to me ?" said Somaprabha in a humorous manner.

"Not commands, my dear Lord; but plans".

"Well. Tel me at least what your plans are".

"About three hours before dawn you must enter Rajgrihi".

"Anything else ?"

"At the time of your entering the city you will have with you your army of five thousand soldiers and my army of five

thousand soldiers. In all, you will have with you ten thousand able warriors. As soon as it is three in the night, the western gate of the city will be opened."

"Anything else ?"

"You will have to carry out a serious fight against Sugupta, the field marshal of Magadha who is guarding the fort with twenty thousand soldiers. According to my calculations by morning the main gate of the city will be broken open and Dasarath the King of Ayodhya will enter Rajgrihi without any hitch or hindrance."

"Anything else ?"

"No, I have told you everything. Victory to Rishabhdev !"

Within the twinkling of an eye, Virdev disappeared into the darkness. Somaprabha forgot himself for a while in admiring. Virdev's invincible heroism, incomparable valour and his extraordinary sense and wisdom. All the soldiers who were assisting Virdev gathered on the western side.

Virdev proceeded towards the east. According to his plans he stopped Vikramaraj, the commander from the north who was proceeding southwards and instructed him to go at once to the military base which was situated in the mountainous area, in the north.

"Dear Vikramaraj, you will have to carry on a fight against the commander Suman. He has taken with him ten thousand soldiers."

"It does not matter. I will encounter him and I will fight against him with all my might."

"But remember ! Not before the last phase of the night."

"It shall be so !" Vikramaraj set off to the north.

Virdev kept waiting eagerly for the arrival of King Dasarath. It was not yet midnight. Within a short time, he

had to set off to the North. Anjali and Shambal stood waiting for Virdev on the bank of the moat. Midnight was approaching. Just then, an arrow whizzed past the ear of Virdev. At once, he hurriedly ran into a grove of trees nearby and took up his bow and arrow. Within a few moments, soldiers on elephants passed by. There were countless elephants but there was no noise of any kind. At once, Virdev was overwhelmed with joy. His elation knew no bounds. The King of Ayodhya, had arrived. He proceeded into the grove of trees, and stood there. He saw the King of Ayodhya in a high and resplendent chariot. As soon as he came out of the clump of trees, he was surrounded by the soldiers of Ayodhya. Suddenly, King Dasarath's eyes fell upon Virdev. But on account of the darkness of the night, he could not fully recognise him.

"Bind him and bring him here !" said Dasarath.

Within a moment Virdev was brought to his presence.

"Who are you ?"

"I am myself, oh King !"

"Who ? Virdev ?" Dasarath recognized him by his voice. As soon as he gave a sign, the soldiers moved away.

"Yes, my king ! At your service".

"Is everything all right ?"

"Yes, by the grace of Bhagwan Rishabhdev".

"Now, what is your plan ?"

"Oh Lord ! You have to explain your plans to me. I will act upon them."

"No, Virdev ! From today, the responsibility of leading the campaign against Magadha lies on your shoulders. You are our commander, in this war".

"Every plan and battle-formation will have to be made by you. You will have to supervise and guide the whole campaign.

"By the boundless grace of your excellency".

"Dear commander Virdev ! What are your plans for our action ?" said Dasarath affectionately, patting on his back.

"My Lord, the Chief Minister of Magadha is ready at the main entrance of the city of Rajgrihi, with ten thousand cavalry. Five thousand chariots are ready to assist him. The Emperor of Magadha, Yashodhar has been waiting for you, with two thousand soldiers on elephants".

"Enough ?"

"No. My king ! On the other side, Commander Vikramaraj, Chief Minister Somaprabha, and Virdev will unite their armies on the battle-front; and will make the enemies lick the dust. They will not rest until they have decimated the enemy-armies".

"And how many more ?"

"Forty thousand able warriors ! Twenty thousand on the battlements and twenty thousand at various fronts".

"Is it all right ?"

"The attack will begin at about 4 in the morning. First of all, you have to commence the attack."

"Very good".

"And your commands, my lord ?"

"Go. Become victorious ! Bhagwan Rishabhdev will always be with you and aid you."

Virdev looked up towards the sky. Countless stars were twinkling in the sky. The firmament looked resplendent with their light. It was almost midnight. He proceeded along a narrow path towards the north and riding his galloping horse he set off towards his destination.

Anjali and Shambal had been waiting for Virdev on the bank of the moat. Anjali stood silent, watching with fascina-

tion, the beautiful stars twinkling in the sky. There were only a few minutes left for midnight. But there was no sign of Virdev. She said to Shambal, in agitation.

"Shambal; Virdev has not yet come".

"He must be on his way".

"Could any undesirable... inauspicious thing...."

"Tush ! Tush ! Do you also say this ? A hero may have to face many unhappy things; but can such things cause any harm to a hero like Virdev ?"

"What you say is true Shambal; but this is a matter of war. The enemies are always watching us with vigilant eyes. We are very important for them."

"Dear lady. He may be on his way. We need not worry so much about it".

Then, the two became silent. All of a sudden, there appeared the light of a number of torches in the mountainous area of the north. Both were greatly amazed at this sight because Virdev's soldiers had already travelled westwards, so they wondered how other soldiers could come there. The soldiers of Magadha would never come to that area even by a mistake. When that was so, who could they be ? Both of them fell into a confounding conflict. A serious conflict appeared in the minds of both. Both were thus in great amazement when they suddenly heard a low voice;

"Anjali ! Shambal !"

"Here....This way." The voice became a little clear. It was the voice of Virdev. Shambal and Anjali became thoughtful. Virdev came near them and whispered to them;

"The third phase of the night has begun and now without a moment's delay, we should carry out our plans".

"After you went away, we received a secret message that in the secret passage of the Fort one thousand soldiers are standing guard but we are only three".

"In this situation, we too must have with us at least one hundred able warriors". Shambal said with agitation.

"But where have we time for all that?"

"The movement of the soldiers is being organised in the mountainous area of the north. Who are those soldiers?" Anjali asked to satisfy her mind.

"The ten thousand soldiers of Vikramaraj have reached that area".

"You can arrange to get one hundred soldiers from among them".

"It does not matter but this arrangement has to be made first. Even a moment's delay will be dangerous to us and Ayodhya", and Virdev said giving his signet-ring to Shambal. Shambal set off to the mountainous region of the North with the speed of wind.

A boat had been tied to the bank of the moat. At one time, more than twenty-five members could not be seated in it. Virdev met the sailor who steered the boat and explained to him his plan. He agreed to take one hundred soldiers to the other bank in two trips. The sailor was a loyal friend of Shambal.

When the third phase of the night had advanced a little, Shambal returned. He had brought with him one hundred soldiers and they were all coming quietly without making noise so that the soldiers of Magadha might not entertain any doubts or suspicions. Virdev observed the soldiers closely; then addressing all he said;

"You must carry out your duties with unflinching awareness. Those who love their lives may go back at once but remember that if you are loyal and selfless and if you happen to die in the war you will attain bliss in heaven and you will be honoured and adored by all".

"We will consciously carry out the commands of Virdev. We are prepared to sacrifice our lives for our duty", the soldiers said in one voice.

"Victory to Rishabhdev !"

Virdev, Anjali and Shambal sat in the boat. Along with them forty six soldiers sat in the boat and then the boat proceeded towards the west.

Within an hour, the boat reached the adamantine boundary wall of the fort near the secret passage on the western side. The secret passage of the fort lay beneath deep water, at a depth of more than one hundred and fifty feet of water. Shambal had been once the Chief Guard at this passage. So he knew the way of entering the passage.

Shambal sent down a strong rope into the water to search for the passage. Virdev held one end of the rope and Shambal tied the other end around his waist and jumped into the deep water.

Within a few moments bubbles appeared on the water and the rope began to loosen. Virdev, at once, pulled the rope, tied the end around his waist and jumped into the deep water. Again, the rope grew loose and Anjali tied it round her waist and leaped into the water.

In this manner all the soldiers jumped into the water. The sailor returned with his boat and brought the remaining soldiers to the western wall of the fort. All of them jumped into the water as the others had done. Shambal broke open the secret passage with a sharp weapon and entered it cautiously. Virdev and Anjali followed him into the passage. The passage was absolutely dark. Nothing was visible in it. They could not see one another. Led by Shambal, they slowly proceeded through the passage placing their feet noiselessly.

XLIX

THE CONQUEST OF MAGADHA

All went slowly and silently through the passage. Nobody could see anything there. Yet they were all proceeding following one another in search of the door that led into the fort. Just then, Shambal stopped suddenly. He saw before himself a wall. He began to search for a door in the wall. . . . All stopped when he stopped. He began to creep up the wall but he could not find a door there. Nearly, half an hour was spent in this kind of indecisiveness. The soldiers felt smothered and began to breathe heavily and seemed to be finding it difficult to breathe. They felt as if they were strangled. Virdev was anxious. They could not see any door or passage there. Just then, they heard a loud bang. Nobody could understand what it was. Because of a sort of explosion in the tunnel all sank down to a deep level. They felt as if the whole earth was sinking. When they reached the ground they realized that they were surrounded by armed soldiers of Magadha on all sides.

At once, Anjali sprang up, took two swords in her hands and like a ferocious lioness pounced upon the enemy-soldiers. Inspired by Anjali's heroic action, Virdev also attacked the enemy soldiers assisted by his hundred soldiers. The soldiers of Magadha were confounded and stupefied by this unexpected attack. For a few moments, they could not think of doing anything. Meanwhile, Virdev slew twenty-five enemy soldiers. The soldiers began running helter-skelter. The heroic soldiers of Ayodhya began fighting with unexampled valour.

Shambal began to move step by step towards the western gate. Virdev also followed him. At once he found that Anjali had been surrounded by the enemy soldiers. Yet, she was fight-

ing like a hungry lioness, cutting off the heads of the enemy soldiers. Virdev thought of something and he leaped from his place in such a way that the attention of the enemy soldiers was drawn towards him. He gave a signal to Anjali to move towards the western gate. Anjali continuing the fight began moving towards the western gate. She looked towards the sky. The third phase of the night was almost over but their destination was still far away.

The heroic soldiers under the command of Virdev almost decimated the soldiers of Magadha. Even then, his task was not over. Virdev speedily proceeded towards the western gate. Anyone who stopped him on the way and collided with him was at once slain.

Virdev passed his eye over his soldiers. Of them fifty were killed and fifty others were safe. Yet he had to kill about two hundred Magadha soldiers. In the light of the torches in the hands of the enemy soldiers the internal situation of the fort could be seen. Shambal and Virdev began a terrible fight against the enemy soldiers. Anjali was trying to safeguard Virdev always following him like his shadow. She was attacking the enemy soldiers and was killing them. There were many able guards at the gate and those who were still alive could be counted. Virdev again said,

"It is not too late. Throw down your arms or get ready to die. None of you can escape death today at the hands of Virdev".

On hearing the name of Virdev, the Magadha soldiers were stricken with horror. They stood stupefied for a few moments and then they threw down their arms and surrendered themselves to him.

"Open the gate". Virdev ordered.

At once, the gate of the tunnel was opened. Virdev was startled to see the sight before him. Countless torches were burning. Chief Minister Somaprabha and his ten thousand soldiers were crossing the moat in boats. From the battlements,

arrows came down like torrents of rain. Field Marshal Sugupta came from the eastern part to the western gate of the city. Suddenly a thought occurred to Virdev. He whispered something into the ears of Shambal and at once, Shambal proceeded towards the fort with fifty soldiers. He held a torch in his hand and guided the soldiers. The fort was enveloped in the dense darkness. Suddenly because the torches were burnt out the enemy soldiers could not see the soldiers of Ayodhya in the boats. Making use of this advantage Somaprabha entered the city of Rajgrihi.

Shambal, Anjali and Virdev suddenly disappeared. On the eastern side, a terrible battle was going on. In the fourth phase of the night, in accordance with his plans King Dasarath had launched his attack on the city. King Yashodhar had brought his soldiers on elephants into the field and King Shubhamati was fighting against him. Shubhamati was a famous warrior of the time and a great master of the art of fighting on elephants. There was no hero who could equal him in those days. The horizons were reverberating with the trumpeting of countless elephants. Even the best of the enemy soldiers were vanquished. On all sides soldiers were running. At one place, King Dasarath attacked Maniratna, the Chief Minister of Magadha.

Virdev stood upon a high hill and kept carefully watching the fight going on in different fronts and he was also making plans for further action.

Suddenly, his incisive eyes fell upon Emperor Yashodhar and King Shubhamati. The Emperor's soldiers had surrounded Shubhamati on all sides and Shubhamati was seen moving heaven and earth to defeat the Emperor, risking his life. Both were great experts in fighting on elephants.

Suddenly, Virdev's right eye shook. As a result of this, leaving Anjali and Shambal there, Virdev ran forward taking a sword in one hand and a spear in the other. On the way he killed an enemy soldier on horseback; mounted the horse and sped towards the battle-field. He made his horse rush into the

midst of the elephants. Cutting off the heads of the soldiers on the way he reached the place where Shubhamati was fighting.

But there was some delay in his going there... Emperor Yashodhar stabbed Shubhamati with a spear and in consequence he fell on his seat on the back of the elephant. Virdev was indignant at Yashodhar's action. The *mahout* of Shubhamati brought his master out of the battle-field.

Virdev rode upto Yashodhar like the veritable god of death. The enemy soldiers tried to surround him but they could not. Virdev's strokes sent them to death one by one. At once, Virdev with one wave of his sword cut off the tusk of Yashodhar's elephant. The wounded elephant ran away from the battle-field. Everywhere soldiers were running helter-skelter. Virdev threw a spear at the elephant which was running away and compelled the Emperor to get off the elephant.

The Emperor at once, mounted the horse and began fighting. Virdev said in a roaring voice.

"I thought the Emperor himself would come to liberate the prince but Virdev himself had to come here to take the Emperor".

"Damn it. You are a wicked fellow".

"Oh King! I am not a wicked fellow but the messenger of death, the god of death".

"Then you too taste this", saying this the Emperor threw his spear at Virdev.

Virdev escaped the stroke of the spear and with the speed of a lightning he threw his spear and killed Yashodhar's horse. The emperor began fighting, standing on the ground. Virdev also dismounted from his horse and began fighting with the Emperor.

Suddenly, the whole battle-field began to reverberate with the cries of victory issued by the soldiers of Ayodhya. The cries of victory filled the atmosphere. King Dasarath of Ayodhya had

wounded Maniratna the Chief Minister of Magadha, captured him and sent him to his tent.

Then, the valiant King Dasarath rushed towards the Emperor and began a terrible fight against him. The armies of Ayodhya, were engaged in attacking the enemies. The soldiers of Magadha were in despair and were imploring for protection. A terrible commotion appeared everywhere. Along with the enemy-armies, even the armies of Ayodhya suffered a heavy loss.

Chief Minister Somaprabha entered the city through the western gate and had to fight against Field Marshal Sugupta. A terrible fight began between the two. Somaprabha had with him more than ten thousand soldiers whereas Sugupta had with him twenty thousand soldiers. The soldiers on foot began to fight. At the very beginning, the soldiers of Magadha displayed such heroism that within a short time Somaprabha turned pale and was unable to think of doing anything; but a little later Sugupta realised the extraordinary militaric abilities of Somaprabha; and he was stunned by Somaprabha's valour. Just as a farmer cuts off crops, Somaprabha cut off the heads of enemy soldiers and began to move towards the eastern gate. Sugupta did everything he could to stop him; but all his efforts were in vain. He was leaping forward like an annoyed lion.

Sugupta's anxiety knew no bounds. He became greatly agitated. He ordered his servants to prevent Somaprabha from reaching the Eastern gate. Somehow or the other, he should be stopped on the way but the able soldiers of Ayodhya foiled all his plans. Within a short time all his plans failed. Somaprabha attacked him determined to take revenge against him. With one stroke he broke Sugupta's sword into pieces and fell upon him. Within a short time Somaprabha captured him and sent him to the tent meant for political prisoners. Then, without a moment's delay, Somaprabha proceeded towards the Eastern gate and opened the main gate. The soldiers of Ayodhya stood guard at the gate. The night had almost come to an end. Outside a terrible fight was going on between King Dasarath and the

Emperor of Magadha. Virdev rushed forward towards Dasarath and whispered to him.

“Your Highness ! You may now enter Rajgrihi”.

At once, Dasarath proceeded towards the main gate while Virdev remained there fighting against the Emperor. Anjali and Shambal also came there. The emperor was surrounded on all sides. The soldiers of Ayodhya intoxicated by the desire to fight, attacked him. The Emperor was wounded; moved up a little like a wounded snake and attacked Virdev with his mace. Virdev covered with blood began to roll on the ground. Shambal came forward and lifted up Virdev. Anjali was indignant at the Emperor's action. Her eyes grow red. She began to shake with anger. She like a terrible goddess attacked the Emperor. King Dasarath received the news that Virdev was seriously injured in the fight. Somaprabha remained near Dasarath and was engaged in routing the hostile soldiers. He heard the news and proceeded to help Virdev. Anjali stopped him on the way and said, angrily.

“I shall myself kill the ignoble Emperor who injured my father and who threw down my friend.” And she threw her spear and broke to pieces the Emperor's crown. Then she took daggers in her hands and began fighting against the Emperor dragging him into a conflict. A serious encounter took place between the two. Neither of them was inferior to the other. She finding a suitable opportunity, attacked the Emperor in such a way that he fell down and began rolling on the ground. At once, Anjali cut off his hand and stabbed him with her dagger. Suddenly, blood flowed from his body.

The emperor lay on the ground like an uprooted tree. Suddenly, there appeared a commotion everywhere. The soldiers began to run helter-skelter. Everyone was trying to save his life. The soldiers took to their heels to save their lives. The cries of victory issued by the soldiers of Ayodhya began to reverberate in the skies. The King of Ayodhya at once threw away the flag of Magadha fluttering over the main-gate and hoisted there the flag of Ayodhya. Hearing the cries of victory

issued by King Dasarath, the soldiers of Ayodhya were delighted and elated.

The Commander Vikramaraj who had launched an invasion from the mountainous regions of the north routed Suman the commander of Magadha and countless soldiers; and reached Rajgrihi. Suman was captured and sent to be kept a prisoner.

King Dasarath's rule was proclaimed in Rajgrihi. The drums were beaten to announce the commencement of the rule of King Dasarath of Ayodhya over the Magadha empire. King Dasarath entered Rajgrihi accompanied by Chief Minister Somaprabha, Commander Vikramaraj and Anjali. Lamentations and cries of distress were heard from the harem of the emperor. King Dasarath sent a message of consolation and condolence to the harem. Proclamations were made everywhere informing people not to entertain any fears. The people freed from fear became engaged in their daily activities. Peace appeared everywhere.

King Dasarath handing over the responsibility of the government and administration of Magadha to Chief Minister Somaprabha and Commander Vikramaraj, went to meet Virdev and King Shubhamati who lay wounded in a tent. Both were free from danger. They would recover their health and spirits slowly. Anjali was engaged in rendering service to them. In the evening the body of Yashodhar was cremated with royal honours.

The next day, the very first thing done was to release Chief Minister, Shrishen from prison. King Dasarath himself went to the prison-house; released Shrishen and embraced him. Then, taking him with him, Dasarath came to the royal court.

There was a magnificent golden throne in the Court. King Dasarath ascended the throne. The brahmins chanted hymns of glorification. After the inaugural function the court began its activities. The political prisoners, Chief Minister Maniratna, Field Marshal Sugupta, the commander Suman and the other

state officials of Magadha stood in a proper order on the left side of the throne. On the right side Somaprabha the Chief Minister of Mithila, Chief Minister Shrishen, Vikramaraj the commander of the northern kingdoms, valiant Virdev and Anjali sat in their seats. All sat in their seats and were waiting for the commencement of the activities of the court.

King Shubhamati sat in a throne on the right side of King Dasarath. The leading citizens of the city and the high officials of Ayodhya attracted the attention of all. After a glorification of Bhagwan Rishabhdev and after uttering cries of victory the resounding voice of King Dasarath was heard.

“Let the political prisoners be released !”

Virdev stood up. He saluted the King; came forward and first of all released Maniratna, the Chief Minister of Magadha. Then, he released Sugupta, the commander, Suman and other state officials. They were all given proper seats as commanded by the King. King Dasarath in his first speech, heartily thanked all those heroes and allies and subordinates who had extended an active co-operation to him in the invasion of Magadha. First of all, he mentioned the name of King Shubhamati and expressed his gratitude to him in glowing terms; and honoured him with splendid words of praise. Then, he praised in glowing words the heroism, the valour, the power of resolution, the loyalty and the qualities of leadership displayed by Virdev who had been sent from Ayodhya by Chief Minister Shrishen. He called Virdev to his side and presented to him a sword studded with gems. Then, the King praised in glowing terms the tremendous heroism and incomparable valour displayed by the able commander, Vikramaraj and honoured him in a proper manner. After that, he praised the heroism, the political wisdom and strategic skill of Somaprabha, the Chief Minister of Mithila.

And at the end, King Dasarath mentioned the name of Anjali; and said overwhelmed with emotion : “Really, I find no words to praise Anjali. Her incisive intelligence, her capacity for taking quick decisions, her outstanding heroism, her capacity

to remain unshaken in the most dangerous calamities are beyond words. She is not only a beautiful damsel but also a young lady of tremendous potentialities. She can inspire confidence and courage in those who are in bitter despair. King Shubhamati allowed her to join the campaign against Magadha; and this itself is a great honour to her. How can I honour her? What words can I use to honour her adequately? I feel that I cannot find words to praise her. Whatever is said in praise of her is too little".

Anjali sat by her father, King Shubhamati and bending her eyes towards the ground, she heard with concentration every word uttered by King Dasarath but her mind was wandering in a different direction. Repeatedly her eyes turned towards Virdev. She seemed to desire that all the credit for the victory over Magadha should go to Virdev. Just then, Dasarath announced :

"From today onwards, Virdev shall be Chief Minister of Magadha. I honour him with this status".

All clapped their hands in approval of Dasarath's declaration. In the midst of the noises of the clappings of hands, the people also uttered words of approval. Joy and jubilation appeared everywhere. Virdev again approached the King Dasarath. The King offered him the signet-ring of the position of Chief Minister. He received the signet-ring, bowed his head and said in a humble manner :

"I, Virdev swear on Bhagwan Rishabhdev and my soul that until the last drop of blood remains in my body, I shall be absolutely loyal to the Emperor of Magadha and if it becomes necessary, I shall be always ready to give up my life joyfully to prove my sincerity and loyalty".

Again the court resounded with the noise of the clapping of hands.

After that, King Dasarath honoured Chief Minister Maniratna, Field Marshal Sugupta and Commander Suman by installing them in high positions. They too agreed to receive

those positions and declared that they would remain loyal to the King of Ayodhya. At the end, King Dasarath announced his political policy and administrative measures :

“We know very well that in Rajgrihi and in the Magadha Empire, countless animals and birds were being killed. We desire to root out this distortion . . . this mockery. All jivas have a right to exist. Our policy is not to encroach upon their rights. Therefore, henceforth, the Empire of Magadha shall follow the policy”, **“Live and let live”**. We desire to establish the ethical traditions of Bhagwan Rishabhdev and we are sure that this non-violent culture of Bhagwan Rishabhdev shall bring peace, felicity and prosperity to all Jivas. I desire . . . and I am sure that all of you will follow these ideals in your life and will disseminate them”.

“May the desire of his excellency be fulfilled”. Chief Minister Virdev said rising to his feet. Then the court was dismissed for the day.

The very next day, King Shubhamati set off to Kautuk-mangal. Chief Minister Somaprabha and Commander Vikramaraj stayed there taking rest for a few days and returned to their respective places. Chief Minister Shrishen had already returned to Ayodhya because he had to send Queen Aparajita and Sumitra, at once to Rajgrihi.

Anjali was still staying at Rajgrihi because Kaikayi was about to come there shortly. Virdev was engaged in organising the administration in Magadha. He had so much work that he could not find time even to take his food. For some days, he could not even meet Anjali. One day, unexpectedly, they met. He had gone to meet her. On seeing him, Anjali said jocularly :

“May the Chief Minister of Magadha Virdev be victorious !”

“Anjali, instead of calling me Chief Minister, say that I am your brother. That is what I like more”.

“All right brother. May my brother be victorious”.

"I think you said it after careful thinking".

"Where is the need for thinking in this matter?"

"Am I your brother?"

For a moment, Anjali looked at him with fixed eyes. Virdev's eyes grew moist.

"True Virdev. I feel blessed to secure a heroic and noble brother like you. Indeed, to-day, my life has attained its fulfilment".

"Anjali, we are indeed brother and sister".

"Is it true Virdev?"

"Yes, sister. We are children of one father though our mothers are different".

Anjali kept looking at him with fixed eyes.

"King Shubhamati revealed this secret to me at the time of his setting off. Until then I too was completely ignorant of it" Virdev said in a serious voice.

Anjali turned pale to hear this. She fell into deep thoughtfulness. After a few moments, she said.

"Virdev, I shall go back to Kautukmangal".

When Anjali said this, suddenly Virdev's eyes welled up with tears.

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RAM AND LAKSHMAN

Wherever a heroic and valiant person moves, the land on which he treads comes under his sway. King Dasarath who set off from Ayodhya in disguise conquered the vast empire of Magadha by virtue of his militaric prowess. At the appointed time, Queen Aparajita, Sumitra and others also had come. Everywhere joy and jubilation appeared. People will not be aware of the passage of time in times of happiness and prosperity. Rajgrihi developed by leaps and bounds. Rivers of milk and curds flowed in the city. The goddesses of progress and prosperity bestowed their blessings on the city and began filling every street and house with smiles and delights.

Meanwhile, one night queen Aparajita saw four great dreams. Since the dreams appeared unexpectedly, the queen began to sway with joy and elation. In her dreams, she saw an elephant, a lion, cool and pleasant moon and the supremely radiant sun. The four dreams were symbolic of the incarnation of *Baladev* upon this earth. In the morning Queen Aparajita spoke of her dreams. King Dasarath's joy knew no bounds.

In course of time, a sublime jivatma existing in *Bramha-devalok* completed his span of life there and at the destined moment appeared in the womb of Queen Aparajita. From that moment, Queen Aparajita's beauty and grace began to develop like the splendour of the waxing moon. In her heart, there arose various kinds of desires. King Dasarath with great enthusiasm and delight, kept fulfilling her desires. After the period of pregnancy, Queen Aparajita gave birth to a son who possessed all the sublime virtues and features. The emperor of Magadha Dasarath was overwhelmed with delight when his first son was

born, just as the ocean swells at the sight of the full moon. King Dasarath like the miraculous gem *Chintamani* gave gifts to the deserving with the greatest magnanimity. It is an ancient tradition in Bharath to give gifts to the deserving when a son is born. Sweets were distributed all over the empire.

The people of Rajgrihi overwhelmed with joy planned to celebrate the birth of the prince on a grand scale. Thousands of citizens thronged to the palace. The people of the city swaying with enthusiasm gave the king presentations of fruits and flowers. In all the streets, roads and houses of the city, noble ladies began singing auspicious songs. Scented water was sprinkled on the roads. Everywhere, the city was decorated with festoons and garlands. A large number of emperors and kings came to Rajgrihi and gave King Dasarath precious presentations. The tremendous effect of Shri Ram's merit began to manifest itself.

On an auspicious day, at an auspicious time, the boy was named "Padma". In course of time, Padma became famous in this world as Shri Ram. The magnificent palace of Rajgrihi swelled with joy and elation when Shri Ram stepped on its floor.

Sometime after the birth of Shri Ram, Sumitra saw seven great dreams. She at once woke up from her sleep; remembered her dreams in detail and straight went to King Dasarath; and described her dreams. King Dasarath was greatly delighted to hear it. Swaying with delight he said,

"Dear queen! The elephant, the lion, the moon, the fire, the goddess of wealth and the sea seen by you in your dreams are symbolic of the birth of *Vasudev*. Therefore, the child that is going to appear in your womb is capable of becoming *Vasudev*".

Sumitra was greatly delighted to hear the effect of her dreams from King Dasarath and she began to take great care of the child in her womb. After the passage of the destined time she gave birth to a son. It was as if the greatest benefactor and well-wisher of the world was born. Dasarath celebrated

the birth of his second son on a grand scale and organised the eight kinds of worship in all the Jin temples in the city. In all the Jin temples the Jin images were consecrated. All the prisoners were released as a part of the celebration. Gifts were given to the needy magnanimously. A sublime person is born only for the happiness and progress of Jivas. The King and the subjects experienced great delight and elation.

The people of the city and King Dasarath celebrated the birth of Sumitra's son on a grand scale....It was celebrated on a grander scale than that of the birth of Shri Ram because the son of Sumitra possessed the merit of *Vasudev*.

At a proper time the boy was named Narayan. He later became famous as Lakshman. Ram and Lakshman fascinated the whole empire of Magadha. Everyone who saw Ram and Lakshman was spell-bound by their fascinating appearance and his heart overflowed with love. Their sublime appearance, their gentleness, their grace and their captivating voice fascinated everyone with the result that not only King Dasarath but all experienced extraordinary joy and elation at the sight of Ram and Lakshman.

The boys were brought up with extraordinary affection and love. In course of time, they reached the phase of youth. King Dasarath engaged scholars of outstanding eminence to educate the boys. But the scholars and masters of the various arts were merely like observers witnessing their development because Ram and Lakshman were born after having attained a pacification of their passions. In other words, they had great *Punya* or merit. As a result of this, the two brothers achieved an absolute mastery over all arts and accomplishments, within a short time.

Every day people had the opportunity of witnessing their skill in the use of various weapons and in archery and that sight filled them with great joy. Dasarath was immensely happy to see their extraordinary heroism and physical strength. In consequence, he began to make many plans for the future.

This incident occurred one day. King Dasarath was sitting on his throne in the Court of Magadha. The ministers, the high state-officials, the leading citizens and the heads of the leading families were present in the court. The courtesans were about to begin dancing. Just then, the door-keeper came into the court. He bowed to the King and stood near him. The dance ended and the activities of the Court began.

“May the emperor of Magadha be victorious. Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya desires to present himself in the court”.

“Bring in the Chief Minister with honour”, the Emperor of Magadha glanced meaningfully towards the Chief Minister Virdev. On hearing about the arrival of Shrishen, Virdev at once stood up. As soon as the King gave his command he proceeded to the door. Just then he saw Shrishen entering the court. The same familiar, dignified bearing, the same broad forehead and grey hair ! He wore a white dress; had put on a silk upper-cloth and a red turban. A golden cover for the shoulders and a gold necklace around his neck added glory to his features. Virdev went two steps forward and saluted him touching his feet. Shrishen lifted Virdev and embraced him enthusiastically. Virdev’s eyes were filled with tears of joy.

“Virdev, do not forget that, now you are not an ordinary soldier but the Chief Minister of the vast empire of Magadha. My blessings are always with you”.

Shrishen entered the court holding the hand of Virdev. Shrishen offered his compliments to the King. The king descended from his throne; embraced Shrishen and offered him a seat near him.

For a little while, there was silence in the Court.

“I hope all are well at Ayodhya”.

“Oh King ! Ayodhya is quite prosperous and happy on account of your greatness. But Ayodhya has been looking forward eagerly to seeing you”.

For a few moments, King Dasarath fell into deep thoughtfulness. There was silence everywhere. Some memories of Ayodhya flashed before Dasarath one after another, in the form of pictures. Joy and sorrow played hide and seek with his face.

“Dear Chief Minister ! We will at once set off to Ayodhya” King Dasarath said looking meaningfully towards Virdev. Virdev was rather shocked by the king’s sudden decision to go to Ayodhya, because he knew how for many years King Dasarath had loved Magadha. King Dasarath had become a part and parcel of the lives of the people of Magadha. King Dasarath had done everything necessary to help Magadha achieve development and progress. He was always engaged in the task of improving the empire and he shared the joys and sorrows of the people. Now, would such a king leave Magadha and go away ? Especially after the birth of Ram and Lakshman the people of Magadha had developed deep attachment for the royal family. Within a moment a suspicion arose in the mind of Virdev. He wondered whether the people of Magadha would agree to this proposal of the King to set off to Ayodhya with his family. They could never bear the separation from Ram and Lakshman.

“Virdev, what are you thinking of so deeply ? My heart is deeply attached to Magadha and I feel deeply sad to cut off these bondages of affection. The people of Magadha have bound me so fast with the bonds of love and affection that I find it impossible to break them off. I love Magadha greatly. Yet it is absolutely necessary that I should return to the capital of the Ikshvaku kings. Please do not ask me for the purpose of my going away so expeditiously. The agitation and yearning of my heart are the cause for my going there. A man may experience any amount of agitation but he cannot express it or explain it and I cannot say anything more.”

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The news that the King was returning to Ayodhya spread like wild fire in the city. The people of the city were plunged in grief. Everywhere, in the city people began to talk of it. The faces of the leading citizens became gloomy. No one was taking

interest in the administrative activities. The whole city appeared lifeless. A death-like stillness seemed to have enveloped the city. Ram and Lakshman also heard about it. They never thought that their father would take such a speedy decision. But of course they knew that some day or the other they had to return to Ayodhya. They heard from King Dasarath and from their mothers many interesting things about Ayodhya. Therefore, they too desired to see Ayodhya. So both the brothers were delighted to hear the news of their travel to Ayodhya. They were elated by the news but at the same time, they were sad at the prospect of leaving Magadha. They were born in Magadha. They had spent their childhood in Magadha. They had spent their boyhood in Magadha. They had acquired education and military training in Magadha. They had grown upto be young men and had experienced heavenly delights in Magadha. They had enjoyed the graces and glories of nature in Magadha and naturally they were greatly grieved to go away from Magadha. The two brothers came into the harem. They saluted Queen Aparajita with devotion; and she said pointing towards Shrishen.

“Dear sons ! Salute the Chief Minister of Ayodhya”.

The princes looked towards Shrishen who sat in a seat of state and who possessed a radiant personality; and saluted him with overflowing devotion. Then, making the two youngsters sit near her, she said;

“He is revered Shrishen of whom I used to speak to you. He has come to take us to Ayodhya”.

“No, great Queen ! That is not the only reason for my coming here. I have come also with the purpose of seeing the two rare flowers that are blooming on the tree of the Ikshvaku line. My desire has been fulfilled.” Shrishen said expressing his affection for the two princes.

“Oh you venerable man ! Our attachment for Magadha cannot be broken off so easily”. Shri Ram said with politeness.

“Dear prince ! You are right. Indeed, Magadha has by her love and nobility bound you to herself.....but...”

"But what oh, noble one ?"

"But it is absolutely necessary that all of you should come to Ayodhya".

"Why ?"

The prince's question grieved the Chief Minister. At once, there appeared gloom on the radiant face of the Chief Minister. His eyes welled up with tears. He began to watch with absorption through the window, the mountains that lay at a great distance from Rajgrihi.

"Dear Prince ! Till now many Kings of the Ikshvaku dynasty have occupied the throne of Ayodhya but that throne has been vacant for some years. From the time, King Dasarath left Ayodhya, the people of Ayodhya have been unhappy and agitated.....Moreover..."

"What else, dear Chief Minister ?"

Queen Aparajita asked eagerly.

"Oh Queen ! Now, even I am old and weak. Old age has enfeebled me. I do not know when this life of mine may end"

"Please do not say so, dear Chief Minister. Ayodhya still greatly needs your able and noble services." Aparajita spoke with tenderness.

"Noble Queen ! As long as there is life in this body, it will dedicate itself to the service of Ayodhya. I have become a part and parcel of Ayodhya. But I feel again and again that nature; may not allow this relationship to continue for long".

"Oh you venerable one ! We have heard from our father and mother many thrilling stories of your splendid service to Ayodhya. For many years, in the absence of my father, you have taken care of the throne of Ayodhya with incomparable ability, wisdom and loyalty. We are greatly impressed with your ability, dedication, intelligence, your astonishing valour; and your tremendous honesty. These things will make you immortal. Moreover, Ayodhya will always remember all your extraordinary services".

“Dear prince, your politeness will brighten the history of the Ikshvaku line of Kings”.

“Oh you venerable one. All this is the result of the grace of Bhagwan Rishabhdev”.

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Rajgrihi was plunged in grief. The people of the city were grieved at the prospect of the separation from the King. They were shedding tears. All the people of Magadha, young and old were experiencing sorrow which had enveloped their minds like the darkness of the night of the newmoon day. It was as if the sun, the source of all light had lost his radiance. The sighs and weeping of noble women were heart-rending. Large numbers of people from various parts of Magadha thronged to the palace.

Why had this atmosphere of sorrow appeared? Why had the faces of the people grown gloomy? There was only one cause for this.

King Dasarath was going to Ayodhya for good. The royal family that had bestowed peace and felicity on the people of Magadha and had won their love and affection was now going away to Ayodhya. Oh! What a mockery this is! Neither those that were leaving nor those that were bidding farewell to them were happy. Those who were going away were going away because of a necessity; and those who were bidding them farewell were doing so unwillingly. All were plunged in grief. As a matter of necessity they had to carry on their daily activities. This is the futility of *samsar*.

Now, the eyes of the people of Magadha and the members of the royal family were not fixed upon the golden chariot of King Dasarath but they were fixed on King Dasarath himself who was sitting in his chariot with a blank mind. Dasarath was worried and agitated not as the King of Magadha but as an individual who had loved those people.

Ram and Lakshman who shone like gods sat on either side of Dasarath. Their eyes also were not bright. They were not enthusiastic. They sat with blank minds watching intently the large crowds of people thronging the streets of Rajgrihi. All seemed to be saying, “Oh you beloved one! The star of our

eyes ! Dear prince ! Please do not forget us. You may become the prince of Ayodhya and the King of Ayodhya but you were born and brought up in Magadha. Magadha has become a part and parcel of yourself. You played on the heroic land of Magadha. You bloomed in the pleasant air of Magadha. Therefore, in our eyes you are the emperor of Magadha”.

Queen Aparajita and Sumitra sat in a chariot that followed Dasarath's chariot. Kaikayi and Suprabha sat in a chariot that was following it. The chariots were proceeding slowly.

Behind the three chariots Virdev, the Chief Minister of Magadha was riding on a horse. His eyes had grown red with weeping. Yet he was unable to restrain his sorrow. Shrishen, the Chief Minister of Ayodhya was riding behind Virdev. His face was serious and dignified. He seemed to be probing the mysteries of life and trying to understand its unchangeable laws. He seemed to be making fruitless endeavours to bring about a change in the fixed laws and values of life. Behind them all, soldiers on elephants, soldiers on horses and the infantry were moving and behind them the people of Magadha were coming in large numbers. They reached the boundary of the city. No one was willing to return. Nobody had the courage to say, “Now you may go back”. All kept moving silently, sadly, agitatedly by the prospect of the separation. Suddenly, Dasarath's chariot stopped. He descended from his chariot and went a few paces towards the people of Magadha; and then, he saluted the people with folded hands. The people of Magadha began to cry aloud and the whole atmosphere was pervaded with deep sorrow. Everywhere, sighs and cries were heard. The King, at last, tried to give them his final message. But he could not say anything. His voice was choked with emotion. With great difficulty, he lifted his hands, shook them by way of taking leave of them and then sat in his chariot.

The King's chariot proceeded. The people stood on the sides of the road with bowed heads. They kept watching the chariots, unable to do anything. At last, the people returned to Rajgrihi with blank minds and grieved hearts.

LI

THE BIRTH OF SITA

Some years passed after their return to Ayodhya. Even after such a long time the members of the royal family remembered the love and devotion of the people of Magadha. Kaikayi also had auspicious dreams and she in course of time gave birth to a son. On an auspicious day, along with grand celebrations the boy was named Bharath. Queen Suprabha also gave birth to a son and he became famous as Shatrughna. Bharath and Shatrughna were like *Baladev and Vasudev*. They were always together. Generally, Ram and Lakshman took Bharath and Shatrughna wherever they went. They loved one another greatly. Dasarath was greatly happy to see his four sons playing about. The four sons were like four pillars supporting his empire and all his future plans and purposes depended upon them.

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Now, here is an episode relating to Jambudweep.

There was a beautiful city by name Dharugram. It shone splendid with progress and prosperity. There lived in that city a brahmin by name Vasumati. He had a wife by name Anukosha.

Vasumati and Anukosha gave birth to a son who was named Atibhuti. Atibhuti was their only son whom they loved greatly. He married a beautiful young lady by name Sarasa.

Atibhuti had a bosom friend by name Kayan. They were very intimate friends. So it was natural for the members of the two families to visit each other but Kayan began to visit Atibhuti frequently after his marriage. Kayan was infatuated with Sarasa's incomparable beauty. He was fascinated by the beauty

of his friend's wife. Man who is a slave to passion does anything! Kayan secretly decided to abduct Sarasa. Accordingly he made a plan and eloped with Sarasa one day. Atibhuti had inordinate trust in Kayan but Kayan did not hesitate to betray the trust reposed in him. He was a foe in the garb of a friend. He like a viper bit the man that trusted him.

In the beginning Kayan had great affection for Atibhuti but after seeing Sarasa he became blinded by the infatuation for her. On account of that infatuation he desired to secure Sarasa for himself. He could not restrain his infatuation and it impelled him to deceive his friend. Actually, while abducting Sarasa he did not think even a little of what might happen to Atibhuti.

When Atibhuti came to know that Kayan had eloped with his wife he was plunged in grief. He felt greatly grieved. He fell into a state of deep anguish with the result that he became mad.

He always wandered in search of his wife. His radiant face became dull and depressed. He kept wandering from place to place in great distress. Sometimes he visualized his beautiful wife and sometimes he visualized his deceitful friend laughing arrogantly. He became indignant with both. He left home and kept searching for Sarasa.

He kept wandering from place to place searching for Sarasa. He searched for her among mountains, in deep valleys and in forests and groves but she was not to be seen anywhere.

Vasubhuti and Anukosha could not bear with the separation from their son and daughter-in-law. They too set off in search of their son and daughter-in-law.

A long time passed thus. But Atibhuti could not find his dear wife. The parents also could not find their son and daughter-in-law.

While Vasubhuti and Anukosha were wandering thus, by chance, one day, they met a saint. They were filled with devo-

tion when they saw the pure, serene and tender face of the great Muni. They saluted the Muni and sat on one side.

Both had been agitated by life. The Muni made them realize the evils of life. Just as sorrow can cause agitation to jivas in *Samsar*, even happiness can cause agitation. It is believed that a son is the source of the greatest happiness to parents but that source became in the case of Vasubhuti and Anukosha, a source of great anguish. A wife is said to be a source of happiness in *Samsar*; but now his wife caused inordinate anguish and agony to Atibhuti and made him wander madly from place to place, like a ghost or a spectre.

Vasubhuti realized the futility of life and surrendered his life at the feet of the great Muni. He received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* and cut off all his attachments for life.

In the same manner, his wife, Anukosha surrendered herself to Arya Kamalashri and became a Sadhvi.

Vasubhuti and Anukosha attained peace and serenity thus. Since they began to meditate upon and to assimilate the real nature of *Samsar* they forgot their sorrow. Both were deeply absorbed in the endeavours to attain spiritual elevation.

And then, one day, both cut off all their bondages with life and were born as heavenly beings in the *Saudharma* heaven. After his span of life there ended, Vasubhuti was born as the prince in the royal family of Ratanupur situated in the Vaithadhya mountains. He was named Chandrakirti. In course of time, Anukosha also was born as a Vidhyadhar maid, among the Vaithadhya mountains. After she reached the age of marriage, she was given in marriage to Chandrakirti. In consequence, she became the queen of Ratanupur.

When Sarasa was abducted by Kayan, she did not realize that he was ignoble and lecherous because when he took her away he employed deceitful wiles and deceptive guiles. When she realized the nature of her action, she began to shudder with fear. She was not prepared to deceive her husband under any circumstances. So, she firmly refused to satisfy the sinful

desires of Kayan; he thought : "What is the use of having any relations with a woman who does not have any love or attachment for me ?" and one day, he went away discarding Sarasa.

Sarasa was alone. She was alone in the wild forest of *Samsar*. She began to travel alone through that forest. As she kept wandering, she one day came to a town. While she was wandering in the town, she met a *Sadhvi* by chance. She saluted the *Sadhvi* and began following her. In course of time, she liked the life of a *Sadhvi*. She became a *Sadhvi* and began to endeavour to attain spiritual elevation. When the span of her life ended, she was born in the heavenly world called *Ishan*.

Atibhuti who had a deep attachment for Sarasa became a prey of intense lerable grief. He became weak and decrepit; and ultimately he fell a victim to cruel death.

Yet his emotions prompted by infatuation did not abate; and he continued his search for Sarasa through various *janmas* in various states of existence. Thus in one of his *janmas* he was born as a beautiful swan. When the swan was yet a young one; it fell a victim to a dog and unexpectedly, a muni came there. The muni recited *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* to the dying swan; the swan attained great peace. After its death, the swan was born as a *Kinnar* (a demi god) in the heavenly world. In fact, the efficacy of *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra* is inconceivable and immeasurable.

After completing his span of life in the heavenly world of *Kinnaras*, he was born in the city of *Vidaghdanagar*. He was born as *Kundalamandit*, the only son of King *Prakashasimha* and Queen *Pravaravali*.

Kayan, whose sensual desires remained unsatisfied, kept knocking about from place to place. He had to wander through the *Samsar* for a long time. After many *janmas*, he was born in the city of *Chakrapur*, as the son of the Court-priest, *Dhuma-kesh* and was named *Pingal*.

Pingal went to study under the teacher who was also the teacher of *Atisundari*, the daughter of *Chakradhwaja*, the King

of Chakrapur. In course of time, on account of their regular meeting in the same place, there arose between them the intimacy of love. They fell in love with each other. In consequence one day, Pingal eloped with Atisundari. They came to Vidaghdanagar.

Is it not said that misfortune and sin do not spare anyone? Whatever a Jiva may do he has to experience the fruit of his sins. In the case of Kayan also, the same thing happened. On account of his unfulfilled sensual desires Kayan was born as Pingal. He wandered through many lives but his sins which he had committed in his earlier lives could not be shaken off. Eventhough, he was born in the noble and cultured family of a court-priest, his sensual cravings never abated. On account of this reason, he abducted Atisundari and came to Vidaghdanagar but he could not find any means to earn a living. Hunger caused great anguish to him. He found it difficult to face this problem. Atisundari's agitations knew no bounds. Though Pingal was a bramhin, he had not mastered any *shastras* or any accomplishments. Therefore, in order to make a living, he had to adopt other methods. He went to the forest; collected firewood and sold it in the city; and lived on whatever he got by selling the firewood.

Atisundari's infatuation decreased. Their conversations were interrupted by harsh words and bitter expressions of anger. Her family life was affected by poverty.

Once Pingal went to the forest to fetch firewood, Atisundari sat beneath a tree near her straw hut. It was afternoon. She was in great anguish and worry. She was a princess. Blinded by infatuation and deceived by the sweet flattery of Pingal, she had given up her royal splendour and happiness and had settled down with him to family life. But her mind was shaken by her lover's poverty and helplessness and her yearning for splendour and prosperity. She began to curse her fate. Just then, a rider on horseback came and stood before her. He was bathed in perspiration. His forehead was covered with perspiration. His face had grown dull on account of tiresomeness. Leaving the horse beneath a tree he came to her. When he saw her

beauty he forgot his tiresomeness; and he went a few paces forward. His eyes began to feast on her beauty. In the same manner, Atisundari's eyes were fixed on his splendid face. Their eyes met and there arose in their hearts, a tender feeling of love for each other. The love that had existed between them in their previous life awoke within a moment. At once, Atisundari went to Prince Kundalamandit and stood before him with a bowed head.

Both were silent, but their faces and eyes were communicating with each other. Each began to yearn for the other's company. Prince Kundalamandit got ready to take Atisundari to his palace but he entertained a fear :

"Will my father approve of this love of mine ? Will he give a place to her in the palace ? Will he accept her as his daughter-in-law. No. No This is not possible. This can never take place. I know my father's nature very well. If she comes to my palace reposing trust in me and if she is thus disgraced and insulted, should I keep quiet ?" Kundalamandit kept thinking. Atisundari began to entertain a suspicion. She thought :

"The prince does not seem to be pleased to receive my love".

Then she said :

"O Prince ! What are you thinking of ?" He was startled by her sudden question. She looked at him with fixed eyes. She came near him and kept looking at him. The prince was thrilled to see the graceful face of Atisundari. He muttered some words in a vague manner.

"No. Beautiful damsel ! There is no such thing. You are the queen of my heart. Where can I go leaving you ? I will never leave you".

When the memories of past ages and lives wake up, a sudden change comes about in human life. All their efforts will be useless. At such a time the world condemns them and makes accusations against them, but how can the world know the memories and instincts of past lives that lie concealed in the depths of the minds and hearts of people. The auspicious

and the inauspicious endeavours of human beings are prompted by the noble or ignoble actions of their past lives. The capacity to frustrate those karmas and to render them ineffectual is not present in all. Very rarely do we come across people who have that capacity. Ordinary capacity is not enough to change the effect of noble and ignoble karmas. Extraordinary capacity is necessary for it. This extraordinary capacity appears in jivas only when their *Viryantaray Karma* is pacified partly and destroyed partly. This *Kshayopashama* is not of the same level in all jivas. Supposing on account of a lower degree of *Kshayopashama* in some jivas evil Karmas produce their effect, people are incapable of controlling those Karmas. We cannot blame their souls for it. They have to act according to their karmas.

Prince Kundalamandit placing Atisundari on his horse proceeded through a forest. Atisundari could not understand why the prince was riding into the forest instead of taking her to the palace. After a while, the horse began galloping. She thought, "This is not the proper time to ask the prince anything". So, she suppressed her eagerness and kept quiet. Of course, she was happy that she was safe in the hands of a capable man and that he would receive her as his wife.

The horse was not allowed to stop until the sunset. It kept galloping. At last, the sun disappeared in the west. The prince had entered the dense forest. On all sides, there were sky-high trees and plants, playing hide and seek with the sky and the place was surrounded by high mountains. The forest was desolate and terrifying but the prince was not unfamiliar with it because he had gone there a couple of times before.

The prince stopped the horse beneath a huge tree and helped Atisundari to dismount from the horse. Then the prince heaved a sigh of relief.

"Dear one ! Here you can be free from all fear and worry".

"Dear lord ! I gave up all my fears and worries as soon as I saw you".

"You take rest here. I will go and fetch some fruits and water."

Then, the prince taking with him a leather bag to fetch water went away into the forest. Atisundari was greatly astonished by the heroism, valour and appearance of the prince. Of course, they had not become familiar with each other. They were unknown to each other. Yet, there had appeared between them an intimacy as if they had been familiar with each other for ages.

Within a short time, the prince returned. He placed in her hands the leather bag containing water and placed before her the fruits he had brought wrapped in the upper-cloth.

"Dear one ! I think you are very hungry."

"My lord ! I feel blessed to have attained your grace. How can hunger and thirst agitate me now ?"

"Dear one ! You have come away with me without knowing who I am."

"Then, have you brought me here after finding out who I am".

"Yes, I recognized you at the very first sight".

"In the same manner, I too recognized you at the first sight".

"Oh beautiful damsel ! Your intelligence is sharp and incisive but compared to you I am nothing".

"Very well. Whatever it may be now you have some food".

The prince took out his dagger and began to cut the fruits. Atisundari took the dagger from his hands; cut the fruits into pieces and gave them to him with great affection.

Both ate fruits and drank water to their satisfaction. After having had food, they were engaged in an amorous conversation for a long time. After that, the prince made beds out of some dry grass. Then, he spread upon those beds a red cloth that had been used to cover the horse. They spent the night happily.

The sun rose, Birds began to twitter in the trees. Cool breezes began to blow. The prince decided to settle down to a family life in the forest. Atisundari's joy knew no bounds. She gave her consent gladly. The prince, at once, put up a straw-hut and they began to live in it happily. Atisundari felt that she had attained heavenly bliss. The prince used to go out in the mornings. He returned in the evenings having earned something. Sometimes, he brought foodgrain and sometimes he brought dress and decorations.

Sometimes, when Atisundari asked him how he got those things he evaded her question and merely smiled. This behaviour of the prince made her rather sad. There arose in her mind the suspicion that the prince might be robbing those things from travellers. Her suspicion gradually increased.

In course of time the prince became the leader of all the robbers and thieves in the area and in that area there appeared a colony of robbers and thieves. The robbers and thieves obeyed every word of the prince and carried out every command of his. In course of time, the prince prospered and his straw-hut became a splendid mansion. The prince somehow kept all his comrades happy and cheerful. He took care to see that no one had any trouble or worry. Atisundari also mixed with them freely sharing their joys and sorrows.

The prince liked the vicinity of Ayodhya. It was an ideal place for robbing people. Every day he went into the territory of Ayodhya; robbed people and returned to his village in the forest.

Why was he doing all this ? He had to recapture his father's kingdom; not by means of politeness or humbleness but by means of force. He desired to organise an army and he was committing robberies to fulfil this desire of his. He could not collect a large army without a lot of money.

In course of time, King Dasarath came to know of the robberies that were taking place in the area. In order to prevent the robberies and to give protection to people, he sent a poten-

tate by name Balachandra with five thousand soldiers. Kundal-
mandit came to know of this. He decided to fight against the
army of King Dasarath and he informed his comrades of his
decision. All expressed their readiness to take part in the fight.

But fortune did not favour the prince and he was captured
by Balachandra. Many of his comrades died in the fight and
those who escaped death ran away. Hearing the news of the cap-
ture of the prince, Atisundari swooned. At once, all the women
of the village gathered there. After regaining her consciousness,
Atisundari began to weep aloud. Then those women tried to
comfort her and said :

“Dear lady ! Do not give way to sorrow. Our leader will
certainly return safe and secure. We are all prepared to sacrifice
our lives to bring him back”.

Balachandra took the prince to Ayodhya. Dasarath ordered
that the prince should be imprisoned. But, of course, Dasarath
was greatly impressed with his looks and his awe-inspiring
appearance. Within a short time, Dasarath came to know from
his spies that the young man was none other than the prince of
Vidagdhanagar. His anger disappeared. He released the prince
honourably.

The prince set off towards his village. On the way, by
chance, he met a muni by name Munichandra. From him, he
understood the greatness of the human state of existence. He
understood the ideals and values of life. He decided to turn
over a new leaf in his life. As a result of this, he at once received
from him the twelve great vows of a Shravak.

The return of the prince filled the people of the village with
great joy. Atisundari overwhelmed with joy embraced the
prince. Her face was covered with tears of joy. The prince
spoke words of comfort to her and told her about the transfor-
mation that had taken place in his life. He told her that he had
decided to give up robberies. Atisundari was greatly delighted
to hear this. At once, the colony of robbers changed into a
cultured village.

Of course, the prince was always thinking of recapturing his father's kingdom but he died before fulfilling that desire. Saddened by the separation from her husband, Atisundari ended her life.

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What about poor Pingal ? He became mad on account of the separation from Atisundari. During his wanderings, once he met a muni by name Guptacharya. He became a sadhu. Yet he could not forget Atisundari. He always cherished in his heart the memory of Atisundari and died. After his death, he was born as a god in the *Saudharma* heaven.

In course of time, the jivas of Kundalamandit and Atisundari were born as the children of King Janaka of Mithila and Queen Videha.

Videha was greatly happy to have given birth to the twins.

LII

THE FEARS EXPERIENCED IN MITHILA

Of course, Pingal went to heaven; but he could not forget Atisundari; he always remembered her. While he was in heaven, by virtue of his extrasensory perception, he visualized his *Purvajanma*; and he, identified by his divine vision, Kundalamandit, the abductor of Atisundari. He visualised Kundalamandit and Atisundari as having been born in the family of Janaka, the King of Mithila.

His hatred was immense and boundless. Suddenly, he entertained an evil idea. In his mind, there appeared a terrible idea. At once, he went to the human world. At that time the city of Mithila was enveloped in the darkness of the night and the people of the city were in deep sleep. Of course, guards were vigilantly watching the doors of the palace but who can stop a heavenly being from entering the palace? He straight went into the harem. The prince and the princess were sleeping in the lap of their mother, Queen Vidheha. At once, Pingaldev took up the prince. Pingaldev hated and despised the boy whom the king and the queen loved tenderly. This is the way of destiny. The same person is loved by somebody and hated by somebody else. He is honoured by somebody and disgraced by another. Somebody sees virtues in him. Somebody else sees defects in him.

Pingal made a cruel decision to beat the child against a stone and to kill him but in his cruel soul there suddenly arose a feeling of kindness. What was the cause for this? In his previous life, for sometime before his death, he had been a sadhu. That memory accompanied him to this life.

He began to think, "Ah! I have been experiencing the fruits of my sinful actions. One happy point is that I have been

a *sadhu* in one life. On account of that I have attained the heavenly state of existence. If again I commit the sin of infanticide I cannot attain liberation for countless lives”.

As a result of this kind of thinking his anger disappeared. His feeling of hatred vanished. He became peaceful and serene and he began to look at the child with affection and love. He decorated the child's ears with ear-rings studded with gems; he put a garland of pearls around his neck and decorated his hands with golden bracelets. The boy shone like a lightning decked with those ornaments.

Later, he placed the child on a beautiful bed of flowers in the pleasure-garden near Ratanupur situated in the Vythady mountains. He returned to the heavenly world called *Saudharma*.

In this transitory life, sin and merit bring about transformations thus. A short while ago, in the life of the prince, sin had emerged to the surface; and so he was about to be killed; but soon because of the effect of merit he found a happy place on a beautiful bed of flowers in the pleasure-garden. The guards who saw the child there at once conveyed the news to Emperor Chandrakirti.

At once, Chandrakirti came to the garden. He was overwhelmed with delight when he saw the child decorated with divine ornaments sleeping on a bed of flowers.

Chandrakirti's fame was resplendent. He possessed extraordinary splendour and prosperity. Ratanupur enjoyed unopposed sway. Rivers of milk and ghee flowed in the city but the King lacked one felicity. He had no children and now the child who was seen in the garden brought him that felicity also. He felt immensely happy. He took up the child affectionately. The child's sweet smiles filled the people around with a new joy. The strings of the emperor's heart produced sweet melodies. He embraced the child and held it in his arms.

He hurriedly went to the palace. Queen Pushpavati was lying on the bed, on the left. She had closed her eyes. The

emperor softly entered the chamber and placed the child in her lap. The child began to scream with joy on being brought in contact with a woman. The queen who was startled by the cries sat up on her bed. Her eyes widened with amazement when she saw the child laughing and making loud cries. For a few moments, she kept staring at the child spell-bound.

"Oh queen ! This is our son. God has given us this gift. I hope you like it".

"Oh King ! The child is beautiful . . . extraordinarily beautiful." There surged a spring of affection in the barren heart of the queen. Milk spilled spontaneously from her breasts.

In all the streets and circles of Ratanupur, drums were beaten and an announcement was made.

"Queen Pushpavati has given birth to a son."

The King and the people who were overwhelmed with joy made magnificent arrangements to celebrate the birth of the child. All the prisoners were released from jails, as a part of the celebration. In all the temples in the city worship and prayer were organized. Gifts were given magnanimously to the needy. The atmosphere of the city echoed with the auspicious songs sung to celebrate the birth of the child.

When Videha woke up she saw only the female child in her lap, not the prince.

When she could not see the prince near her she was greatly agitated. She was in great anguish on account of the disappearance of the prince. She sat up on her bed and cried, "What happened to my son ? Who took him away ?" Her cries echoed in the chamber. The lights were burning dimly. On hearing the cries of Videha, the maids and attendants woke up. All filled with fear gathered near the queen.

"Who has taken away my son ?"

"Dear Queen ! May the prince live long but no one came into the chamber in the night. Kindly see if the child is sleeping

with the King". Filled with doubts and fears, the attendants and maids searched for the child in every nook and corner of the palace but they could not find the child anywhere. The queen's anguish increased every moment. Like a frightened deer she kept looking this side and that and weeping aloud.

"Who has abducted my child ? I will see that the person who has abducted my child, is punished severely. I will see that, that person's bones are broken. Oh ! Find out my son and bring him to me".

Queen Videha's anger flowed out in the form of tears.

King Janaka came to know of the matter and he became speechless on hearing it. After recovering from the shock, he said, "What did you say ? Do you say that the prince is not to be seen anywhere ?" His eyes were widened with doubt and fear. At once, he came to the harem. As soon as she saw the king. Queen Videha ran to him like a hunted deer; fell at his feet and began to weep aloud.

"I do not know whose wicked eyes fell upon my son and who has abducted him..." Queen Videha said looking towards the King with tearful eyes. King Janak's throat was choked with grief. The tears flowed from his eyes.

"Do not worry, my dear queen. I will send our guards to search for our son; and see which fellow had the courage to commit this enormity."

The King comforted the queen by giving this assurance to her and at once, sent for the head of his spies. He informed the chief of the spies, of the matter and ordered him to arrange to search for the child. The chief went away to carry out the command of the King. The chief of the guards and his assistants searched for the child everywhere. The wheel of time kept revolving but they could not find any sign of the child. There arose all sorts of doubts and fears in the mind of Queen Videha. There was a violent turmoil. She gave up food. She did not take a bath and discarded all her ornaments and was always seen weeping over the disappearance of her child...." Who

has taken away my child ? What has happened to my son ? Who will sing lullabies to him and lull him to sleep ? Some cruel fellow might kiil him." Maddened by her anguish again and again she ran to the window and looked out. Standing at the window she kept looking for her son for hours and when she could not find any sign of her son she fell into a state of despair and agitation. Her condition caused grief not only to the King but also to all the people of the city. A mysterious fear coiled around her mind and heart like a dreadful serpent. She tried to find some comfort at the sight of her dear daughter, Sita. She took up Sita, embraced her and kissed her. Now, the only prop of her life was Sita....Sita was a tender bud that bloomed cheerfully.

In spite of all the efforts made by the guards the prince could not be traced. King Janak was in deep despair. The guards searched for the child in every village and town, in every forest and wood and in every nook and corner of the city but they could not trace any sign of the boy. The king and queen were in great despair. They cursed their misfortune and wept over the disappearance of the child. Of course, the sight of Sita helped them to forget their sorrow a little. Human life combines joys and sorrows. Joys and sorrows come and go. Neither sorrow nor joy remains for long. Whatever has to happen, happens. Nobody can prevent it from happening.

Sita !

King Janak and Queen Videha could not celebrate the birth of Sita. Soon after her birth, they had to suffer from the separation from their son. As they gradually forgot the sorrow caused by their son's disappearance, their love and affection for Sita kept increasing.

In course of time, Sita grew up to be a young lady of great beauty. She acquired mastery over many accomplishments. On account of her merit, Sita was surrounded by heavenly happiness and prosperity.

King Janak was filled with joy at the sight of Sita. Queen Videha could not bear separation from her daughter even for a

moment. She always stayed with her like her shadow. Sita became the object of all her affection and love. When Sita entered the phase of youth and when her body bloomed into beauty King Janak and Queen Videha began to experience a worry which others could not understand. King Janak was always worried about this.... "Where can we get a suitable bridegroom for Sita? Who is that fortunate young man?" His spies brought pictures of various kings, princes and potentates. He discussed the details relating to every portait with the Chief Minister, Somaprabha but he could not approve of any one of them. In consequence, he began to experience another worry. Already, he was experiencing one worry and now another worry began to agitate his mind.

Once, King Janak was in his court. The courtiers had forgotten themselves in hearing sweet music. The singer and the musicians were displaying their extraordinary skills. Just then, a messenger came into the court.

He saluted King Janak and stood before him. He had come from the border area. His face revealed his worry and anxiety.

"Your highness! Some ignoble kings have encroached upon our territories. The barbarian king of Ardhabarbara, by name Atarangtam supported by others has begun a terrible war."

"How many of our soldiers are there at the border?" King Janak said looking towards the Chief Commander.

"Dear Lord! Our armies on the border have been so far successful in routing the aggressors. Our armies are not inferior to those of any Kingdom but this time in the battle-field many of our soldiers had to die. This has increased the confidence and courage of the enemies. Moreover, the enemies are in large numbers. Of course even many enemy soldiers have died on the battle-field but their numbers instead of decreasing have been increasing like clouds of locusts."

"We should make preparations to defend our territories. If we cannot defeat the enemies by ourselves we have to take the

help and co-operation of our allies and friends. At any rate, our first duty is to drive out our enemies from our territories."

And then the King paused, for a moment. He fell into deep thoughtfulness. He remembered his dear friend, King Dasarath. He thought of his affection for him and his incomparable heroism. Turning towards the messenger, he said.

"At once, you go to Ayodhya. Meet King Dasarath and convey my message to him; and then without a moment's delay, you must bring me his message."

Then, King Janak prepared a detailed message. Carrying the message, the messenger sped away towards Ayodhya.

* * *

"May King Dasarath of Ayodhya be victorious!"

The messenger went into the court; and said aloud "May King Dasarath of Ayodhya be victorious!" King Dasarath received the messenger with honour and offered him a seat of state. Then expressing his joy, Dasarath said;

"Of course, my dear friend Janak is far away from me, but I am so happy to see you that I visualize him in you. Our friendship is unique and no power upon this earth can break it. Dear messenger! I hope our dear friend, his country and his family are well and prosperous. I hope King Janak is well and happy."

"Your highness! I know that you are a great friend of King Janak's. Oh mighty hero! King Janak always remembers you with affection. Even to day he remembers you with veneration as if you were his family deity".

"Have you come on any special purpose?" Dasarath said interrupting him.

"Your Highness! You know very well that there are many ignoble and savage kings in the southern parts of Vaithadya mountains and to the north of the Himalayas, the lord of

mountains. Those areas are teeming with people. Their ways are barbarous and uncivilized.

Among those kingdoms there is one by name Ardhabarbara. It is known for its barbarous and cruel ways. The capital of that kingdom is Mayuramala. An ignoble king by name Atarangatam is its ruler. In the other kingdoms in the vicinity his son and other relatives are rulers.

Atarangatam has collected the other kings of the area and with their assistance he has encroached upon the territory of Mithila.

Many great heroes and warriors of Mithila died in the war. The ignoble armies have been advancing. They are destroying temples. They have been committing outrageous actions against our people. They have been using force and ignoble methods. They are intent upon destroying our noble culture and establishing their ignoble culture. Our king Janaka is worried and agitated not so much by the fear that Mithila may be destroyed but by the fear that our noble culture might be destroyed.

Therefore, Oh king ! Now, we completely depend upon you. Your active co-operation is essential to safeguard our noble Aryan culture; and it is for this purpose that King Janak sent me to you. Your great decision now will be a good fortune for the Aryan culture and for Mithila and it will be an immortal event in history".

On hearing the message brought by the messenger, the King of Ayodhya was greatly angry with the invaders. His face grew red with anger. He commanded that the drums of war should be beaten at once. He ordered the Chief Commander to get ready the elephants, horses, camels and the soldiers on foot for the war.

King Dasarath himself decided to lead all the four parts of the army. The news that Dasarath was setting off for war spread like wild fire. Ram and Lakshman also came to know of it.

"Lakshman ! Is it proper that our father at his age should set off on a military campaign while we keep playing games here ?"

"I am always ready to carry out your orders". Lakshman folded his hands and said in a humble voice.

"Come on. Let us first meet our father."

The two brothers, at once, went to the palace of Dasarath. King Dasarath was ready for the campaign dressed in the militaric garb. The two brothers approached him; and saluted him touching his feet. They knelt before him; and then stood up. King Dasarath stroked the head of his sons; and kept looking at him.

"Dear father ! We have a humble entreaty to make".

"What is it ?"

"Kindly permit us to set off on this campaign".

"No. No. You are still young. I cannot send you".

"Dear father ! You are unwilling to send us because of your affection for us; but the heroism of the descendants of the illustrious line of Ikshvakus is famous in history. The history of our families from the time of Emperor Bharat illustrates this truth. Therefore, kindly send us on this campaign. You will see whether your sons will rout and drive away those barbaric kings or not; and, yes, you will soon hear about our victories".

Dasarath was lost in thought. He had no doubt regarding the heroism and abilities of Ram and Lakshman but excessive attachment can cause such doubts and Dasarath was not an exception to this rule.

"Dear father ! I will not be alone. My brother Lakshman also will be with me. Therefore, you kindly send us on this campaign." King Dasarath thought for a while and then affectionately embraced his sons. He felt greatly happy to have such sons.

"Dear son ! I have the fullest confidence in your abilities. You two will undoubtedly rout and drive away the enemy kings. Proceed on this campaign. My blessings will always guard you and guide you. May you be victorious".

Just then Queen Aparajita came there. She heard what Dasarath said but she never thought that Dasarath would send Ram and Lakshman to the wars. She also did not know that he had given his consent to their leading the campaign but even before she could say anything Ram and Lakshman saluted her feet.

"Dear mother ! Kindly give us your blessings. To day your sons are leading the first militaric campaign in their lives."

Queen Aparajita glanced towards King Dasarath. Dasarath said in a serious voice.

"I was getting ready to go to help our King Janak. Your sons came here and requested me to send them, on this campaign".

"And the father has happily given them his consent and blessings I think !"

"No, No. Our sons have wrung from me, my unwilling consent by laboursome petition and at last upon their will I sealed my hard consent. They won't spare you also. You too will have to bless them and consent to their going on this campaign", Dasarath said smiling.

"Ram ! Now delay should be avoided. There should be no delay in helping noble men".

"Yes. The only delay is that our mother should deck our foreheads with the mark of victory". Sixteen maids brought in gold plates such auspicious substances as *swastik*, coconuts and Kumkum. Aparajita marked their foreheads with Kumkum; placed *swastik* on the marks and placed the coconuts in their hands.

“You are the symbols of the Ikshvaku family. May you be always victorious! May your path be free from all impediments! Proceed. Bhagwan Rishabhdev will always be with you”.

Ram and Lakshman saluted all and went out of the palace. The war cries of the armies reverberated in the horizons. The commanders heartily complemented Ram and Lakshman. War-drums were beaten. Bugles were blown. The two brothers sat in their chariots and the chariots at once began speeding through the roads of Ayodhya. The people of the city overwhelmed with joy issued cries of victory. Women scattered flowers on their way and bestowed upon them their heartiest wishes for their victory.

Taking fifty thousand soldiers with them, Ram and Lakshman set off towards Mithila.

LIII

THE CLOUDS OF CALAMITIES

Ram and Lakshman fought so ably and heroically that the barbaric kings had to accept defeat and run away from the battle-field. They felt that Ram and Lakshman were like ferocious lions. The heroism and valour of the two great princes humbled those haughty kings. The savage kings and their soldiers could not forget for a long time the stunning attacks made by Shri Ram and Lakshman.

King Janak was greatly delighted and elated by the heroism and valour displayed by Shri Ram and Lakshman. The people of Bharath felt secure under the protection of Shri Ram and decked him with the garland of victory and greatly honoured him.

Both the worries of King Janak disappeared simultaneously. He attained a victory over enemy kings and he easily found an ideal bridegroom for his daughter, Sita. Everyone who saw or heard about the heroism and valour of Shri Ram praised him heartily. The people of Mithila commended and glorified Shri Ram. Queen Vidheha also heard about Shri Ram's heroism and was eager to see him. Since Shri Ram defended her country and saved it from the clutches of the cruel enemies, Sita enshrined Shri Ram in her heart and began to worship him there with the flowers of love.

The streets of Mithila began to reverberate with the sounds of war-drums and trumpets. King Janak entered the city with Ram and Lakshman. The women of Mithila garlanded them and welcomed them enthusiastically. The whole city of Mithila echoed with cries of joy and jubilation. Flowers were showered

on their way. At the window of the balcony of the palace, there were two eager and ardent eyes looking for the arrival of Shri Ram to give a gift of love to him but the gift could be given only if the person who had to receive it asked for it.

King Janak took Shri Ram and Lakshman to his Court which was packed to its capacity and in the presence of all he praised their unexampled heroism and valour. Again and again, he commended them. He described the friendship between Ayodhya and Mithila. He felt proud of his amity with the King of Ayodhya. Shri Ram spoke amidst the noises of the clapping of hands, thanked Janak for his compliments and by his dignified bearing captivated the hearts of the people. He said in a brief manner;

“Oh King Janak, venerable like my father and my loving people ! Your love and affection gave me greater delight than the one given by my victory. On this august occasion I remember my venerable father, the King of Ayodhya with devotion and dedication. He has bestowed a great benefit upon us by giving us this opportunity to fight and win a victory. The savage kings of the north invaded Bharath and caused much fear and sorrow to our people but now they had to discard their weapons and run away from the battle-field like mad dogs. This victory is not ours, nor does it belong to the King of Mithila. It belongs to all the people of Bharath. It is a victory for the non-violent culture of Lord Rishabhdev which has been in existence for countless ages and which will continue for countless ages providing them guidance to attain salvation.

The enemy kings and their armies have experienced such a defeat that they will not even turn their eyes towards Bharath. Even the shadow of their cruel and violent, culture will not fall upon our country.”

All those who were in the Court commended Shri Ram and the King of Mithila issuing cries of victory. The Court was dismissed for the day. King Janak went into the palace taking Ram and Lakshman with him. Queen Videha received them

with great enthusiasm. On seeing Shri Ram she was greatly delighted. Her joy knew no bounds. She thought joyfully,

“The goddess of fortune has come in search of Sita. My daughter is really fortunate in securing such a great man for her husband”.

King Janak also was overwhelmed with joyful emotions and when he was of the same opinion, she said, “What is there to think of in this? Such a noble man cannot be found anywhere in this world. My Lord! Do not let go this opportunity. Take a decision today”.

When this news reached Sita she was so greatly delighted that she began to dance involuntarily. Her heart bloomed into bliss. Her sweetest dreams had come true and so it was natural for her to sway thus with joy and the very next day the engagement also took place.

Sita was absorbed in dreaming of her future life. This is the nature of human beings and this is the cause for all their sorrows. Whenever some aspiration of theirs is fulfilled they imagine that they will be supremely happy and that in the future they will not have any sorrows or worries. The rainbow of aspirations does not break but the sad thing is that human beings become victims of illusion and infatuation. At such a time they do not realize that the happiness that depends on others is no happiness and that it is sorrow in reality when man carries out endeavours to attain his objectives and to fulfil his aspirations he may get some partial happiness which will be short-lived. This is the way of the world. The samsar abounds in such conflicts and contradictions as joy and sorrow, delight and depression, jubilation and lamentation. He who can rise above these conflicts and contradictions is a real Yogi.

Shri Ram's fame spread far and near. At the same time, the fame of Sita as a beautiful damsel also spread everywhere like fragrance in the air. When the divine sage Narad heard about Sita's extraordinary beauty he too desired to see her and to verify the truth of her fame and Narad was a strange perso-

nalitiy. He at once set off towards Mithila. His hair was yellowish and unkempt. His stomach was sunken. He held a *Thambura* in his hands and an umbrella over his head. He wore a loin-cloth and a long braid of hair which was shaken by the winds. The divine sage Narad came to Sita's residence with great eagerness. Seeing his peculiar appearance and features Sita shook with fear. At once, she stood up and cried, "Oh mother". Crying thus she ran into the inner chamber.

Hearing the screams of Sita the maids and attendants gathered there. They saw Narad standing in Sita's chamber but no one knew him. So all were stupefied. For sometime, there was dead silence and then when all the maids and attendants screamed and shrieked the guards came running. Narad stood still wondering what he should do in that situation. The guards, the maids and the attendants surrounded him. Some pushed him and some pulled his neck. Some beat him and some spoke to him harshly.

Narad adopted a clever trick to save himself from that calamity. He at once rose to the sky and disappeared. He reached a high peak of Vaithadya and heaved a sigh of relief.

Such an unhappy incident had happened in Narad's life for the first time. Before that whenever he went, he was received with honour; but what had occurred in Mithila was totally opposite to that. In the palace at Mithila, he had been ridiculed, disgraced, slighted and beaten. All this was new to him and he could not bear with such treatment. The incident made a deep impression upon his mind. He was filled with anger and decided to take a severe revenge against them. After he recovered his spirits a little, in the cool breezes that were blowing, he thought :

"Did I go to terrify Sita ? Do I desire to abduct her ? When a guest goes to their house how barbarously do they behave ? That too it happened in the palace of King Janak known for his gentleness. No ! This cannot happen. Such a thing cannot happen anywhere in this world. I will take revenge against them. I cannot bear with this disgrace. Sita might not have

recognised me but could not King Janak recognise me? Ah! He could not find time to meet me. Well! It does not matter. Nothing is really lost. Now they will know who I am. Oh! If I had stayed there for some more time the guards would have cut me into pieces. Like lionesses, the maids would have pounced upon me and torn off my body into pieces. It was a good thing that I became cautious and disappeared from there."

Narad was still shivering with fear. He was breathing like bellows. He was bathed in perspiration. He grew silent. He sat upon a high peak of the Vaithadya mountain and planned his revenge. He knew that Sita had been engaged to Sri Ram. A thought occurred to him and he became cheerful. He made some decision and then he proceeded towards Ratanupur.

He reached Ratanupur and camped in a garden near the city. When the guard of the garden came to know of his arrival he ran to him; saluted his feet; and wearing the dust of his feet on his forehead; he said;

"Divine sage! This garden of King Chandragati has been hallowed by your arrival."

For a moment, Narad kept looking at the guard; thought something and said in a serious voice;

"Please take care to see that King Chandragati does not come to know of my arrival here, for some days."

"As commanded by the divine sage".

"And I desire another favour from you."

"I am ready to carry out any command of yours."

"I need a wooden board, various colours and a brush."

"All these things will reach you in a few minutes."

"Oh pious man! May you be happy".

The guard saluted him and went away. Narad began to walk to and fro in the garden but today he had no desire to see

the beauty of the garden and to enjoy the graces and glories of nature there. He took no interest in the melodious songs of the birds. He did not enjoy the sweet fragrance of the various glorious flowers there; because his mind was preoccupied with thoughts relating to his contemplated revenge.

Within a short time the guard appeared again. He built a small cottage for Narad. He placed in the cottage all the substances necessary for his austerities. He also placed in the cottage a wooden board, colours and a brush.

Pleased with the guard, he said :

“You have done what is necessary. Now you may go.”

The guard bowed to him and returned. Narad entered the cottage. He placed his *Thambura* in a corner and he sat on the tiger-skin spread there by the guard. Then, he closed his eyes and became absorbed in deep meditation. In his meditation, he visualized an imaginary world. Suddenly the palace of Mithila appeared before him. He visualized Sita who possessed angelic beauty as sitting at a window of her balcony and prepared a mental portrait of her magnificent beauty. He visualised her beautiful body decked with colourful garments and expensive ornaments and gave a shape to her unexampled beauty, but this was not enough for Narad. This would not complete his task. He also added to the face of Sita, the divine radiance and sublime features and expressions that were there on her face and also added to the portrait, the grace and charm of youth. He portrayed every feature of Sita realistically and artistically in his mind. Thus he prepared a mental portrait of Sita.

When he opened his eyes, he found that night had set in. Darkness had enveloped everything. He could only see the magnificent mansions of Ratanupur obscurely in the light of the burning lamps on the buildings. In the cottage, there was a dim light proceeding from the ghee-lamp placed there by the guard. He placed the wooden board near the lamp. He mixed the colours artistically and then taking the brush, he painted

on the board the portrait of Sita which he had prepared mentally. His brush moved briskly. He worked thus until late into the night and then having slept for an hour, he took up the brush again.

After having worked thus for three days and three nights, he could prepare a life-like portrait of Sita. It was Sita herself in the picture. Narad was delighted to see it. He lifted the plank with the help of a couple of artists; saw it from various angles and was satisfied with it and then he covered it with a silk cloth.

Just then, the guard came into the cottage; Narad thanked him for his services.

"Oh divine sage ! I have an entreaty to make to you".

"What is it ?"

"Prince Bhamandal has come to the garden. If you permit me, I will inform him of your honoured presence here."

"Good ! Very good ! Dear friend, your idea is good. I feel grateful to you." Narad said emotionally, almost leaping up. He found that he could implement his plan. The guard could not understand the reason for his great joy. Yet, instead of thinking about it, he went straight to Prince Bhamandal :

"May the Prince be victorious ! I have brought some auspicious news for you," said the guard politely, with a bowed head.

"Come on. What is it ?"

"The divine sage Narad has hallowed the garden of Ratanupur."

"Where is he ?"

"Please come with me. I'll show you where he is."

Both hurried towards Narad's cottage. The prince had heard that Narad always kept wandering through the three

worlds; and that he was a store-house of information about the whole universe. "Ah, he is himself a treasure-house of extraordinary information." The prince felt blessed in getting an opportunity of seeing such a great sage.

Narad had placed the portrait of Sita in the cottage at such a place that as soon as the prince came in, his eyes would fall upon it.

"Victory to the divine sage ! Oh you revered one ! Kindly accept my salutations", saying this, Prince Bhamandal entered the cottage.

"Dear Prince, may you prosper", Narad blessed him placing his hand over his head. Bhamandal politely sat at his feet. "My lord ! I hope you are well. I feel blessed at your sight. I do not know when again I may get this extraordinary opportunity of seeing you." Bhamandal said in a humble manner. He was silent for a few moments.

"Tell me dear Prince what you wish for".

"Oh Divine sage ! You always keep wandering through the whole universe. You travel through various towns, villages, cities, forests and gardens. You would have seen many rivers, lakes, mountains and caves. You would have seen various kinds of people, dress, decorations, customs, and traditions, and come across various kinds of languages. All this is natural. I desire to know if you have come across any extraordinary or uncommon thing in your wanderings."

"Dear Prince ! This universe abounds in countless strange and extraordinary and astonishing things. My problem is what to tell you and what not. This has become a riddle," and Narad heaved a heavy sigh.

"If you desire to know something extraordinary at present" saying this, he turned his eyes towards the portrait.

"Dear lord ! Is this a picture or a real person ?"

"Dear Prince ! You are right. This portrait is an answer to your question. Only a few days ago did I see this extraordinary person."

Then, Narad uncovered the portrait; and gave it to Bhamandal. For a few moments, Bhamandal's eyes were riveted to the portrait. Narad carefully watched the emotions appearing in the face of the prince.

"Dear Prince ! I have not seen such a beautiful lady anywhere in the three worlds."

"True... You are right ! I have not seen such a beautiful maiden anywhere even in the Vidyadhara world," Bhamandal said with a voice shaken by ardent emotion, staring at the portrait. He kept looking at the picture with amazement and joy. Not for moments but for a long time did he keep staring at the picture with utter bewilderment.

"Dear Prince ! Please accept this portrait as a presentation from me".

"I feel extremely grateful to you".

The prince took the portrait; saluted Narad and at once, proceeded towards the palace. Soon after the prince went out of sight Narad laughed hilariously and his laughter echoed in the cottage. He thought; "Sita will have to pay heavily for having dishonoured me. What does she think of me ? Now the Vidhyadhar prince will move heaven and earth to secure her".

The guard after having seen the prince off, returned to Narad. Seeing Narad's ways he entertained all sorts of doubts and fears. Many questions arose in his mind but, he did not possess the courage or confidence to question Narad about it. With the purpose of planning out his future course of action Narad looked towards the guard meaningfully and said;

"I have to stay here for some more time".

"That is a matter of great pleasure to us, oh divine sage ! But now the news of your being here will spread like wild fire in Ratanupur"

"No friend ! Nobody will come to know of my being here. The prince will not tell anyone about me. Yet we cannot be sure...." and Narad stopped speaking. Later, he asked the guard to fetch him some fruits and cow's milk and then sat beneath a peepal tree to take rest.

Having inspired the prince to become infatuated with Sita, Narad remained there to watch the result of his plan. He kept gathering information from time to time about Bhamandal. Bhamandal became deeply infatuated with Sita. The portrait made him spell-bound. The portrait of Sita woke up a deep memory of his earlier life which lay latent and dormant in the depths of his consciousness. Day and night, he began to pine for Sita. He forgot his games and amusements; he neglected his studies. He did not care to eat food or to sleep. He lost all peace of mind. Step by step, his condition grew worse. Just as a Yogi becomes absorbed in the Brahma he became absorbed in a constant contemplation on Sita.

King Chandragati was greatly worried over the sudden transformation that had come about in Bhamandal. Once, he sent for Bhamandal. He began to shudder with anxiety on seeing his only son experiencing some deep anguish. His gloomy face, his soiled dress, his withered body and his faded face sent a shiver through his veins, which shot to the brims of his being. He could not bear to see his son's distress. He fell into a deep anguish.

LIV

THE ABDUCTION OF JANAK

"Are you suffering from any disease?"

Silence !

"Has anyone dishonoured you?"

Silence !

"Are you afraid of any enemies?"

Silence !

"Then, has anyone ridiculed you?"

Silence !

But when Chandragathi did not get any answers to his questions, he was deeply worried. Bhamandal stood before him silently with his eyes fixed on the ground; as if he was a stone-image. He was in a strange dilemma. He could not say anything. Words rose from his heart like waves but they broke against the shores of his mind and receded. He found himself between the devil and the deep sea. He could neither speak out his thoughts nor keep quiet. He could not speak out his thoughts to his father. He felt it improper. Chandragati was totally ignorant of Bhamandal's mental state; yet by looking at the thoughts and emotions manifesting themselves on his face he could realize that he was worried about something, some secret problem which he could not reveal. He seemed to be hesitant to speak out.

Having sent away Bhamandal, Chandragati the Vidyadhar king contacted Bhamandal's friends. His friends knew that there was a portrait in Bhamandal's chamber; and the portrait had caused a tremendous change in the prince. The friends had guessed this. In fact, they had questioned Bhamandal about the portrait but he had merely said, "The divine sage Narad gave it to me as a presentation." Bhamandal's friends told the king all that they knew. But when the king came to know that Narad was staying in the garden he was greatly amazed and delighted. At once, he sent some trusted officials to bring Narad into the palace with honour.

Narad was awaiting such an invitation from the king. As soon as he received the invitation of King Chandragati, he went to the palace. The King went a few paces forward; received Narad and entreated him to be seated.

"Divine sage! You came to Ratanupur several days ago but I never knew about it. Otherwise, I would have been at your service long ago."

"Oh King of Vidyadhars! You are not at all at fault. Actually, I found your garden so pleasant and fascinating that I felt like staying there for sometime. Otherwise, I would have gladly come to the palace."

"Divine sage! Kindly tell me something about the portrait which you have presented to the prince."

"Oh King, what do you desire to know?"

"Whose portrait is it? To which royal family does she belong? Where is she?"

"Oh King! That is a portrait of Sita, the daughter of King Janaka of Mithila. But I have not been able to do full justice to her in portraying her. Her beauty excels the portrait. I am not a great artist. I have tried my best to portray her beautiful form but her beauty is so extraordinary that it cannot be painted in colours."

"I have wandered through the world countless times. I have seen countless goddesses, mermaids and divine damsels but I have not seen anywhere such a beautiful lady as Sita. Her face possesses an unexampled grace. Her voice possesses an unexampled sweetness. Her hand is softer than the lotus and her feet are softer than tender plantain leaves.

Moreover, I do not find words to describe her beauty. I do not find the colours with which I can paint her picture faithfully; and place it before you. Actually what you have seen is not even a thousandth part of her beauty."

Narad while saying this was glancing towards the door expecting prince Bhamandal to come in.

"Oh king, what more can I say ? From the time I saw her every pulsation of my heart has been telling me that this extraordinary gem must decorate only the son of Chandragati. In consequence, I made a portrait of Sita and gave it to him as a presentation."

"Oh divine sage ! Your desire will be surely fulfilled. This extraordinarily beautiful damsel will become Bhamandal's wife."

"Oh King ! May you prosper."

And Narad at once set off from there. His mind and heart were full of the thoughts of revenge. Chandragati bade farewell to him with all honour. Narad went to visit other cities among the Vaithadya mountains. He knew very well that Chandragati would certainly abduct Sita to fulfil the desire of his only son and that way he (Narad) would have taken his revenge against her. King Janak would be forced to surrender to the king of Vidyadhars. In consequence, Sita's sweet dreams would be dashed down; and his desire for revenge would be surely fulfilled but Naradji could not realize what was concealed in the womb of time.

King Chandragati said affectionately patting on the back of Bhamandal; "Dear son ! You need not at all worry. I will see

that Sita will marry you. Having given this assurance to his son, Chandragati proceeded towards his counsel-chamber. He was silent for sometime and then he fell into deep thoughtfulness. The sun had already set. King Chandragati called the guard and said, "Bring Chapalagati at once here." The guard retreated and within a short time he came accompanied by Chapalagati. Chapalagati entered the chamber; bowed to the king and sat down. Chapalagati was the head of spies in Ratanupur.

"You have to go to Mithila at once," Chandragati said commencing a conversation.

"I will carry out your orders."

"Your duty is not only to go to Mithila but to abduct King Janaka secretly and to bring him here."

For a moment, Chapalagati kept staring at the king. He wondered, "Abducting King Janak, but why?"

King Chandragati, trying to clear Chapalagati's doubts said again, "We have to abduct king Janak but with due honour! You must bring him to Ratanupur as our specially honoured guest." But Chandragati's clarification only caused a greater mystification in the mind of Chapalagati. The King's clarification brought about many doubts in the mind of Chapalagati. "If we should bring King Janak, with honour here; why should we abduct him? Where is the need to honour a man whom we have to abduct? If King Janak should be brought here with honour we can as well invite him to visit our palace and bring him openly in an airship. But why all this mess?" Seeing Chapalagati lost in thought, King Chandragati laughed and said.

"First, you abduct and bring King Janak here. Then you will know our purpose."

Chapalagati saluted the King and went away. He went home; changed his dress; took the necessary weapons and then proceeded towards Mithila by his airship.

The airship landed in the garden near Mithila at midnight. The whole city was asleep. There was no noise anywhere in the city of anyone's movement except the noise made by the guards who were moving about. Chapalagati quietly entered the palace. King Janak was in deep sleep. He was relieved of all his worries since he had attained a victory over the barbarous kings and had found a suitable bridegroom for his daughter, Sita. So he was sleeping soundly. Not only King Janak; but all the people of the city and the members of the royal family were sleeping soundly free from all worries. Shri Ram and Lakshman also were staying in Mithila.

Chapalagati cast a magical spell upon King Janak. In consequence, King Janak fell into deep sleep. At once, Chapalagati took him up and came straight to the garden. He placed him in the airship and began travelling towards Ratanupur.

The airship reached Ratanupur in the early morning. Chapalagati landed the airship in a garden near the city and removed the magical spell he had cast on Janak. When King Janak opened his eyes he saw an armed guard standing before him folding his hands respectfully. He was standing with a bowed head looking at King Janak. Janak was greatly amazed. When King Janak looked around he saw a beautiful garden stretching for miles around and the sky-high mansions of the Vidyadhar world. On all sides, there were the ranges of the Vythadya mountains. King Janak was greatly amazed and confounded.

"Victory to the King of Mithila! Oh King! You are an honoured guest of Chandragati, the king of Vidyadhars."

"But what is his purpose in thus abducting me and forcing me to be his guest?"

"Dear King, Chandragati, the Vidyadhar king will tell you all about it. I am after all his official. Yes. I will surely take you to the king"

King Janak's wonder knew no bounds. He was astounded by the occurrence and accompanied Chapalagati to Chandra-

gati's palace. As soon as King Janak entered the palace, Chandragati hurried forward and embraced him affectionately. Chapalagati stopped there. King Chandragati holding Janak's hands took him into the palace. Chandragati treated him with great honour. He entreated King Janak to be seated on a throne studded with gems and then said in an elevated voice.

"Oh king I think you are amazed at all this."

"Surely, I am."

"Probably, you do not know why you have been brought here."

"Surely not!"

"Dear King! We have heard from reliable sources that your dear daughter Sita is a damsel of extraordinary beauty. I could see how beautiful she was in a portrait of hers. From the time I heard about her extraordinary beauty and unexampled virtues, I have been feeling that she will be an ideal bride to my son Bhamandal."

At once, King Janak realized everything. He soon realized why he had been so abruptly abducted and brought there, why such extraordinary honour was given to him and why King Chandragati was treating him with such affection and regard.

"Not only this, my dear king; if Sita marries Bhamandal Mithila and Ratanupur will be bound by the strongest bonds of friendship. At the same time the Vidyadhar world and the human world will be united by sweet amity." Chandragati described in soft words the advantages that would accrue from Sita's marriage with Bhamandal.

There was silence everywhere. A little later King Janak said in a serious manner, "Oh King of Vidyadhars! What you say is true. I am sure that an alliance with a mighty and noble king like you would be a great advantage to Mithila but if you had mentioned this point, a little while ago I would have heartily agreed to it deeming myself absolutely fortunate in having secured such a son-in-law."

“But even now you can give your consent. Any difficulty ?”

“King Chandragati ! Probably you do not know that Sita has already been betrothed to the eldest son of King Dasarath of Ayodhya. In other words, as a noble Kshatriya I have promised Sita’s hand to Shri Ram”.

This was news to Chandragati. Narad had not told him about this development. After having accepted Shri Ram as her husband how could Sita accept Bhamandal ? In a way this was absolutely impossible.

“Oh King ! I do not at all disapprove of what you say. You should not also think that I am giving up my decision. You have been brought here and honoured here. We have done that only to increase our amity and friendly relations. If only I wanted I could have abducted Sita herself. Under these circumstances you too are helpless. Well, let us drop this discussion but there is one indisputable truth; you might have agreed to give your daughter to Shri Ram in marriage but Shri Ram cannot marry her thus.

My meaning is that you cannot give away yourself this extraordinary gem to anyone. You must arrange a *Swayamvar* and at the *Swayamvar* the bride can freely choose a bridegroom. You have committed a mistake and I do not like you to repeat it.”

“Then what is your suggestion ?”

“Shri Ram has to win the hand of Sita only after defeating us.”

“Then should there be a war ?”

“No. No, dear King. War is not the only means for this. I will suggest another method. In our arsenal, there are two mighty bows called ‘*Vajravarth*’ and ‘*Arnavavarth*’. One thousand Yakshas are guarding them and they are powerful. They are resplendent bows. We venerate the bows as we venerate our family deities. If Shri Ram can lift at least one of them

and fix an arrow to it, he will be considered victorious. If he succeeds in doing so he can marry Sita. We will not at all oppose it."

On hearing the words of Chandragati Janak was absorbed in thought. He was greatly worried and agitated. He felt rather stunned by this unexpected calamity.

"Oh king! Where is the need to worry thus about this affair. My suggestion is absolutely just. You need not hesitate to accept it."

King Chandragati stood up and began walking to and fro in the chamber. King Janak sat mute and motionless like a picture. The night had advanced. Some untoward things might happen if there was any delay. He had to return to Mithila at once. Otherwise, the news of his abduction would spread everywhere and cause great distress and anxiety among people. Therefore, Janak said :

"I will certainly think of your suggestion."

"Oh king there is no need to think about it further and there is no time also. It is well-known that my son has grown mad after Sita. So at least you have to think of my difficulty". King Janak was speechless. For sometime, there was silence in the hall. King Chandragati went near King Janak and said "Oh king you cannot go out of this palace, until you give your consent to my proposal."

The king of Mithila was stupefied. He felt that Chandragati might use even force to secure his consent. He thought about Chandragati's condition for Sita's marriage; "Cannot Shri Ram lift up both the bows of Chandragati? Shri Ram who routed and drove away the barbarous kings of the north! He is certainly a hero of immeasurable strength and heroism. He will surely lift the bows but if fortune does not favour him what are we to do? Sita will have to accept Bhamandal as her husband or she will have to commit suicide." King Janak was agitated by countless thoughts of this kind. But he had no alternative to accepting Chandragati's condition under those

circumstances. Of course, he was not willing to accept his condition but there was no way out. At last he came to a decision, "Let me get back to Mithila; then we can surely find a way out of this calamitous situation. Ram and Lakshman also are there. I can discuss the matter with them and adopt some method to get out of this difficulty."

In consequence, King Janak accepted Chandragati's condition. Chandragati's joy knew no bounds. Overwhelmed with joy, he embraced King Janak warmly. He ordered Chapalagati to make arrangements for King Janak's return to Mithila. Chapalagati got the airship ready. Then Chandragati, Bhramandal, Chapalagati and other Vidyadhar warriors sat in the airship. The two mighty bows *Vajravarth* and *Arnavavart* were also carefully placed in the airship.

After travelling for a couple of hours the airship reached Mithila. King Janak alighted at the palace. Then, Chandragati and others alighted in a garden near the city and camped there.

King Janak was in great perplexity. Chandragati was staying there as his guest whether he liked it or not. His spies were watching vigilantly every movement of his.

King Janak narrated to Queen Videha the unexpected occurrences of the previous night. Queen Videha was filled with fear and agitation. The tears began to flow from her eyes. In great anguish she said :

"What sin have I committed to deserve this deadly stroke from destiny ? Why is fortune so hostile towards me ? He is not satisfied with having abducted my son. Now he is trying to harm my darling daughter ? What shall I do ? Where shall I go ? To whom shall I narrate my sorrowful story ? There is no limit to my grief. We have to choose the bridegroom freely. We are Sita's parents. Can anyone choose a bridegroom by force ? But our fortune is so hostile that we have to choose a bridegroom against our wishes".

"Dear Queen ! Have a little courage. Be patient. Have confidence in Shri Ram's incomparable heroism and valour."

“But my dear lord, when our sinful karmas are in the ascendant, calamities do occur. In case Shri Ram fails to lift those bows and fix arrows to them what are we to do ? This is but a magical trap of the Vidyadhar king. In that case what will happen to my dear Sita ?” and Queen Videha began to weep aloud like a child.

“Videha ! you may not have confidence in Shri Ram’s abilities but I have confidence in them. You are worrying yourself unnecessarily. All will be well by the grace of Bhagwan Rishabhdev.” King Janak thus tried to console Videha and to inspire courage in her.

After having thus consoled and comforted the Queen Videha, King Janak went towards his chamber to make arrangements for Sita’s Swayamvar. Before making the arrangements for the Swayamvar, he wanted to discuss this situation with Shri Ram. He sent a guard, to bring Shri Ram and Lakshman to his chamber and sat waiting for them.

SITA'S SWAYAMVAR

Shri Ram and Lakshman heard the entire story and then told the King of Mithila to discard all fears and doubts; and to arrange Sita's *Swayamvar*. In the same manner, Queen Videha informed Sita of the calamitous situation that had arisen. But Sita was determined to surrender herself to Shri Ram body and soul and not to think of anyone else even if it became necessary to die for it. At the same time, she was also confident that Shri Ram would be successful in the proposed test.

King Janak issued a proclamation regarding Sita's *Swayamvar*. He sent his officials to various countries and Kingdoms to make the announcement, and he sent Chandragati's own messenger to make the announcement in the Vidhyadhar kingdoms. Kings, princes and potentates thronged to Mithila to attend the *Swayamvar*.

The king of Mithila got a magnificent pavilion built for the *Swayamvar* in the vast courtyard of the palace. The artists and artisans of Mithila built the pavilion lavishing on it all their skill and vision. They built a magnificent pavilion. Thrones and seats of state were placed in the pavilion. The floor was sprinkled with scented water. The pillars of the pavilion were inlaid with invaluable gems and precious stones. The ceiling of the pavilion was decorated with magnificent carvings. Ornamented chandeliers were hung from ceilings in all the necessary places in the pavilion. The chandeliers sent out rainbow hues. Near every throne and seat ornamental tables were placed on which flower vases and censers were placed from which emanated fascinatingly fragrant smoke. In the centre of the hall, the two bows had been placed on a decorated platform.

The day of the *Swayamvar* came. Very early in the morning, the palace and the pavilion began to reverberate with the melodies of various musical instruments. The whole city was teeming with the visiting kings and princes. After making the necessary arrangements all the invitees came to the hall of the *Swayamvar* displaying their splendour, prosperity and power.

First of all, Chandragati entered the hall accompanied by Bhamandal. King Janak standing at the entrance received him with great honour. The other Vidyadhar kings and princes followed Chandragati into the hall. Then the other kings and princes entered the hall one by one. All sat in the seats reserved for them.

At the appointed time, in accordance with King Janak's orders, Sita entered the hall of the *Swayamvar* in a slow and dignified manner. Decorated with extraordinary garments and ornaments Sita seemed to be the veritable goddess of love and beauty come down to earth. Her beauty was such that it surpassed the graces of the most graceful of *apsarasas*. She came to the platform; worshipped the bows and then stood aside waiting for Shri Ram.

Bhamandal became deeply infatuated with Sita at the very first sight. He felt thrilled and delighted to see her. Every part and particle of his being was agitated by ardent passion. He kept staring at her with fixed eyes.

King Janak sat upon a high stage so that he could attract the attention of all and said, "Oh you Vidhyadhar kings! Oh you kings, princes, potentates and powers! I extend a hearty welcome to you all to this *Swayamvar*. I, King Janak of Mithila proclaim that anyone who can lift at least one of the two bows lying on the platform and can fix an arrow to it will have the right to marry my darling daughter Sita".

After the King of Mithila made this announcement silence prevailed in the hall for sometime. There was no whispering or muttering anywhere. All were eager to see what would happen next. Though all knew what was going to happen they

were all eager to see who would take the initiative. Their eagerness kept increasing. Some moments passed in this kind of indecisiveness and nobody stood up. The Vidyhadhar princes began going to the platform one after another but they could not even touch those bows which were coiled around by poisonous serpents and which sent out an unearthly radiance. When that was so the question of their lifting the bows did not arise at all. When the kings approached them, fiery flames like pyrotechnical explosions shot out from the supernatural bows and they moved back amazed and confounded. They bent their heads in shame and returned to their places quietly.

The other kings and princes had to share the same lot. King Chandragati gave a signal to prince Bhamandal. Bhamandal stood up from his throne. King Janak, Queen Videha and princess Sita became breathless with anxiety. Chandragati's eagerness was intense. He staked his prestige and honour thus.

Prince Bhamandal moved slowly towards the platform. He became totally enfeebled and enervated by the unearthly effulgence of the bows. His face became dark with despair. He could not bear with the tremendous radiance flaming out from the bows with explosive force. He tried, not once or twice but thrice; but all his endeavours ended in failure. He was covered with perspiration. His face was covered with clouds of despair. He found that all his hopes had been shattered. What he had staked he lost. Bhamandal stood with a bent head looking towards the ground. When he returned to his place disgraced, King Chandragati bowed his head in shame. He could not understand how it happened. He was absolutely certain that Bhamandal would lift the bows easily. But within a moment all his plans ended in bitter failure. Therefore, he felt deeply agitated. His radiant face was covered with clouds of anguish.

A commotion arose in the hall. On seeing what had happened to the Kings, the princes and the mighty Bhamandal, the others gave up their desire to attempt to lift the bows. No one was bold enough even to approach the bows and then Shri Ram stood up from his throne. Suddenly all eyes were fixed upon

him. The penetrating eyes of Chandragati, Bhamandal and other contestants were fixed on Shri Ram. They were looking at him not so much with eagerness as with silent contempt and mockery. Sita, Videha, Janak and the other members of the royal family of Mithila grew eager and even anxious but Lakshman sat in his place with calmness and composure. Shri Ram approached the bows fearlessly and with heartfelt devotion and then with a serene mind he touched the bows just as Indra touches his weapon *Vajra*.

As soon as Shri Ram's lotus-soft hands touched the bows, their fiery flames abated. The poisonous serpents felt paralysed.

Then Shri Ram lifted the bow called *Vajravarth* and fixed it on a metal stand and at the same time he bent it as if it were an ordinary bow and fixed an arrow to it. Then he pulled the string upto his ear. The tremendous noise caused by the string shook Mithila like an earthquake. In consequence, all the people of Mithila came running to the pavilion.

When the Kings, princes and potentates clapped their hands, the noise of their clapping reverberated in the skies. Sita experienced a tremendous thrill that threw her into an indescribable trance. Her mind began to dance like an elated peacock. At once, she hurried towards Shri Ram and decorated his neck with the garland in her hands. A little later, he replaced the bow on the stand.

Shri Ram announced in a loud voice, "As I lifted the *Vajravart* my brother Lakshman will lift the *Arnavavart*". Shri Ram stood near the platform. Lakshman at once stood up; hurried to his brother and saluted him. Shri Ram bestowed his blessings upon him. Lakshman went towards the platform; lifted the *Arnavavart*; fixed on arrow to it. All this happened with such speed that all kings, princes and others who were there became petrified with amazement. The noise made by the *Arnavavart* was deafening.

The Vidhyadhar kings admired Lakshman's extraordinary strength and valour and offered eighteen Vidhyadhar maidens in marriage to him. Shri Ram and Lakshman became famous,

throughout this world and the Vidhyadhar world. Their achievement was glorified far and near.

Sita's joy and elation knew no bounds.

Bhamandal's despair and distress were boundless.

But Oh ! Bhamandal did not know that Sita was his sister. He did not know that the great gods presiding over the bows had shown great grace to him by preventing him from taking up the bows. They had bestowed a great benefaction upon him. If Bhamandal had lifted the bow a great calamity would have occurred. Bhamandal went away from Mithila with a heavy heart. But that very sorrow of his was going to be happiness in the future. His failure was indeed going to be a success in the future.

The failures and successes that arise in human life may in course of time prove to be the very opposite of what they are. Some success at the present may turn out to be a failure in the future; and some failure of the present may turn out to be a success in the future.

King Janaka of Mithila entreated Chandragati, the king of Vidyadhars to stay upto the time of the marriage of Sita but when he thought of the mental state of Bhamandal Chandragati thought it better to return to Ratanupur instead of staying at Mithila. The other kings, princes and potentates could not reject King Janak's entreaty and invitation and they stayed on in Mithila. King Janak sent some of his ministers to Ayodhya to invite Dasarath and his family to the marriage of Sita.

King Dasarath had already received the news of Rama's splendid victory against the barbarous kings of the north and when he heard about the way in which Shri Ram won the hand of Sita his joy knew no bounds. Moreover, when he heard about Lakshman's heroism and the marriage of Lakshman with eighteen Vidhyadhar maidens he was overwhelmed with delight at the thought of the astounding heroism and abilities of his sons.

King Dasarath soon set off to Mithila with the members of his family, his ministers and a large escort of warriors. After travelling for some days they reached Mithila. The king of Mithila received his bosom friend with all grandeur and eclat. They embraced each other affectionately and then taking Dasarath's hand in his hand he said.

"My dear friend ! Some years ago you came here to take me away and now you have come here to take away my daughter. Do you think that Mithila is a place from where you can carry away something whenever you come here ?" and the two friends burst into laughter. The two friends spent the whole night in cordial conversation, in joy and jubilation. In the course of his conversation with Dasarath, Janak described the extraordinary courage and valour which Ram and Lakshman had displayed in their war against the barbarous kings of the north. Moreover, he also narrated to Dasarath humorously the story of his abduction by Chandragati.

"Oh king ! I agree that Chandragati abducted you in an unauthorized manner but it is evident that he stood by his word and carried out his promise". Dasarath said praising Chandragati and he continued, "Just as he got you abducted he could have got Sita also abducted but instead of doing, so, he, without offending your honour and prestige acted respectfully towards you. Not only that; after he came to know from you that Sita had been betrothed to Ram he made such a suggestion to you that Bhamandal would not be offended and your promise would not be affected. Moreover, when Ram and Lakshman took up the divine bows and fixed arrows to them Chandragati did not get angry; did not place any impediments on their way and did not also exercise his power. All this shows the greatness of Chandragati. I say all this because of my experience at the time of Kaikayi's *Swayamvar*. Have you forgotten that event which took place in our presence ? Remember well. Both of us were witnesses to that incident. Do you remember how the kings and princess behaved at that time ?"

The two friends were lost in the reminiscences of the past. Many half-forgotten things came into their minds. Both

laughed.....became serious and then they relived many happy and unhappy sequences of the past.

“Oh king ! How wonderful this human life is ! This life is like a stage. And all jivas are like actors upon it. Every man appears on the stage with deep-seated memories of his past life and inspired by the related objects he enacts his role in the drama of human life. Sometimes he laughs; sometimes he weeps; sometimes he laments over unhappy events. He eats food. He has enjoyments and amusements. He also commits violence. He practises non-violence. He takes the prop of truth or untruth and acts adapting himself to the situations. What is all this ? A mere drama..... Mere playing roles. The drama is directed by the power of Karmas. Karmas inspire all actions. Depending upon this power of karmas human beings wear various kinds of dress and decorations, acquire various forms, bodies, thoughts and feelings and they act upon the stage of life in accordance with the predestined principles. Good and evil are only different aspects of this drama. Highness and lowness, — even this is acting. Dear brother ! Every lesson taught by karmas impels jivas to enact a role.

This can end only when man attains liberation from his dependance upon karmas. Only in the human state of existence can we carry out endeavours to achieve that end. Remember ! That time also has come”.

Dasarath sat upon a cot studded with gems. The dim light emerging from the lamps was playing on his face in a frolicsome manner. Janak was observing the various emotions that were appearing on his face. Endorsing Dasarath's statement Janak said, “Dear friend what you have said is true. Life is merely a drama.....a long drama and we are all actors in it; moreover for ages we have been merely enacting the roles that have been predetermined.”

Later King Janak heaved a long sigh and entreating Dasarath to take rest, he too went to bed. When in the early morning he woke up he found Ram and Lakshman standing

before him with bowed heads. The two brothers bowing to Dasarath touched his feet and then they touched Janak's feet. Both blessed the youngsters with overflowing joy.

On that day Shri Ram was going to marry Sita. Mithila and Ayodhya were going to be bound with permanent and unbreakable bonds of love and honour. The cultures of Mithila and Ayodhya were going to unite like two mighty rivers converging towards each other and then flowing on.

On that day at an auspicious time the marriage of Shri Ram and Sita and the marriage of Lakshman with the eighteen Vidyadhar maidens took place. On the same day, Janak's younger brother Kanak gave his daughter Bhadra in marriage to Bharath.

On account of the entreaty of King Janak and the members of the royal family Dasarath agreed to stay in Mithila for some-time enjoying their hospitality and affectionate treatment. But one day he had to go to Ayodhya. The family of Dasarath and the family of Janak became so intimate that whenever the point of Dasarath's travel to Ayodhya was raised it pierced the ears of the members of Janak's family like a sharp spear and they shed tears.

At last the time came for their bidding farewell to Sita. Janak's sublime face was covered with dark clouds of grief. Videha's eyes welled up with tears. Attendants and maids grieved by the prospect of separation surrounded Sita. All were shedding tears. Sita's voice was choked with emotion. She could not utter even a single word. She was experiencing anguish silently, since she was going away from her father's house. Queen Videha embraced her and wept like a child. Sita's tears drenched the breasts of her mother. Queen Videha somehow restrained her tears and said in a voice shaken by emotion, "Dear Child! You are our only daughter. You are more dear to us than our lives. Yet to day you are going away from us. Going far away from us. So you must deem King Dasarath and Queen Aparajita your father and mother and love them as you loved us all these days. You must consider Shri

Ram as your God. He is all in all for you. The first duty of a noble wife is to share her husband's joys and sorrows. You should never forget this great principle. I do not think it necessary to say anything more. You are an image of chastity and of intellectual brilliance. You must bring glory to the families of my father and your father. You must act in such a way that every action of yours fills your father-in-law's house with grace and felicity. Wherever you may be, you must be a source of joy and cheerfulness to all like a rose. Moreover, you must consider Lord Jineshwar and your chastity dearer than your life".

Until now Sita had not known what sorrow and agitation were but now for the first time in her life she was experiencing the grief of separation from her parents and others. She experienced for the first time the pain of separation from the loved ones. Till now Sita had found in her father's house only happiness, delight, love, affection and ardent attachment. She had drunk the milk of affection. Therefore, she had not known pain and grief at all.

Queen Videha came forward a little, stroked the head of Shri Ram with affection and kissed his forehead. She said in a grief-stricken voice, "Oh great hero ! What can I say to you ? I do not find words to say anything. Indeed you are the glory of the royal family of Ikshvaku...an invaluable ornament to the family of Dasarath. You are a mine of virtues and an image of ability and nobility. I have only one entreaty to make to you. I surrender my daughter at your feet. She is a girl with a tender heart and a flower-soft body. She has not known difficulties at all. You must see that no difficulty comes her way. Her tender heart should not be wounded by anything. Bhagwan Rishabhdev will always bless you with progress and prosperity".

Shri Ram saluted the feet of Janak and Videha and sat in the chariot. Sita sat beside him; close to him. Lakshman sat in his chariot with his Vidyadhar brides. Bharath and Bhadra sat in their chariot. The chariot of Dasarath which was at the head moved on. Behind his chariot the ministers and the members of the royal family travelled in their chariots. Step by

step, all the chariots began to move slowly. Behind all these followed the Chief Commander of Mithila with a large escort of warriors.

When the chariots went out of sight, Queen Videha wept aloud and collapsed on the ground. King Janak was vainly endeavouring to check the tides of sorrow rising in his heart but he too lost his composure and wept like a helpless child.

LVI

THE REVELATION OF A SECRET

King Dasarath arrived at Ayodhya with his sons and daughters-in-law. The people of Ayodhya delighted and elated by the tremendous victory that Shri Ram and Lakshman had achieved and by their marriages, organised grand celebrations and jubilations.

The flood of time was flowing incessantly. The sun rose and set. The present became a part of the past and the future became the present. From times immemorial, this process of the passage of time has been in existence and it will go on forever. Just as time is without a beginning or an end the soul also is without a beginning or an end. They are co-existent. King Dasarath had passed the phase of youth and prime and had entered the phase of middle-age. He spent much of his time in reminiscences of the past and there was little time to dream of the future and to realize that dream. One dream of his remained unfulfilled.

King Dasarath once arranged a celebration in the temples of the Jin and organized the ceremony of *Shantisnatra* or the consecration ceremony as a part of the celebrations. Dasarath personally participated in the *Shanthisnatra* ceremony; worshipped the Paramatma with devotion and attained in consequence supreme spiritual felicity. The ceremony was over. The devotees who attended the ceremony received the holy water and felt supremely blessed.

At the time of the completion of the ceremony, he got four golden vessels and filled them with the holy water and sent the first one by an attendant to Queen Aparajita i.e., Kausalya. That attendant was the head of all the attendants and maids in

the harem and he had great confidence and trust in him. He sent the other three vessels to Sumitra, Kaikayi and Suprabha by three others.

These three attendants were young. So they, at once, conveyed the vessels to the chambers of the three Queens. Sumitra, Kaikayi and Suprabha received the holy water with great devotion, sprinkled it on their heads and felt supremely blessed.

When queen Aparajita found that the holy water had been conveyed to the other queens and that she had not received it there naturally arose in her mind a storm of thoughts and feelings. She began to think... "What is this? Has the king forgotten me? Would he not remember me along with those three queens? Actually, he should have conveyed the holy water to me first. If not first at least he should have conveyed it to me at the same time as he had conveyed it to the other queens. But no. He has not sent me the holy water. Whom shall I blame for this? Indeed, I am unfortunate. I fear I have lost my place in the king's heart. He has treated me with terrible indifference. He has slighted me. He has done me a great injustice. In this condition I find it difficult to live. Honour is the very essence of life. I have lost my honour. The king has totally forgotten me." As she continued to think thus she experienced great anguish. The tears began to flow from her eyes. She began to burn with anger. She developed a bitter contempt for her life. She decided to end her life and with this decision in her mind she went into her interior chamber. At once, she hanged herself with her bed-cover. Just then unexpectedly king Dasarath came there. Fortunately, she had forgotten to bolt the door of her chamber from inside. Therefore, Dasarath could enter the chamber and see the terrible sight. His face became crumpled like that of a sick person and he began to shake with fear. His eyes were wide opened with horror. He went into the chamber and removed the cloth from her neck. He held the queen affectionately; took her into his embrace; and then made her take a dignified seat. On seeing the king suddenly she began to weep aloud. Grieved by this sight Dasarath asked her in a voice choked with emotion;

"My dear queen ! Why did you take such a rash step ? Have I dishonoured you in any way or has any injustice been done to you ? Whatever it may be, tell me the truth...." Naturally his eyes welled up with tears.

"My lord ! You sent the holy water to the other queens; but you ignored me", Queen Aparajita began to weep bitterly.

Just then, the old attendant entered the chamber with the gold vessel containing the holy water.

"Honoured queen ! The King has sent you this golden vessel which contains the ceremonial water."

King Dasarath stood up, took the vessel into his hands and sprinkled the holy water on the queen's head. The queen was overwhelmed with joy. Within the twinkling of an eye she forgot her dissatisfaction and began to regret her impatient, rash and thoughtless behaviour.

"Why did you take so much time to come here ?" Dasarath asked the attendant glancing towards him.

"My lord ! You know my body is weak and I am old. I am merely a skeleton with dry bones....a mere skeleton and nothing else. I am unable to do anything quickly. Old age has incapacitated me," the attendant said breathing heavily.

King Dasarath kept looking at the decrepit body of the old attendant. His body was shaking. His hair had turned grey. All the organs of his body had grown weak and withered. His eye-brows were covered with grey hair. His body which was once robust had grown weak and withered. He was finding it difficult even to place a step.

The attendant bowed to the king and queen and went out of the chamber slowly. Dasarath kept looking at him until he went out of sight. Suddenly there arose a serious conflict in his mind. He fell into deep thoughtfulness.

"Is every jiva destined to grow old and decrepit ? Oh ! old age does not spare anyone but this is a pitiable stage of life...."

absolutely pitiable. A decrepit body; weakened senses and a senile mind. No real endeavour can be carried out with such things. I too will grow old and decrepit like this attendant one day. When that is so should I not be cautious at once. I should fulfil a dream of mine before I reach this stage. I should begin adoring the path of *Moksha*. This is the only thing remaining in my life. If I carry out this endeavour my life would be blessed and I am sure to attain a high state of perfection. The vast empire of Ayodhya can be taken care of by Ram and Lakshman, Bharata and Shatrughna. They are capable of carrying out that duty. I have done my duty with absolute devotion."

"My lord ! You are thinking of something deeply. Your radiant face is covered with the clouds of apathy and indifference. Oh ! I am really a wretched one. I think I have caused you this worry. The old attendant is not to blame. Poor fellow ! What could he do ? Of course you sent the water first to be conveyed to me but the old servant took time to come here." Queen Aparajita said with a voice shaken by emotion holding Dasarath's hand. King Dasarath looked at Aparajita's innocent face with fixed eyes.

"My dear queen ! I am not experiencing any agitation; nor did you cause any agitation to me. Of course, the old and decrepit body of the attendant has impelled me to engage myself in some self-scrutiny. Now, I find that I should begin adoring the path of *Moksha*, so that the fruit of my spiritual endeavours might be my provision for my spiritual journey".

Of course, seeing Dasarath worried Queen Aparajita also was worried but yet a lot was there to be done. Therefore, she engaged herself in her work. She received the golden vessel and sent for her daughters-in-law. Within a short time, Sita and the other daughters-in-law of the Queen came there. Queen Aparajita sprinkled the holy water on the heads of her daughters-in-law and said affectionately, "May this holy water bring you felicity and good fortune. May all calamities and inauspicious things be dispelled by this holy water." All bowed to their mother-in-law and received her blessings.

King Dasarath went to his chamber to take rest. The waves of thoughts that had arisen in his mind had not abated. Wherever he cast his eyes he visualized that old and decrepit attendant. He went to bed to forget him. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep, but he could not sleep. All his efforts to forget the old attendant were in vain. The vision of the old attendant's decrepit body shook him and filled him with a subtle fear. Naturally, he remembered his past. Till then he had lived a life of pleasure, pomp and power. But he had not acquired the qualities of spiritual excellence. The image of himself as he had lived so far appeared to be ugly and disgusting. Dasarath decided to destroy that image of himself which possessed pomp and power but not spiritual radiance.

From that day onwards, Queen Aparajita and the other queens noticed that King Dasarath had grown indifferent towards worldly enjoyments and pleasures and that he had become detached. Shri Ram and his brothers found that their father had become detached from his administrative duties. He used to attend the court only for a short time. He had placed the responsibility of administration on the shoulders of Shri Ram. He had reduced his contact with others. Sometime passed thus. One day the guard of the garden brought some happy news.

"My lord ! A great sadhu has come to our garden. He has with him many other sadhus. His name is Satyabhuti. He has the power of reading the mind of anyone. He can see things happening at tremendous distances. He possesses sublime knowledge. He describes the events that took place ages ago and he can visualize the events that will happen in the future."

Delighted with the news, King Dasarath presented to the guard expensive garments and ornaments. The guard was immensely happy. He sent word to Ram and Lakshman to make the necessary preparations for a visit to the garden. Very soon, he visited the garden with all the members of his family. He was accompanied by chariots, elephants, horses and the citizens of Ayodhya.

Mahatma Satyabhuti sat beneath a huge peepal tree in the forest. A large number of sadhus sat around him with bowed heads listening to his spiritual discourse. Dasarath and the members of his family saluted him. The Muni blessed them saying *Dharmalabh*. Dasarath felt delighted. His mind and heart swayed in elation. King Dasarath humbly sat near the Muni. Near him sat Aparajita and the other women. The ministers and the other members of the royal family sat on the other side. At the same time a large number of citizens of Ayodhya came there. The great muni began delivering a discourse. There was silence everywhere. Peace reigned supreme.

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King Chandragati returned to Ratanupur with Bhamandal and Bhamandal was greatly agitated by despair and distress. Chandragati tried his best to console him and cheer him up but his words had no effect on Bhamandal. Bhamandal's grief destroyed the peace and happiness of the Vidyadhar king's family.

Bhamandal overcome with grief gave up eating food. He used to remain always in his bed-chamber. He gave up his relations with all his friends. He stopped mixing with others. He totally kept aloof from all amusements and delights. He was always thinking of death as the only remedy to his malady. His face was totally devoid of radiance. His eyes became sunken. His body grew weak and withered. He stopped such activities as taking a bath, carrying out meditation and wearing clean dress.

King Chandragati was greatly grieved by his son's condition. He prevailed upon Bhamandal to forget Sita and to marry some other princess but he could not forget Sita even for a moment.

"Dear son, Sita is now another man's wife. The decision regarding the choice of a bridegroom for her was made by the gods presiding over the bows. If it was destined that you should marry Sita the deities would have helped you to achieve success but such a thing did not happen. That means the great gods

did not approve of your marrying Sita. The decree of destiny is that Sita should marry Shri Ram.. Therefore, forget her and end your anguish. Moreover, under these circumstances abducting Sita would be highly immoral and unjust. Even if we decide to take that unjust and immoral step it is not easy to abduct Sita. Shri Ram and Lakshman are not ordinary men. They are the supreme powers of the universe incarnate. You had a proof of their superhuman heroism in the *Swayamvara* hall”.

When King Chandragati found that his suave persuasions failed to have any effect on Bhamandal's mind he decided to take him on a pilgrimage to holy places and accordingly he set off on a pilgrimage to Rathavarthagiri taking Bhamandal, several Vidyadhar kings and princes and princesses with him.

King Chandragati and others visited the Jin teemples situated on the Rathavarth mountain, worshipped the images with devotion and then he spent sometime in watching the glories and graces of nature in that vicinity. During that period he noticed that there was no change in Bhamandal's mental state. He continued to be in despair. Bhamandal was in the same state of mind as the one in which he had been in the Vaithadya mountain. There was no difference at all. The same silence, the same gloom, the same sighs continued. In consequence, Chandragati's anguish increased. The various Vidyadhar kings, princes and princesses used various methods to cheer him up but all their efforts were fruitless.

At last, in sheer despair Chandragati decided to return to Ratanupur. The airship carrying them began flying towards Ratanupur. From the airship they kept watching the cities and towns beneath. When the airship was flying over Ayodhya Chandragati suddenly remembered a past event. The *Swayamvar* that had taken place in Mithila flashed before his mental eyes. Then he saw the mass of people thronging the garden near Ayodhya. When he looked at the sight closely he saw there the great muni Satyabhuti, who was at that time delivering a discourse. Chandragati ordered his men to land the airship there.

The airship flew down and landed in the garden. Chandragati, along with Bhamandal went to see the muni; and to offer him their salutations. All the other Vidhyadhars followed them. After having saluted the Muni, he sat in the next line. It did not take much time for the enlightened Muni to realize the plight of the family of Chandragati. He found that Bhamandal was agitated by his infatuation for Sita. Hence, he began to speak of that subject.

In his discourse, he threw light on the previous janmas of Chandragati and Queen Pushpavati. He also gave a factual account of the purvajanmas of Bhamandal and Sita. Not only this; he also narrated other details such as Sita and Bhamandal being born as twins to Queen Videha; Pingaldev out of hatred abducting Bhamandal in his childhood; Narad's visit to Sita's chamber; Sita being terrified; her companions and attendants insulting and beating Narad. Narad running away to Ratanupur; his plan to take revenge against Sita; the painting of the portrait; Narad presenting it to Bhamandal; the abduction of Janak, and Shri Ram's action of lifting of the bow in Sita's *Swayamvar*.

Hearing the story of his purvajanama, Bhamandal swooned. He fell on the ground; and when he regained his consciousness he had acquired the power of remembering his past lives. When with his newly acquired power, he recollected his previous janmas he found that the account given by Muni Satyabhuti was true.

"Venerable Lord! Your account of my previous lives is absolutely true. I have just now realized it;" and Bhamandal saluted the Muni with heartfelt devotion.

Bhamandal now realised that the girl Sita whose extraordinary beauty had captivated his heart was none other than his sister. So, he became repentant. He went to Sita and saluted her. Sita began staring at her brother who had been abducted years ago. "He who was abducted soon after his birth is my brother". She thought and her joy knew no bounds. She felt happy and blessed him.

Then Bhamandal approached Shri Ram and saluted his feet. Shri Ram embraced him affectionately.

Chandragati was overwhelmed with joy. When Bhamandal's agitation disappeared, his grief also disappeared. He felt supremely happy. Of course, on hearing these stories of the various lives and the strange events that had taken place he became detached. He ordered his Chief Minister :

“Dear Chief Minister ! Kindly go to Mithila at once and bring Janak and Videha so that Bhamandal may meet his father and mother.”

Accordingly, the Chief Minister went to Mithila and brought King Janak and Queen Videha to Ayodhya.

King Dasarath and Chandragati went forward and received King Janak with great honour. Then they narrated to him the entire story of Bhamandal as narrated by the Muni. King Janak and Queen Videha kept looking at Bhamandal with fixed eyes. A wave of affection rose in the heart of Videha. In consequence, milk sprang from her breasts.

Bhamandal ran forward and saluted the feet of Janak and Videha. Queen Videha embraced Bhamandal with great joy. King Janak embraced Bhamandal and bathed him with his tears.

King Janaka and Queen Videha found their long-lost son.

Sita found her long-lost brother.

Bhamandal's anguish ended.

Chandragati felt supremely happy when he found joy and serenity abounding around him. He was agitated by the samsar. He became totally detached. In consequence installing Bhamandal on the throne of Ratanupur, Chandragati and Pushpavati received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* from the great muni, Satyabhuti.

LVII

DASARATH'S RENUNCIATION

“Oh Lord of compassion ! Be so gracious as to make me blessed by telling me the story of my earlier lives.” King Dasarath entreated the great Muni Satyabhuti. Chandragati, the Vidyadhar King had already become a muni and Bhamandal had returned to Ratanupur with the members of the Royal Family. King Janak and Queen Videha were staying there because of the insistence of the King of Ayodhya. Mahatma Satyabhuti also was staying there. Every day a large number of people used to gather to hear his discourses.

When one day, Dasarath expressed his desire to know the story of his previous lives, the great Muni Satyabhuti looked into the darkness of the past with the light of his *Avadhijnan* (extrasensory perception) which at once brightened the past and made it clear.

“Oh King ! Since you want to know the story of your *poorvajanmas*; I will begin your story with the city of Sonapur. It is not possible to take up the story of your countless janmas before that point.

There lived a merchant in Sonapur. His name was Bhavan and he was noble in his profession. Dipika was his wife. They had a daughter by name Upasthi. In that janma you were that girl, Upasthi.

When Upasthi reached the proper age, she became a bitter opponent of Sadhus. When she saw a Sadhu, anger arose in her heart like fire. She could not shake off this attitude of hers throughout her life. Throughout her life, she hated sadhus and died. Then she was born as an animal, a bird, a fly and a water-

creature in various janmas. During that period, she experienced hellish torment. In course of time, her sin of having hated sadhus was burnt away and she was born in Chandrapur. She was born as the daughter of Sarthavah and his wife Sundari in Chandrapur as a boy. The boy was named Varun. Dasarath ! We shall call this your second janma. As Varun, you respected Sadhus and rendered selfless service to them and you gave charity with humility. Your respect for Sadhus grew strong. You attained a noble attitude towards jivas and then your worldly existence ended.

Then you were born as a *Yugalik* in the region of Uttara kura in the continent called Dhataki. After having died there, you were born in the heavenly world. After the span of your life in heaven ended, you were born as a prince in the city of Pushkala. You were born as the son of King Nandighosh and Queen Prithvidevi and you were named Nandivardhan. You lived the life of a noble Shrivak and in course of time you again went to the heavenly world. After dying there, you were born in Shashipuranaagar in the valleys of the Vaithadhya mountains.

You were born as the son of the Vidyadhar King, Ratnamali and Queen Vidyullata in Shashipuranaagar and you were named Suryajayadev.

Oh king ! From this janma onwards you developed contacts with the noble people who have gathered in this assembly.

Once the Vidyadhar King Ratnamali received the news that Vajranath, the Vidyadhar king of Simhapur had grown haughty and that he was treating the Vidyadhars with contempt. Therefore, Ratnamali invaded Simhapur. Vajranath with the purpose of safeguarding the city, closed the main gate of the city; appointed guards to defend the fort and was making preparations for a war. Sometime passed thus.

Ratnamali was indignant. He, impelled by anger, invaded the fort and broke down the gates of the city and entered the city. He burnt down the whole city. The flames of fire assuming monstrous forms devoured the whole city. A tremendous

commotion appeared everywhere. The terrified screams and the agonised lamentations of the people reverberated in the sky. Men, women, children, animals and birds were burnt down.

Then suddenly, a divine radiance appeared in the sky. A heavenly being appeared in the radiance. He went to Ratnamali and said in a lofty voice.

“Ratnamali ! What are you doing ? This kind of terrible and violent behaviour is not proper. In the fires kindled by you, children, old people, animals, birds, new-born children, women and the sky-high mansions of the city are being burnt to ashes. Their cries and screams are heart-rending. Once before, you committed a great sin like this. Now again knowingly, why are you committing this heartless sin ? You will get what you desire.”

In one janma you were a King by name Bhurinandan. You were a meat-eater. Once, on account of the benevolent influence of the precepts of a great muni you gave up eating meat; but a person by name Upamanyu made you break your vow and you again became a meat-eater.

Once, a person by name Skanda killed Upamanyu. After his death, Upamanyu was born as an elephant. You caught the elephant and kept it in your stables. In a war, the elephant died. After its death, it was born as your son by your queen Gandhari. That boy was named Arisudan. As soon as he grew up to be a young man, he acquired the power of remembering his past lives. He became a Sadhu and carried out severe austerities. As a result of this, after his death, he became a heavenly being. Oh Ratnamali ! I am that heavenly being.”

Bhoorinandan, after his death was born as a serpent. A terrible fire appeared in the forest. The serpent was burned to ashes in the fire. After that, he went to the second hell. I have gathered my knowledge of him by means of my extrasensory perception (Avadhijan). On account of my attachment for him in my earlier lives, I went to hell. I brought about in him spiritual awakening. As a result of this, after his death in hell, he was born as a Vidyadhar. He is yourself; Ratnamali !”

Oh ! Ratnamali, this is the tragic story of your earlier lives. Even now, it is not too late to mend your affairs. If we can atone for our sins, we can get rid of their effect. Therefore rescue the jivas in the city from these terrible flames. Do not, knowingly, invite endless calamities."

At once, Ratnamali ordered his men to extinguish the fires. He ended the war. Then saluting the heavenly being, he returned to his capital. After returning to his capital, he sent for his son Suryajay and said to him;

"Dear son ! Take upon your shoulders the responsibility of ruling over the kingdom and free me from that burden. Now, I have to think of my soul and proceed on the path of spiritual elevation."

"Dear father ! I too desire to follow you and pursue the path of spiritual elevation. I do not have any interest in the worldly life." Suryajay said humbly bowing to his father, Ratnamali.

In consequence, the father and the son received initiation into the *Sadhudharma*, at the same time from the same spiritual head. Suryajaya's son who was still a boy was installed on the throne.

The two Munis, Ratnamali and Suryajaya observed the principles of *Charitradharma* under the guidance of Acharya Tilaksunder and after their death they were born as heavenly beings in the heavenly world called *Mahashukraviman*".

For a moment, Satyabhuti was silent. He seemed to be searching for some new idea and then he began his narration with a resounding voice.

"Dear king ! Now you must act with caution. Ratnamali after ending his life in *Mahashukraviman* was born as Janak the King of Mithila and Suryajaya was born as Dasarath the King of Ayodhya.

And the jiva that appeared in the form of a heavenly being to advise Ratnamali to stop burning the city was born as Janak's younger brother Kanak. Oh King Dasarath ! When you

were Nandivardhan, your father was Nandhighosh. He went to the heavenly world called *Graiveyak*. After his life ended there, he was born as a human being and I am he."

Dasarath's joy knew no bounds. He felt that his father in a *poorvajanma* had come now to inspire him to proceed on the path of *moksha*. Overwhelmed with joy, he saluted the feet of Satyabhuti.

"Oh thou saviour ! I can never repay the debt of gratitude that I owe you. You have liberated me from my bondage with life by describing my earlier lives. I am now totally averse to all the pleasures and joys of life. Oh lord ! Kindly enable your son to pursue the path of spiritual elevation and guide him on that path."

"Oh King ! Why then delay ? Sooner the better ! Get ready."

"Gurudev ! I will surrender myself at your feet soon." Dasarath said in a humble voice.

After he heard the story of his earlier janmas Dasarath broke off all his attachments for this life. Of course, the attachments of his earlier lives had fascinated him; because the forms in which those attachments had appeared were fascinating to him. Satyabhuti possessed the four kinds of knowledge and was resplendent with spiritual excellence and attainments.

King Dasarath immersed in thought returned to his palace. In the evening, he invited to his council-chamber all the members of his family, the ministers and the high officials of his kingdom. The queens, his sons, his daughters-in-law, his ministers and all leading citizens of the city gathered there. All sat in their seats. Of course, they knew why the king had invited them. The king's spirit of detachment and renunciation had become a subject of discussion not only among the members of the royal family but also among the citizens of the city. They knew that Dasarath was indeed a Yogi in the guise of a King.

There was silence in the chamber. The king looked at everyone with fixed eyes as if trying to give importance to

everyone. Then for a few moments, he kept his eyes closed. A few moments later, he opened his eyes and looked around.

“Ram !”

“Yes, Revered Father ”

“Now, I desire to pursue the path of spiritual elevation.”

Dasarath looked towards Ram seriously. A mysterious seriousness appeared on Shri Ram's face. His eyes were turned towards the ground. On hearing his father's voice, he shed tears. He sat mute in his seat. A little later, touching Ram's head with his hand, Dasarath said :

“Ram ! This is a tradition that has been in existence in our family from the time of Lord Rishabhdev. This is the age-old tradition of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Actually, like my ancestors, I should have done this much earlier but knowingly or unknowingly, I have delayed.”

Shri Ram was still silent. On account of his attachment for his father, he was not at all willing to agree to his pursuing the path of renunciation, and at the same time, his spiritual enlightenment was such that he could not place any impediments on his father's way. Then King Dasarath looked towards Lakshman. Lakshman was a man of extraordinary abilities and a firm mind. Till then, no one had seen tears in his eyes, but now even his adamant heart had grown soft. When he saw tears in the eyes of Shri Ram, his eyes also grew tearful. Bharath sat near Lakshman in grief. His face was covered with agitation and deep worry. Shatrughna sat with a blank mind behind his father like a wooden image. He was deeply agitated over the impending event.

Dasarath turned towards Aparajitha-Kausalya and said :

“Dear Queen ! Do you have anything to say ?”

“My Lord ! Infatuation and deception place many impediments on the path of *moksha*. Strange are the ways of infatuation...but my Lord ! We do not want to place any impediments

on your path. My lord ! I pray to the supreme father to remove all impediments from your path."

"Dear Queen, your words become a noble lady belonging to the Ikshvaku dynasty. I am immensely pleased with what you have said."

Again, there was silence in the chamber. No one said anything. All were silent. Then, Bharath spoke in a resounding voice.

"Father ! I have an entreaty to make."

Suddenly all eyes turned towards Bharath. They were eager to hear what he was going to say.

"Come on, dear son ! What do you want to say ?" Dasarath said turning towards Bharath. He took Bharath's tender hand into his.

"Dear father ! I too desire to follow you on the path of spiritual elevation. Kindly take me also on that path. I will certainly keep pursuing the path. I cannot remain here without you."

The tears flowed from the eyes of Bharath. The atmosphere was filled with grief. All shed tears. His voice was choked with grief. His lips shivered. As before, he sat down with his head on his knees. Hearing Bharath's desire to follow Dasarath, all were stupefied.

"Bharath ! My dear son, you are wise and sensible. How did you lose your mental peace and poise ?"

"Father ! I am absolutely calm and composed. Kindly take me with you. Kindly bestow your compassion upon me, Oh Lord of the world !"

"Bharath....."

"Oh you ocean of compassion ! Physical delights and worldly prosperity have no use for me. I have no attachment for them.

“I do not love them. Dear father, kindly take me with you on the path of spiritual elevation.”

Wiping his tears with his upper-cloth, Bharath sat firmly in front of his father. King Dasarath fell into deep thoughtfulness. Shri Ram kept looking at Bharath with fixed eyes. Bharath's words made a special impression upon Kaikayi. Kaikayi became grief-stricken at the prospect of the separation from her son.

The night had far advanced. All were feeling sleepy. King Dasarath, at the end of the discussion ordered the Chief Minister to make the necessary preparations for Shri Ram's coronation as King, the very next day and went to his chamber suggesting to all to return to their places. While leaving the chamber everyone was talking about the same thing.... “Will Bharath also become a Sadhu along with the King?” All were worried about this. Everyone felt agitated by this development. But who can prevent what is destined to occur? All internally desired and loved the path of renunciation and all knew the greatness of that path. Of course, in such a situation, Lakshman would not be happy. Yet, he always remained with Shri Ram. Lakshman never spoke out until Shri Ram said anything that did not square with his preferences.

Bharath's sudden decision filled Shatrughna with grief. He went to Bharath's room and fell at his feet. He began to weep bitterly like a child weeping for a toy. He was unable to bear with separation from Bharath. He lifted him and embraced him and tried to console him.

“Dear brother, where is the need for such grief? Don't you like the path of self-discipline and spiritual elevation. I am sure that you love it but you love Bharath more. I am not unaware of this truth. That is why you are so deeply grieved.”

Shatrughna was silent. He was not in a position to say anything. Bharath held Shatrughna's hands and began to think deeply.

“Shatrughna ! Remember this truth. Some day or the other we have to be separated. When we are invited by Yama a sepa-

ration will occur. All the relationships of Samsar are transient. No relationship is permanent here. Man commits sins thinking that all these transient relationships are permanent. He gathers karmas and in consequence, he keeps wandering through samsar for countless ages. Therefore, dear brother, we must think of everything from the spiritual point of view and understand it. Ah ! this body, this beautiful form, these senses....this sound.... this taste, this smell, this touch. All these are karma's sports. None of these things belong to the soul. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to think of the real form of the soul."

Shatrughna heard every word of Bharath with deep concentration but he could not get rid of his mental agitation. But one desire dominated his mind and that was that he should always remain with Bharath. His desire was that Bharath should not become a sadhu. He desired that they two should live together whatever might be the circumstances. His desire was that Bharath should not become a sadhu though his father might become a sadhu. So turning towards Bharath he said.....

"Dear brother what you say is true. Your idea also is right but my desire is that you should not become a sadhu under any circumstances."

It was past midnight. Silence held its sway everywhere. No sound could be heard except the sounds of the footsteps of the guards. There was silence everywhere but agitation reigned supreme in the royal family of Ayodhya. Shatrughna was deeply agitated.... A storm had arisen in his heart. Kaikayi also unable to sleep kept walking to and fro in her chamber. She was lost in deep thought. She had been agitated not so much by her husband's decision to become a Sadhu as by Bharath's decision. One question kept piercing her heart like a thorn. "What an undesirable idea has occurred to Bharath ? Why should I live after he becomes a Sadhu ? When both my husband and son become sadhus, then why should I live ?" The very thought of the separation from them filled her with great agitation. Just then, a new idea flashed through her heart like an electric flash. "Why should I not dissuade Bharath from becoming a sadhu ? But that is no use. He is very obstinate. He never changes his

decisions. Moreover, he loves his father so greatly that he will not listen to me.” Again, she began to think deeply. The day was about to break. Suddenly, an idea rose like a comet in the firmament of her mind. She was thrilled. She also experienced a shiver of fear besides a thrill of delight. The very next moment she felt a little relieved and peaceful.

LVIII

THE DEMAND FOR THE BOON

"My lord ! I hope you remember that at the time of my *Swayamvar* when you had to fight a war you gave me the precious opportunity of being your charioteer. Probably, you have not also forgotten that after the war you gave me a boon."

"Yes, my dear queen ! How can I forget that event ? Indeed, it was your skill as a charioteer that enabled me to achieve that tremendous success," said Dasarath remembering the past.

"Oh lord of my life ! Today I entreat you to bestow that boon upon me. I am sure that, you will not break your promise. You respect your word more than anything else. The promise made by great men are as permanent as words carved upon a stone."

"Kaikayi ! You are right. You are absolutely free to ask for the boon but while asking for the boon you must bear in your mind two vital points. You must ask for only such a boon as I can bestow upon you. At the same time, you must not try to prevent me from pursuing the path of spiritual elevation. Apart from these two you can ask for anything you like."

At once, Kaikayi's face grew resplendent with joy. She felt as though her dreams had come true. She felt as if she was floating on the waves of affection for her son. So, she did not think of the consequences of her demanding the boon. If at all she thought of it, she thought of it vaguely not with farsightedness.

“Oh lord of my life ! Since you have decided to pursue *Sadhudharma* instal my son Bharath on the throne of Ayodhya with all grandeur and *eclat*”.

Hearing the words of Kaikayi King Dasarath kept looking at her with fixed eyes. He was silent for a while. Then, he said in a serious voice.

“Is this all ? Anything else ? You want the Kingdom of Ayodhya. Is that so ? You can take it at once.”

Kaikayi was thrilled to the brims of her being. Her mind began to dance like a peacock. King Dasarath sent a guard to bring Ram and Lakshman. Kaikayi's desire was fulfilled.

Of course, Kaikayi's motive in demanding that boon was that her son Bharath should remain with her instead of going away with his father as a sadhu. She did all that only with that purpose. Her desire was that the responsibility of ruling over the country must be placed on Bharath's shoulders, so that he might remain in samsar; so that he might not become a sadhu and so that he might be enjoying worldly delights for a long time. She could not think of any other method to compel Bharath to remain in the samsar.

She was not worried about Shri Ram's reaction. Of course, she knew very well that the throne of Ayodhya should rightly go to Shri Ram and not to Bharath. But Shri Ram loved her, Sumitra and Suprabha as much as he loved his mother Aparajita-Kausalya. She also had in her mind the idea of explaining everything to Shri Ram afterwards. She also knew very well that Shri Ram loved Bharath greatly and that he would not be angry when Bharath was made the king of the country. On the contrary, he would be happy.

Queen Kaikayi was a noble woman. She possessed great purity and culture. Moreover, she loved all the four brothers as her dear sons. She did not hate Shri Ram but, of course, she had a little partiality for her son Bharath and this was natural.

As soon as they received the message of Dasarath, Ram and Lakshman came to meet him. As soon as they entered the

chamber, they saluted their father and stood aside respectfully. There was silence everywhere. Addressing Shri Ram, stressing every word Dasarath said ;

“Dear Ram ! At the time of your mother, Kaikayi’s *Swayamvar*....” Dasarath pointed his finger towards Kaikayi and proceeded, “Greatly impressed with her skill as a charioteer I gave her one boon. Then she said, “I will ask for it when I need it”. At that time, she did not ask for anything. Now, she has asked for the boon and I have given it to her.”

“Dear father ! Whatever you do is proper and right. The promises of the Kings of Ikshvaku dynasty can never be broken.”

“She has asked me to crown Bharath king of the country and I have agreed to it”.

“Revered father ! My mother has asked for the right boon. She has done the right thing in requesting you to install Bharath on the throne because he is supremely radiant and valiant. This is indeed happy news.”

At once, Shri Ram’s face grew resplendent with joy. Overwhelmed with joyful emotions, he said :

“Dear father ! You have referred this matter to me out of your compassion for me. You have the power to make anyone the King of the country. You are all in all in Ayodhya and a gem among the Ikshvaku kings. You have the authority to take your own decision. When that is so who am I to oppose your decision or to give my consent to it ? Moreover, I am your humble servant. I am but the dust of your holy feet. I am always ready to carry out your commands with heartfelt dedication and devotion. Moreover, there is another point, dear father. Bharath and I are not different. We are equal in your eyes. Therefore, kindly install Bharath on the throne of Ayodhya. I am only happy that Bharath is going to be the king”.

The words of Shri Ram made Dasarath’s heart glow with joy. He rose to his feet and embraced Shri Ram.

“Dear son ! How broad-minded you are ! How sublime is your mind ! What you said is true. Moreover, you have spoken the truth.”

Just then Bharath entered the chamber. He had already known these developments. Therefore, he was in great fear, worry and sorrow. He was worried and agitated.

“Dear father ! Do not forget that I first entreated you to permit me to follow you on the path of spiritual elevation. I stand by my determination and I am determined to stand by it. You cannot change my determination.”

“Dear Bharath, do not oppose my promise. I have already given my word to your mother and you have to safeguard my promise....”

“No.....No.....This can never happen. I will not ascend the throne of Ayodhya under any circumstances.”

Kaikayi stood mute and petrified. She experienced great anguish seeing Bharath's agony. King Dasarath appeared to be more serious than the circumstances warranted. The atmosphere became heavy with anxiety. All were worried. When Bharath rejected the throne in such a firm manner Shri Ram said in a lofty voice,

“Dear brother, Bharath ! You need not ascend the throne of Ayodhya with the idea that you desire it. You have to ascend the throne with the idea that you have to fulfil our father's promise.” The tears that had been restrained all these days began to flow. Bharath began to weep like a child holding Shri Ram's feet. Bathing Shri Ram's feet with his tears, he said :

“Oh you noble hero ! Father and you are giving me the kingdom and that shows your greatness but if I accept it with a selfish desire, I would be the meanest of mortals. Have I become so low and despicable ? Shall I selfishly disregard the noblest traditions of our family ? Am I not the son of one of the noblest kings of this illustrious line ? Am I not the brother

of Shri Ram, the noblest hero of this world ? And shall I stoop to this mean level ? No. No, dear brother, please do not compel me to commit this enormity”.

Lakshman was not interested in the matter; so he had slipped away from there. According to him all these things were mere riddles and puzzles and he did not like them. Kaikayi's condition had aggravated. She had not thought that Bharath would reject the throne thus. Dasarath's anguish knew no bounds. He never thought that he would have to face such a new problem before setting off on the path of *Samyamdharm*a. Therefore, he was deeply worried.

But Shri Ram was caught in a deeper conflict and perplexity. No solution occurred to him. On the one hand, the King had bestowed the Kingdom on Bharath; and had given Kaikayi, the boon she had demanded; but on the other hand, Bharath was not at all willing to accept the offer of Kingship. He was eager to pursue the path of *Samyamdharm*a; and to follow his father. As long as Bharath did not accept the kingship his father's promise would not have been fulfilled; and he would not be able to adopt the path of *Charitradharma*. Bharath was determined to become a Sadhu; and ignoring his spirit of renunciation if he tried to dissuade him from his decision to become a sadhu, it might wound his feelings. If he tried to advise Kaikayi to refrain from demanding such a boon, it might wound her feelings. Shri Ram desired to follow a middle-path that would not offend anyone. When he thought deeply about it, a solution occurred to him. Somehow, Bharath should be made to ascend the throne of Ayodhya”, and then suddenly, a new idea flashed to him, “As long as I am in Ayodhya, Bharath will not accept the kingship because he respects me as his father. He has great love and devotion for me. He venerates me. Therefore, as long as I am in Ayodhya, he will not accept the kingship. Yes ! Let me go away from here. If I go away for ever, there is the possibility of his accepting the Kingship.”

In consequence, in order to see that his father's promise was fulfilled, he discarded his right to the throne. Moreover,

he also decided to go away to a forest. Why ? Out of devotion for his father.

Thinking thus, Shri Ram said turning towards Dasarath :

“As long as I am in Ayodhya, Bharath will not listen to us. Therefore, kindly permit me to go to a forest so that your promise may be fulfilled; and so that the present problem may be easily solved.”

Then, Shri Ram saluted the feet of King Dasarath and went out of the Chamber. On hearing about Shri Ram's decision.. Bharath began to weep like a child. The chamber reverberated with his cries; and the atmosphere became gloomy and depressed. Dasarath swooned; and fell down like a severed tree. The tears flowed from his eyes. In his semiconscious state, he could utter only one word;

“Ram ! Ram ! Oh Ram !”

At once, Shri Ram went to the chamber of his mother, Aparajita-Kausalya; and obtained her blessings.

“Mother ! Just as I am dear, to you, Bharath also is dear to you. In order to fulfil my father's promise, the kingdom has been bestowed upon Bharath; but Bharath is not at all willing to accept the kingship; and it is certain that as long as I am in Ayodhya, Bharath will not accept the throne. Under these circumstances, my father's word cannot be kept up. So, as a way out of this confounding tangle, I have thought of going away to a forest. That will solve the problem easily.”

Every word uttered by Shri Ram pierced the heart of Kausalya like a thorn; and it began to palpitate.

“Dear mother ! You must face the situation with patience and courage. Bharath and I are not different in your eyes. We are like your two eyes. We are virtually two parts of your heart. Therefore, you must treat Bharath with affection and love. You must see Ram in Bharath. You must not experience grief like an ordinary woman on account of the separation from me.”

Every word uttered by Shri Ram stabbed her heart like a pointed spear. She became deeply agitated. Her grief knew no bounds. Her tender heart seemed to break. She was grieved over the sad prospect of a separation from Shri Ram. She seemed to have lost her breath. She began to shiver with a nameless fear. She became unconscious oppressed by her grief. There was a commotion in the harem. Shri Ram held her; and gently placed her on the ground. The attendants sprinkled cold water on her face; and began to fan her. Shri Ram sat on the ground placing Kausalya's head on his lap. Within a few moments, she recovered her consciousness, sat up and said greatly dazed :

"Who made me recover my consciousness? Oh! I was happy when I was unconscious. I will gladly die. How can I bear with the separation from Ram? The son is going away to a forest and the husband is becoming a sadhu. It would have been better if I had died before hearing all this. Oh Lord! Why have I not been killed by a thunder-stroke? Why has not my heart broken into a hundred pieces? How hard and harsh is the human heart! Though a mountain of calamity falls upon it, it keeps beating."

Her cries filled the others with grief. All were plunged in sorrow. The atmosphere that was jubilant a little while ago became in a moment heavy and depressed. Sita stood in a corner and kept wiping her tears with the edge of her sari.

"Dear mother! You are the queen of the kingdom of Ayodhya.... You are the consort of the Emperor Dasarath and you are a noble woman of the illustrious line of Ikshvakus. You should not weep like ordinary women. When a lion goes out into the forest alone does the lioness weep like this?"

"Oh Ram. Oh you life of my life", said Queen Kausalya sibilating. "You cannot understand the agitation of a mother's heart. Kausalya does not possess the strength to bear with a separation from you. All my golden dreams have been dashed down to pieces."

"But, dear mother, there is no other way. I have got the golden opportunity of repaying the debt of gratitude to my parents. In our life, sometimes we have to sacrifice our desires,

ambitions and aspirations for the sake of our lofty ideals. This tradition...this lofty ideal has been shining resplendent like the pole star from the time of Lord Rishabhdev giving light and guidance to people. If we have to sacrifice everything to carry out our duties we have to make such a sacrifice. Dear mother, such a situation has arisen in my life. This is a testing time for me. My going to the forest is absolutely essential if my father's word is to be kept up and if mother Kaikayi's aspiration is to be fulfilled. I seek your blessings to carry out this duty."

Then Shri Ram again saluted his mother touching her feet and proceeded slowly towards Sumitra's chamber. He touched the feet of Sumitra who was standing there with a bowed head. Sumitra who was in deep grief blessed Shri Ram silently. Then, he went slowly to the chamber of Kaikayi. Her eyes were red on account of continuous weeping. She lay on her bed covering her face with her hands and was sobbing. From a distance, he saw her condition and he stood silent. He saluted her from a distance and prayed to his deities to fulfil her aspiration. From there, he went to Suprabha's chamber. Suprabha who was in great grief blessed Shri Ram silently. She looked at Ram with great agitation and stood silent and still like a stone-image.

When Shri Ram came out of his palace the large number of people, the guards, the door-keepers, the friends and the attendants who had gathered there wept aloud. Even the breezes seemed to have stopped blowing. The birds stopped singing. Horses, elephants and cows shed tears. All amusements had been stopped. The anguished cries of the people of Ayodhya reverberated in the skies. Who would not weep when their beloved prince is going away to a forest? Whose heart would not thaw away? Who would not be moved by Shri Ram's unexampled devotion for his father? Who would not admire such a great man? All bowed their heads; folded their hands and bade farewell to the radiant star of the Ikshvaku dynasty. As soon as Shri Ram went out of the palace Sita hurriedly went forward; saluted Dasarath; and bowed to the feet of Kausalya. Seeing Sita Kausalya wept aloud. She took Sita into her embrace and sobbed like a child.

“Mother, kindly bless me. I too will accompany my honoured Lord.” Sita entreated Kausalya to permit her to accompany Shri Ram.

“What do you mean, child ? How can you go to a forest ?” Kausalya said in a grief-stricken tone.

“Mother, kindly give me your blessings. I must go at once and join my lord.”

“Sita, my darling ! Until now you have not walked on bare ground. You are accustomed to travel by chariots. How can you travel on foot ? How can you walk through a forest where ground is stony, flinty and thorny. Dear child ! My son is a lion in human form. Nothing is impossible for him but you are like a tender creeper. How can you bear with the extremities of weather and the exigencies of life in a wild forest.”

Suddenly, Kausalya stopped speaking. For a few moments, she was silent. She read in the face of Sita her firm determination to follow Shri Ram. Then she said in a calm voice.... “But I do not want to prevent you from following your husband. You are a woman of extraordinary virtues. Naturally, you are eager and anxious to be always with your husband. I know your feelings but I shudder to think of the hardships of life in a forest and for that reason I am reluctant to permit you to go to a forest with your husband.”

Sita stood up. The sorrow that had clouded her face disappeared. She cheerfully began to think of her deities. Then, with a bowed head she saluted Kausalya and said,

“Mother ! My devotion for you will always give me protection. I am determined to follow my lord. Kindly bless me.”

And then Sita went out of the palace to join Shri Ram.

All the people of Ayodhya, men, women and children complimented Sita with their voices choked with emotion when she was following Shri Ram.

"Indeed Sita's devotion for her husband is astounding!"

"Indeed, this is an extraordinary example of the devotion of a wife to her husband."

"Sita has brought glory to the families of her father and her mother."

"Oh ! She is not at all daunted by the unbearable hardships of the forest life."

The women of the city expressed their reaction thus admiring and sympathizing with Sita. They also extended to her their heartfelt wishes for her welfare and prosperity. At that time, Lakshman was taking rest in his chamber. So he did not know that Shri Ram and Sita were going away to the forest. When he found the attendants sobbing, he asked them :

"What has happened ? Why are you weeping ?"

Nobody gave any reply but all wept aloud. They were all plunged in deep grief. Lakshman was greatly perplexed. He said again. "What is the matter ? Why are you weeping ? At least, let me know the reason for all this !"

An attendant said sobbing....

"Dear prince ! Shri Ram and princess Sita have set off to the forest."

"What did you say ? Have they set off to the forest ? Has my elder brother gone away without taking me with him ? How can this happen ?" Lakshman felt confounded. His mind was deeply agitated. He went up to the topmost chamber of his palace and began walking up and down in sheer helplessness. He thought :

"Actually my father is plain and simple. The hearts of women are unfathomable.... They are hypocritical. Kaikayi should have asked for the boon much earlier. Why did she not do so ? She has asked for the boon now when my elder brother was about to be crowned king and when he was about to ascend

the throne of Ayodhya. Well! My father has given the throne to Bharath but how could Bharath accept the throne? He has proved false to his elder brother; and the mother and the son have joined together and have stained the spotless honour and fame of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Of course, my father's promise has been kept up. Now there is no need to fear anything but I will not allow Bharath to be peaceful. I will rout him; seize the throne from him and will enshrine Shri Ram upon it. Only then will I have some peace of mind...." Lakshman began to burn with anger. The attendants knew the nature of his anger. All began to shudder at the sight of the indignant face of Lakshman and feared some unhappy occurrence.

Lakshman sat in the topmost storey of his mansion and kept looking at the sky.

"If I seize the throne from Bharath, Shri Ram may not approve of my action and may not accept the throne. He is a great man. He has discarded the kingdom of Ayodhya and royal splendour as if they are as worthless as a piece of straw and has set off to the forest. He will not accept the throne. At the same time, my father will be greatly unhappy. That is another matter of worry. Instead of that, Bharath can ascend the throne and rule over Ayodhya but my father should not have any reason to be grieved. Instead of being here, why should I not also go away and join my elder brother? Then there will be no problem at all. I will live with him in the forest. I will enjoy the beauties of nature and I will always be rendering service to my elder brother."

At once Lakshman became serious and silent. He rose to his feet and went to meet King Dasarath who was plunged in grief.

"My dear father! I too will join my elder brother and live in the forest." Saying this, he bowed to King Dasarath and went out.

He went to Sumitra's chamber. He devoutly bowed to the feet of his mother and said :

“Mother dear ! My elder brother has set off to the forest. I too will join him. I cannot stay here even for a moment, without Shri Ram.”

Sumitra's patience and firmness gave way. Restraining her emotions with great difficulty, she said :

“Dear child ! You are right. I really feel happy to hear that my son out of his own free will is determined to join his elder brother. Ram set off only a little while ago. He would not have gone far. Go and join him. Bhagwan Rishabhdev will always protect you.”

“Mother ! I am really blessed. May everyone get in every janma a noble mother like you. Your blessings are our protection”.

From there, Lakshman proceeded to Kausalya's chamber. As soon as he went out, Sumitra grieved by the separation from her son, cried, “Oh....Lakshman....” and fell down unconscious.

LIX

THE JOURNEY TO THE FOREST

“Dear Lakshman ! Do not go away. You are the apple of my eyes. Do not go away from me,” Kausalya said bathing Lakshman with her tears, while he sat placing his head on her feet. Kausalya was greatly grieved to find that even Lakshman was determined to go and live in the forest like Rama.

“Dear Lakshman ! You are my only prop in the absence of your brother, Shri Ram. I do not know how, I can bear with this separation. Do not go away from me. Lakshman ! My darling son, do not go away.”

Kausalya’s eyes had grown red with weeping, and yet the tears continued to flow from her eyes. Her radiant face had grown dull and dejected. Clouds of sorrow covered her face. Her expensive garments had become crumpled and soiled.

“Mother ! You are the mother of Shri Ram. You gave birth to him and you suckled him with the milk of patience and heroism. When that is so how can you be so agitated. It is natural for ordinary women to weep thus but I am not prepared to believe that you are an ordinary woman.”

Lakshman said looking at Kausalya’s tearful eyes.

“Mother dear ! Bless me at once. My brother will go far away if I delay. I must at once go and join him.”

“No. Lakshman ! No !” Kausalya at once stood at the door preventing Lakshman from going out. Her face was clouded with sorrow.

Maddened by sorrow, mother Kausalya stood at the door like a firm wall. The maids and attendants in the palace did not have the courage to stop him. Only, Kausalya had the courage to do so. Of course, Sumitra was Lakshman's mother but he never saw any difference between Sumitra and Kausalya. They were always equal in his eyes.

"Mother! Do not stop me. Lord Shri Ram will go away. I cannot live even a moment without Shri Ram. How can Lakshman live in the absence of Shri Ram. Mother! I am absolutely dependent on Shri Ram."

Within a moment, the firmness on his face softened and he was moved to see Kausalya's condition. He was filled with sorrow. He bent down and held her feet.

Oh Kausalya....the loving mother of Lakshman! She could not bear to see his grief-stricken face. Even before that she had several times witnessed such a situation. She was fully aware of Lakshman's thoughts and feelings. So she kept away from his path but now she could not bear to see Lakshman going away. She silently collapsed on her bed; covered her face with her hands and began sobbing like a child.

Ah! That was the inauspicious day on which Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman went away to the forest from Ayodhya, the queen of cities, when they left that magnificent palace of Ayodhya. Unable to witness this great injustice done by Destiny, the sun went behind clouds. King Dasarath was plunged in grief.

The lamentations of Queen Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha seemed to have moved even the stone-walls around. Everyone was greatly moved to see the grief of Bharath and Shatrughna. The whole city of Ayodhya was plunged in grief. This is mere imagination. To-day we cannot get a factual description of the scene. If a Kevaljnani were to describe the scene it would cause horripilation in every listener. All would shed tears and express deep compassion for the royal family which was thus caught in the flames of sorrow and anguish.

Lakshman went like an arrow and joined Shri Ram and Sita. Shri Ram was dressed in ordinary clothes and on his face, there was the joy of having fulfilled a promise on his father's behalf. The face of Sita was made to bloom like a lotus by the sight of Shri Ram's feet and Lakshman was happy that he was with Shri Ram. It was as though the three had gone to the forest to play some games and sports. Though they had gone to a forest, there was no trace of gloom or sorrow on their faces at the painful prospect of having to live in a forest.

But the people of Ayodhya were experiencing great anguish. They were like fish out of water. The young and the old men, women and children on hearing that Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman had set off to the forest, gave up their activities and began running madly after them.

"Why is Shri Ram going away to the forest? Is Sita also going to the forest? Why is the valiant Lakshman going to the forest?" Such questions rose in the minds of people like monsters and perplexed them. Shri Ram's travel to the forest became a subject of discussion for all people.

"Dear brother! I heard that all this confounding mess is the work of Kaikayi. Indeed, she is a wicked woman." A young man said unhesitatingly. His face revealed his anger and sorrow.

"What nonsense are you speaking? How is poor Kaikayi to blame for this? When sinful Karmas rise to the surface in the lives of people such calamities do occur to them," said a middle-aged man interrupting him. He looked up towards the sky and heaved a long sigh.

When Dasarath regained his consciousness, he heard that Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman had gone away to the forest. His grieved heart was pained by the separation. At once, he set off in search of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman taking with him his ministers and the members of the royal family. Of course, Shri Ram had gone a long distance from Ayodhya but without delaying even for a moment Dasarath kept travelling. On hearing that King Dasarath was following him Shri Ram

stopped. As soon as Dasarath came up Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman saluted his feet with devotion. When Dasarath saw them, he was greatly anguished. His distress knew no bounds. Kausalya and the other members of the royal family wept like helpless children.

But Shri Ramachandra was not shaken by the situation and he said in a serious manner, "Dear father! You are a great king. You are an ocean of patience and you have discarded all attachments. You should not shed tears. Tears do not become a great man like you. Your promise to Kaikayi has to be fulfilled. Have you forgotten that all the kings of the Ikshvaku dynasty kept up their promises under all conditions? Bharath will accept the throne only if I am away from Ayodhya; not otherwise. Under these circumstances my leaving Ayodhya is essential. This is a decree of fate that cannot be altered. Why should you weep over this?"

Shri Ram's voice reverberated everywhere. Every word uttered by him was profoundly significant. Dasarath was speechless.

"Dear father! Please realize that my going away to the forest will solve the problem. Your promise will be fulfilled and Kaikayi's aspiration also will be fulfilled. In this situation, why should I feel sad at all? No, father, no. Indeed I am supremely happy. Please bless us. Your blessings will give us the strength by means of which we can face all difficulties in the forest with courage and calmness and can carry out our duties properly."

Then, Shri Ram bowed to the feet of his father and entreated all to return to Ayodhya. He said to the people of Ayodhya.

"Kindly allow me to carry out my duty. If you do this you too would have done your duty. The tradition of the royal family of Ayodhya is one of self-sacrifice and what I have done is not at all extraordinary. I am going to the forest only to fulfil my father's promise. May lord Rishabhdev bestow peace and prosperity on all of you." All rose to their feet. All were

silent. Tears flowed from their eyes. Their faces had grown dark with anguish. All kept silently watching Shri Ram's resplendent face.

Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita proceeded towards the forest. Until they went out of sight, the people of Ayodhya and the members of the royal family stood there watching them silently, with fixed eyes. When they went out of sight, the people and the members of the royal family returned in bitter despair and distress. The streets of Ayodhya which were formerly crowded were now silent and desolate. All the joys and jubilations disappeared. A dead silence prevailed everywhere.

The royal family returned to Ayodhya. While returning King Dasarath was silent. On the way he did not utter a single word. He was lost in deep thoughtfulness. The true form of the samsar strengthened his spirit of renunciation. In this situation of Rama's departure to the forest, King Dasarath realized the futility of the samsar, the changefulness of human relationships and the dreadful nature of attachments. In consequence, he decided to crown Bharath, King of Ayodhya and to become a sadhu. He called the guard at the door and said.

"Inform Bharath to meet me at once." Within a few moments Bharath came into the chamber. He outwardly appeared to be calm and composed but inwardly he was experiencing deep agitation. The separation from Shri Ram had plunged him in grief. He had felt that life was meaningless and pointless. He had already developed a spirit of detachment and this event increased his sorrow and agitation.

Actually, it is only such events that open the inner spiritual eyes of thoughtful and wise people. Such events bring about the effect that even the most excellent discourses cannot. An event is more effective than a precept. The departure of Shri Ram to the forest exercised such an impact on Dasarath and Bharath that both became totally detached.

"Dear son Bharath ! I wish to celebrate your coronation and receive initiation into the *Sadhudharma* as soon as possible."

"No, my dear father, my coronation cannot take place. I cannot ascend the throne of Ayodhya. I too will become a sadhu and follow you. My becoming the king of the country is completely out of the question. My mother has placed an unwise step and has stained the resplendent fame of our royal family. I am totally innocent. Oh ! she is not my mother. She merely gave birth to me. She is my mother. If it were any other person I do not know what I might have done to her."

"Dear Bharath, these words are unbecoming of a hero like you."

"When Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman keep wandering through the wild forests would I ascend the throne of Ayodhya and live a life of splendour and prosperity ? Dear father, I can never do this. Would this increase the fame of our royal family ? I wish Kaikayi had thought of all this before asking for such a boon."

"Bharath, what you say is not true. Kaikayi does not hate Shri Ram but she has acted thus only on account of her abounding affection for you."

"Is not my noble brother Shri Ramachandra also her son ? Am I her only son ? Is it proper on her part to love one son in such a way as to do injustice to another ? Can't you realize this truth ? On account of her decision the entire royal family of Ayodhya is steeped in grief. The people of Ayodhya are steeped in mute anguish. All are deeply agitated and agonised. All are in great gloom and distress."

"But dear son, why do you forget this truth that your mother asked me to bestow only the kingship upon you. She never knew that this would necessitate Shri Ram's departure to the forest. Moreover, the truth is that it was on account of your rejection of the throne Shri Ram had to go to the forest. You know very well that the departure of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman to the forest has caused great anguish to Kaikayi. She is experiencing boundless distress. It is impossible to control her. Her eyes have grown red with weeping. Her face has become crumpled and disconsolate and her body has become withered like a fallen leaf."

Bharath broke down in grief. He wept bitterly. His voice was choked. He became speechless with grief. He placed his face upon Dasarath's lap and wept. Dasarath affectionately patted on his back.

"Dear father ! I am a wretched fellow. On account of me, my brother had to go to a forest and you have had to experience this anguish and the people of Ayodhya have had to lose their radiant Lord. But what is it that I can do ? The separation from Shri Ram is unbearable to me. I cannot even think of living without him. In this situation, how can I accept the Kingship ? My dear father ! Kindly forgive me. I cannot accept the kingship of Ayodhya. Only Shri Ram can ascend the throne of Ayodhya. I feel blessed if only I can worship his feet."

Dasarath could not say anything. He was silent. Bharath kept sobbing for a long time. His sobs echoed in the chamber. Just then, Kaikayi entered the chamber. Dasarath made a sign suggesting that she be seated. Kaikayi silently sat on a throne. Her resplendent face had grown black and blighted. She seemed to be the very image of anguish and agitation.

After being silent for a while Dasarath said : "Bharath has been rejecting the kingship. What shall we do ?" He looked at Kaikayi with fixed eyes. He said again, "How can I be initiated into the *Sadhudharma* until the coronation takes place."

For a while, deep silence prevailed in the chamber. Then Bharath said in a firm voice : "Only Shri Ram must be crowned king of the country; not I..." On hearing Bharath's words, a violent conflict arose in Kaikayi's mind. She had never thought that such a situation would arise. She said in a serious voice : "Oh Lord of my life ! What is past is past. Now only Shri Ram should be crowned the king of the country."

"But my dear queen, what about my promise to you ?" Dasarath said with evident eagerness and anxiety.

"Oh Lord of Ayodhya ! Your promise to me has been fulfilled. I have received your boon because you have offered the

kingship to Bharath. If he does not accept the kingship it does not mean that your promise is not fulfilled. Now, delay is not proper. You must send our ministers and high officials to bring back Ram. As soon as he comes back we should celebrate his coronation, so that your desire to pursue the path of *Samyam* may be fulfilled." As soon as Kaikayi made this suggestion, King Dasarath sent for his ministers and officials and ordered them to bring back Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman to Ayodhya.

When Kaikayi asked for that boon she never knew that such a calamitous situation would arise. She never knew that Shri Ram would go away to the forest; that Bharath would reject the throne; and that Dasarath's desire to become a sadhu would be thus impeded. Kaikayi was a woman of indisputable nobility, a worthy member of an illustrious royal family. She was the noble wife of emperor Dasarath and the darling daughter of emperor Shubhmati, a scholar and an enlightened woman. She had no evil motive in asking for the kingdom. Her husband was determined to become a sadhu. Her fear was that Bharath also might become a Sadhu. If that happened her life would have been blighted. She would have no prop in her life. This caused agitation to her and, in consequence, she asked for the boon. If Bharath had not decided to become a sadhu she would not have asked for the boon. Shri Ram need not have gone to the forest and Dasarath's desire to become a sadhu would not have been impeded.

The ministers made enquiries and found out that Shri Ram had gone westwards. So they too went westwards. In consequence, they overtook Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman very soon. Shri Ram understood the reason for their coming. He received them with honour. Seeing Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita wandering in the forests the ministers shed tears. Their sorrow knew no bounds. They stood silently before Shri Ram with bowed heads.

Shri Ram sat on a stone beneath a huge tree. Lakshman stood behind him. Sita was engaged in extending hospitality to the guests. She was cutting fruits for them. All sat in front of Shri Ram. Shri Ram's face shone with an unearthly radiance.

He was cheerful and smiling. Lakshman also was cheerful. Sita's face was radiant with joy but those who had come there were in a different state of mind. Their faces were clouded with sorrow and agitation. All sat hanging their heads.

After having eaten fruits and drunk water the head of the cabinet of ministers began speaking.

"My Lord ! King Dasarath has sent us to take you back to Ayodhya. Therefore, kindly return with us to Ayodhya."

"Dear Chief Minister ! You have come here according to the order of the King and you have done your duty but, Oh noble man ! Just as you carry out your duty I too have to carry out my duty. You install Bharath on the throne of Ayodhya and maintain thus the great tradition of Ikshvaku dynasty."

"Oh noble hero ! You are right. From the time you left Ayodhya Bharath has been weeping ceaselessly. He has been rejecting the kingship."

Hearing from the ministers the state of affairs prevailing in Ayodhya, Ram experienced deep anguish. He began thinking deeply. The ministers kept watching the thoughts and feelings manifesting themselves on Shri Ram's face.

"Do you believe that if I return to Ayodhya Bharath would accept the throne ?"

"Dear prince, that may not happen".

"Then why should I return to Ayodhya ? Will it serve any purpose ?"

"The king desires to install you on the throne of Ayodhya."

"But that does not appear to be proper. My father's promise has to be fulfilled."

"That is right. His word has been fulfilled. According to Kaikayi's desire our king has offered the kingship to Bharath but when Bharath himself has rejected the offer and when he offers the throne to you how is his promise to Kaikayi broken ?" The Chief Minister said employing a logical argument.

"But dear Chief Minister until Bharath accepts the kingship we cannot say that the king has handed over the kingship to him. Therefore, at any rate Bharath will have to accept the kingship."

"But he does not at all want to accept the kingship. That is the problem, you see."

"Bharath has to see that my father's promise is kept up. Moreover, he has to accept the throne."

"Dear Lord ! What more can we say ? Queen Kausalya's tears have not dried since you left Ayodhya. Her anguish is endless. A great impediment has appeared on the path of the king who desires to pursue the path of *Samyamdharm*."

Queen Kaikayi also has agreed that the King's promise has been kept up. She says, "Now, Shri Ram can be surely crowned king. Hence, we entreat you to return to Ayodhya." The Chief Minister's voice was choked. His eyes welled up with tears. He got up; and held the feet of Shri Ram. Shri Ram embraced the Chief Minister.

"Dear Chief Minister ! You are intelligent, wise and experienced. You know very well the lofty traditions of the Ikshvaku dynasty. We should think of the present situation with sagacity. If I am present in Ayodhya, Bharath will never accept the kingship. This is certain. He has great love and regard for me. He venerates me as his father. If I am not present in Ayodhya, if not today, sometime later, he will accept the kingship. Knowing this, I voluntarily came away to the forest."

All were silent and still. All began to think deeply about what Shri Ram had said. Just then, a new idea flashed to the Chief Minister.

"Dear Prince ! When Kaikayi herself who demanded the boon, has been saying that the boon has been received, where is the question of the King's promise being broken ! Moreover, Kaikayi also desires that you should return to Ayodhya; and ascend the throne."

“Oh you venerable one ! This is not at all possible. I have taken a vow; and it cannot be altered. Hence, please do not ask me to return to Ayodhya.”

Shri Ram stood up; and proceeded on his journey. The ministers and the officials also followed him. They again and again entreated him to return to Ayodhya; but he refused to do so. Still, a tiny light of hope kept burning dimly in their hearts that Shri Ram would return to Ayodhya. So, they did not at once, return to Ayodhya. They kept following Shri Ram.

Travelling thus, they reached a forest called *Pariyatra*. It was a wild forest that surrounded the *Pariyatra* mountain; and for great distances, there was no sign of human habitation. The forest was wild and desolate abounding in thorny plants, thick bushes and huge trees. Everywhere in the forest, wild animals wandered about freely.

Before entering the *Pariyatra* forest, they had to cross a river by name, the *Gambhira*. It was a wide and formidable river, Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman stopped on the bank of the *Gambhira*. Then Shri Ram said :

“Now, all of you kindly go back to Ayodhya, since from here onwards, the path in the forest is uneven. Please convey our regards to our father; and obey Bharath’s commands. Just as all these days, you obeyed and served King Dasarath, now you obey and serve Bharath.”

The ministers shed tears. All began to weep. Shri Ram became serious and silent. Even the *Gambhira* grew silent and still as if affected by this sight.

“We are indeed wretched....Fie upon our lives ! Death is preferable to this life. We are unworthy of rendering service to Shri Ram.” The ministers and the officials said in one voice and shed tears. Shri Ram’s heart which was soft and tender

like a lotus became hard like a diamond. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman sat in a boat and sailed away bidding farewell to the ministers and others who were standing on the bank. They stood like stone-images until the boat reached the other bank. With great difficulty, they tried to restrain their emotions that rose like a tempest and they stood silent. When Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman went out of sight, they returned to Ayodhya in bitter despair.

LX

BHARATH'S CORONATION

The ministers and the officials returned to Ayodhya; met King Dasarath; and narrated to him all that had happened. Dasarath's anguish knew no bounds. His decision to become a sadhu was being delayed. But neither Shri Ram nor Bharath was willing to ascend the throne. Thinking about this problem for a long time, King Dasarath sent for Bharath; and waited for him in the counsel-chamber. When he came, Dasarath said to him;

“Bharath ! The ministers and officials have returned. Their efforts to bring back Ram have failed. Ram is not willing to ascend the throne. Now, it is your duty to assume the kingship and to carry on the administration of the Kingdom maintaining the lofty traditions of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Please do not place impediments on my path by delaying your decision.”

On hearing the words of King Dasarath, Bharath became unconscious. Regaining his consciousness, he looked at the worried faces of the ministers and officials and found that they were all in deep anguish because they had failed in their efforts to bring back Shri Ram.

“Dear father ! I feel confident that if I go personally to Shri Ram, he will come back. He is an ocean of kindness. He has great affection for me. He will not disappoint me. I would be a slave of Shri Ram. I cannot become the King of Ayodhya. Please do not insist upon my accepting the Kingship.”

“Bharath !” Dasarath's voice was choked. His radiant face grew black with agitation.

"Dear father ! Somehow or the other, I will bring back my brother Shri Ram. I will somehow prevail upon him to return." When Bharath was about to go out, Kaikayi came there. She looked serious and thoughtful. Her deep anguish kept flooding her eyes with tears. She had grown weak and withered. She looked as if she had been ill for long. King Dasarath offered her a seat. She sat silent for a few moments. The atmosphere in the chamber was pervaded with silence mixed with anxiety.

"Dear lord..." Kaikayi could say only this.

Dasarath looked towards her anxiously.

"My lord ! You have kept up your promise by offering the kingdom to Bharath. But your polite son is not willing to ascend the throne. Hence, this calamitous situation has arisen. In fact, the situation is calamitous. You are unable to do anything; and our misery is boundless. Like me, the other mothers of Bharath also are plunged in grief."

Kaikayi's voice was choked with grief. She found it difficult to weep. She began to weep; "Actually, I did not act with farsightedness. If I knew that such a calamitous situation would arise and that the clouds of anguish would thus envelop Ayodhya I would not have committed the sin of asking for such a boon. Though you have four heroic sons you are caught in a conflict regarding the choice of a successor to your throne. It is I who was responsible for the emergence of this painful situation. I have pushed you into the bottomless abyss of anguish. My Lord, forgive me. The anguish and grief of Queen Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha are heart-rending. I pushed the city of Ayodhya into the abyss of grief and anguish."

The atmosphere in the chamber reverberated with her cries of distress. King Dasarath also shed tears. The Ministers and officials were all sympathy for Kaikayi.

"Oh Lord of the earth ! Kindly permit me also to go with Bharath. I too will try to prevail upon Ram to return to Ayodhya. He is my beloved Ram. He will not certainly disregard my words. He will certainly return."

Dasarath permitted Kaikayi and Bharath to go to the forest and bring back Shri Ram. There arose another tiny ray of hope in his mind. There appeared a smile on his blighted face. His mind beat its wings like a bird. He thought that Ram would certainly agree to return to Ayodhya if Kaikayi and Bharath met him and prevailed upon him to come back.

“Queen Kaikayi is personally going with Bharath to the forest to bring back Shri Ram.” This news spread like wild fire in the city. So a new wave of joy swept the city. There appeared a high regard for Kaikayi in the hearts of the people. The people of Ayodhya again became hopeful and began expecting the return of Shri Ram.

Kaikayi accompanied Bharath and the ministers to the forest. They travelled without taking rest. After having travelled for six days thus they saw Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman sitting beneath a huge banyan tree. Kaikayi alighted from her chariot. Bharath also alighted from the chariot. The ministers also alighted from their chariot and followed them.

After going forward a few paces, Kaikayi cried, “Dear son”; like a mad woman and ran towards him.

Lakshman had noticed that Bharath had come. He had informed Shri Ram of their arrival. Seeing Kaikayi running towards him, Shri Ram stood up to salute her. As soon as she came near he prostrated at her feet. Kaikayi bestowed her blessings upon him and embraced him affectionately.

Lakshman bowed to her feet. She embraced Lakshman and then she took Sita into her embrace and wept bitterly. Grief filled the atmosphere.

Bharath fell at the feet of Shri Ram and bathed his feet with hot tears. Unable to restrain his overpowering sorrow, he swooned at Shri Ram's feet.

Sita at once brought some water in the hollow of a leaf. She sprinkled the water on Bharath's face; and began fanning his face with the edge of her bark-sari. A little later, Bharath

regained his consciousness. As soon as regaining his consciousness, he held the feet of Shri Ram and said in a voice shaken with emotion;

“Dear brother ! You have treated me as an enemy; and come away to the forest. Our father bestowed the boon upon my mother to keep up his promise. What is my fault in this ? What fault have I committed that you should inflict this cruel punishment upon me ? Have I at any time offended you or slighted you ? Why have you taken this cruel step ? What blunder have I committed that my elder brother should thus break off with me; and come away from me ? Kindly tell me, Shri Ram, if I have committed any offence. If I have committed any sin punish me and beat me but tell me what offence I have committed. Why have you taken this terrible decision ? Have you ever realised how deeply Ayodhya is grieved by your absence ? Dear brother, without you I can never be peaceful. Kindly return to Ayodhya and make our lives blessed. Your action has steeped me in anguish. Your younger brother has become a selfish man in the eyes of the people of Ayodhya. The people of Ayodhya think that my mother has brought about this calamitous situation by her selfish attachment for her son. My mother might have committed a mistake but the common people are blaming me for it. People think that I am responsible for all this. Therefore, dear brother, return to Ayodhya and free me from this blame.” Bharath spoke in anguish. His voice was shaken with grief. His heart was filled with an indescribable agitation. His condition was such that it would move even the heart of a stone-image.

Bharath kept looking at Shri Ram with fixed eyes.

Shri Ramachandra was patient like a peaceful ocean. Lakshman was silent and Sita stood silent with her eyes fixed on the ground. An extraordinary peace filled the atmosphere. There was such silence that one could hear the noise made by a single leaf on a tree if it moved. Kaikayi, Bharath and the ministers, kept looking towards Shri Ram.

“Dear brother ! Kindly return to Ayodhya and increase the splendour of our kingdom. Lakshman will be your Chief Minis-

ter. I will feel blessed if I can be your guard. My brother Shatrughna will deem himself blessed if he can hold an umbrella over your head", Bharath said repeating his entreaty.

But Shri Ram remained firm. He was silent. Every word uttered by him reverberated in his heart like the melodies of a *Veena* but his words did not change his decision. A little later Kaikayi said endorsing Bharath's entreaty.

"Dear son ! Do not reject your brother's entreaty. I know very well that you love Bharath greatly and that you have great affection for me. Please accept my suggestion and return to Ayodhya. Your father is not at all responsible for the events that occurred in Ayodhya. Bharath also is not to blame. For all this I am to blame." Kaikayi continued in a voice shaken with grief, "Ram, it is natural for a woman to commit a blunder of this kind. I too have all the weaknesses of a woman except that I am a high-born woman. It is no exaggeration to say that I am the very embodiment of all weaknesses. What else can I say ?" and she began to weep. She covered her face with her hands. She paused a little. She heaved a deep sigh and looking towards Shri Ram with tearful eyes, she continued,

"Dear son ! There cannot be in this world another wretched woman like me. I have caused grief to my lord by my thoughtless action. I have placed an impediment on his path when he wanted to pursue the path of *Samyam*. I have wounded the tender feelings of Bharath. I have done a great injustice to you and Lakshman. What more can I say ? Your brother Shatrughna's grief is heart-rending and..." She looked towards Sita who was standing silently and said, "And I have committed the sin of making Sita the very image of all virtues, the embodiment of sublime tenderness wander through the forest. On account of me Queen Kausalya, Sumitra and Suprabha are plunged in grief. Our courtiers and people are steeped in anguish. Seeing all this I have been experiencing indescribable anguish. My heart breaks to think of what I have done. Oh ! I hate myself."

Holding Shri Ram's hand she said again, "Dear Ram ! my son ! kindly forgive me..." and she began to weep aloud.

Kaikayi's grief petrified everyone. All the others who had come with her were shedding tears. Yet Shri Ram remained unshaken. Lakshman was silent and Shri Ram was calm.

"Dear lord ! Kindly return to Ayodhya and bestow your compassion upon us" Bharath said emphasizing every utterance of his.

But Shri Ram did not budge an inch. He remained as firm and stolid as the Himalayas. His face was tender but firm. Kaikayi's entreaties and Bharath's humble appeals did not have any effect upon him. A little later Shri Ram said with his voice ringing like the thunder :

"Dear mother ! I am the son of King Dasarath, the light of Ikshvaku dynasty. How can I break my vow ? My father has offered the kingdom to Bharath and in the presence of all I gave my consent to it. When that is the situation how can there be any change in it ? If I change it I will have acted against truthfulness and stained the splendid name of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Mother ! I know very well that you are innocent. You did not order me to go to a forest; nor did Bharath compel me to go to a forest but I voluntarily decided to leave Ayodhya and go away to a forest. This is my decision. . . . This is my determination. When you asked for the boon from my father your only desire was that Bharath should accept the kingship and remain a householder instead of becoming a sadhu. My desire also is that Bharath should remain a householder and accept kingship. I do not at all make light of your astounding affection for me and Bharath's extraordinary devotion for me. That is not at all my purpose but duty is more important than these things. Therefore, if a man has to sacrifice his tender feelings for the sake of duty he has to restrain them or eradicate them. One must be ready even to sacrifice one's life to keep up one's vow. When that is so, how can I break my vow ? Moreover my father who gave the boon; and I who gave my consent to it are both alive."

Then, looking towards Bharath, he said in a serene manner:

"Bharath ! Now, there is no other way than this, Give up your childishness and realize the seriousness of the situation.

Though you may be unwilling you have to carry out our father's orders and my orders and you have to ascend the throne of Ayodhya." Then looking towards Kaikayi he said, "Mother, just as Bharath has to carry out our father's orders he has to carry out my orders also. Bharath belongs to the Ikshvaku dynasty and he has to act according to the lofty traditions of our family". Sita brought water in the hollow of a leaf. Shri Ramachandra sprinkled water on Bharath's head; crowned him King of Ayodhya and blessed him. The ministers and the others who had gathered there shouted in elation. "May Emperor Bharath be victorious" and their cries resounded in the skies.

Addressing all, Shri Ram said:

"From today onwards, the reins of the empire shall be in the hands of Bharath. He has been crowned king of the country in the place of our father. All of you must henceforth carry out his commands with unstinting loyalty. Just as all these days you carried out the orders of my father; just as you had devotion for my father and me, in future you must show devotion to Emperor Bharath.

In this manner, the promise given by my father has been fulfilled. Now he is free to pursue the path of spiritual elevation."

A few moments later Shri Ram turned towards Bharath and said, "Bharath, convey to our father my salutations. You must always safeguard and maintain the lofty traditions of Ayodhya coming down from the time of Bhagwan Rishabhdev. You must love our people more than your life. You are a treasure-house of extraordinary virtues and invincible powers. You possess all the virtues and abilities of a great man. You will undoubtedly become a popular king and will brighten the fame of our royal family. Dear child, may you be always prosperous and may you be felicitous. May prosperity, felicity and serenity fill your life."

Then Shri Ram saluted the feet of Kaikayi. Lakshman and Sita also saluted her feet. Bharath bowed to his feet; wore the dust of his feet on his head and with heartfelt devotion he saluted Lakshman and Sita and obtained their blessings.

Bidding farewell to them Shri Ram proceeded southwards.

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Shri Ram went to the forest so that his father's promise might be fulfilled.

Bharath accepted kingship unwillingly because he had to obey his brother's commands.

Shri Ram did not at all examine the merits and demerits of the boon that his father had bestowed upon Kaikayi. He did not also try to prove the justness or the injustice of the boon demanded by Kaikayi but he merely thought of this point, "My father's promise to Kaikayi must be fulfilled." He discarded his right to the throne so that his father's promise might be fulfilled and then went away to the forest.

In order to see that his father's promise was fulfilled Shri Ram sacrificed his royal splendour, prosperity, happiness, power and all his golden dreams. He suffered many hardships for this reason. This is a magnificent ideal of filial devotion. Shri Ram acted according to this ideal.

Sita followed Shri Ram into the forests impelled by her devotion for him as a wife. Sita who possessed a tender body and mind experienced countless hardships and agonies. Yet she did not regret them. She wandered through the forests with her husband like his shadow. She did not remain in Ayodhya with Kausalya. She did not also go to Mithila but she always remained with her husband. She was a partner in his sorrows and joys. She did not at any time offer any suggestion to Shri Ram. "What is the point in our going to the forest? Bharath may attain Kingship but why should we go to a forest? If not in Ayodhya we can stay in some other city? Can anyone give such a promise? Yet what had to happen has happened. Father might have given his promise and Kaikayi might have received the boon but when Bharath himself is unwilling to accept kingship why should we go to a forest?" She did not say such things to Shri Ram at any time. She was always silent; and obediently followed the path chosen by her husband.

Lakshman exemplified the loftiest kind of fraternal affection. Though he was a hero of invincible valour he desired to follow his elder brother. Though he did not like the events that took place, he always gave his silent consent to Shri Ram's decisions.

Kaikayi and Bharath returned to Ayodhya. The ministers and the officials met emperor Dasarath and said in a polite manner.

"Oh Lord of the earth ! Our noble prince Shri Ramachandra crowned Bharath King in the forest."

"But where is Ram ?" said Dasarath eagerly.

"Oh Lord, after bidding us farewell he went southwards."

"Then he did not agree to....."

"Yes, Oh king he did not agree to return to Ayodhya. Queen Kaikayi and Bharath repeatedly entreated Shri Ram to return to Ayodhya but Shri Ram did not budge an inch. He repeatedly kept saying the same thing, "I have come away to the forest voluntarily. My coming back to Ayodhya is out of the question."

Dasarath's anguish knew no bounds. He felt that the skies cracked and fell on his head and that the earth quaked violently. He became petrified by the anguish of the separation from Shri Ram. But soon his soul woke up from its dormancy. In consequence, he got over his anguish and began making preparations necessary for pursuing the path of spiritual elevation. At that time, the great muni Sathyabhuti was staying in the garden near Ayodhya.

Dasarath's decision to pursue the path of spiritual elevation was proclaimed throughout the city and arrangements were made for Bharath's coronation in the city.

At the proper time, King Dasarath along with his family received initiation into the *Sadhudharma*. Emperor Bharath arranged eight-day celebrations in all the Jin temples in the city; gifts were given to the poor and the destitute. Food was served to the hungry and the weak. All prisoners were released. A large number of the people of Ayodhya also received initiation into the *sadhudharma* along with their King. Everywhere enthusiasm rose like a storm. Everyone was enthusiastic to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. In those days the path of Moksha was greatly liked by people.

Bharath assumed the reins of kingship. Shatrughna began to assist him in administrative activities. Queen Kausalya, Sumitra, Kaikayi and Suprabha expressed their heartiest wishes for all. They wished that the city might achieve prosperity and that the Ikshvaku dynasty might be glorious and that the empire of Ayodhya should be exemplary in the world.

Of course, Bharath carried out the administration of the empire. He ruled over the empire with ability and nobility and increased its fame and glory. Yet he was always agitated by the absence of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman and he was anguished by the thought of the hardships that they were experiencing in the forest. In consequence, he was always internally agitated. He was detached from prosperity and power and he was always experiencing a deep anguish. He was carrying out the administration with the feeling that he was only a servant of Shri Ram.

For his mental peace he engaged himself in worshipping the Arihant Bhagwan and was always endeavouring to strengthen his spirit of detachment.

On that day, when king Dasarath received initiation into the *sadhudharma* Bharath who was detached and who too desired to receive the initiation experienced great anguish. Who can imagine or describe the extent of his anguish? He had to accept the kingship on account of the compelling necessity of obeying

the commands of his father and his elder brother. Actually, he was totally detached from the samsar. He had the desire of renouncing the samsar. He could not fulfil his desire because of the commands of his elders but he was determined to fulfil his desire when he got an opportunity.

Bharath was ruling over the empire with a spirit of detachment. Shri Ramachandra accompanied by Lakshman and Sita entered the Kingdom of Avanti.

LXI

THE FIRST HALT

Shri Ram, accompanied by Lakshman and Sita entered the kingdom of Avanti which looked fascinating on account of the graces and glories of nature, there. They travelled slowly through the area. Every day, they began their journey at the sunrise; and they spent the nights in some desolate places or outside some villages and hamlets. They travelled thus for some days in the Avanti area. On that day, the sun had risen and was shining in the eastern sky like a ball of fire spreading light and heat everywhere. On account of the heat Sita's face had grown red and weary and she was walking slowly.

Sita said to Ram with a look of solicitation, "Dear Lord, let us take rest in some convenient place."

"Look there ! We can take rest in the cool shadow of that banyan tree. Let us go and rest there for a while;" and then the three proceeded towards the banyan tree. They halted in the shadow of that banyan tree. Lakshman spread his upper-cloth on the ground. Shri Ram and Sita sat upon it to take rest.

After having reposed for a while Shri Ramachandra looked around and closely observed the surroundings. He began to think. "This place seems to have been deserted by people recently. Indeed these cottages and this wood have been deserted by people on account of some fear. The people of this area have gone away from this place. Otherwise, this beautiful place would not have been so desolate and deserted." He kept thinking thus for a while and then said to Lakshman :

"Dear brother, just look at those sugarcane fields, wheat fields and the gardens. Don't you think that the people of this

area must have deserted this place and gone away recently on account of some fear. On account of some reason, the people of this area seem to have gone away deserting their homes and fields."

"Noble brother, you are right. I too think so."

Both the brothers kept looking at the fields and gardens that extended to a great distance. Just then, Shri Ram noticed a traveller passing by and asked him.

"Noble man, I want to ask you something."

The traveller kept looking at Shri Ramachandra with fixed eyes. He was greatly fascinated by the radiant face of Shri Ram.

"Oh great man! What do you want to know? Ask me whatever you want to know, I will tell what I know." Ramachandra brought him to the banyan tree. He affectionately asked him to sit near him and said :

"Why is this place deserted? Oh great man, your radiant face shows that you are a man of noble birth and your question is significant and there is some secret significance in your question. Otherwise, why should you desire to know it?"

"All right. But I think you are afraid of something."

"No, I am not afraid of anything; but it is a long story."

"Noble man! You need not worry about anything. Tell us what you know about it. That will help us to spend our time."

"Very well", the traveller wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his upper-cloth and then composing himself, he began his narration.

"This area is renowned everywhere as Avanti. King Simhodhar is the ruler of this area. Actually, he is as valiant and ferocious as a lion. His enemies shudder at the very mention of his name. There is another city in this area called Dashangapur. There is a subordinate king by name Vajrakarna who

exercises unopposed sway. He is the ruler of Dashangapur. He is one of the most intelligent and valiant potentates. He is very fond of hunting. He is incomparable as a hunter in Avanti.

Once, he went hunting into a forest. It was a wild and dreadful forest. Even before he had started hunting in the forest he met a great muni there. The Muni was standing in deep meditation. Vajrakarna's amazement knew no bounds. He thought that the Muniraj had lost his way and had wandered into the forest.

He approached the muni and asked him; "Why are you standing here like a palm tree?"

After having completed the meditation, the muni said, "I am carrying on meditation to attain spiritual elevation."

"Maharaj, are you trying to attain spiritual elevation? What kind of spiritual endeavours can you carry out in a forest? How can you carry out spiritual endeavours in this wild forest where you cannot get food or water and where men do not live and where even birds do not live? Oh revered one! I am really unable to understand this."

Vajrakarna sat there to hear the Muni's reply.

"Noble man, we can attain spiritual welfare by means of dharma. I have become a sadhu only to adore and practise Dharma and I have come into this forest voluntarily to carry on meditation." The traveller seeking a clarification said:

"Oh you holy man! How is it possible?"

Then the mahamuni explained to Vajrakarna how the soul is different from the body. He said that spiritual welfare could not be attained by means of eating and drinking, amusements and physical enjoyments and that they would only impede spiritual elevation. He pointed out that non-violence, self-discipline and spiritual austerities would bring felicity to the soul and that by acting according to those principles man could attain welfare in this world and in the other world and could attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death. He also added that

the human state of existence was convenient and congenial for carrying out spiritual endeavours. The Muni explained to him that violence, falsehood, stealing, attachment and ignobility would only bring spiritual ruin and in consequence man would have to wander aimlessly through the samsar experiencing agonies, agitation, anguish and mockeries. The truths expounded by the Muni penetrated his heart and brightened his soul. He realized the true nature of samsar."

"Indeed a great muni is an ocean of compassion and of kindness," Shri Ramachandra said in a voice shaken by emotion, endorsing the traveller's view.

"What happened next?" Lakshman asked the traveller eagerly.

"Oh you great hero ! What else could happen ? The gates of Vajrakarna's heart opened. There appeared in his heart spiritual awakening like a tremendous tempest. He decided to lead a life of spiritual excellence. In consequence, the Mahamuni explained to him the real nature of the Paramatma. The muni explained to him the mysteries of life and the real form of the Dharma based on non-violence. He explained to him the vows that are to be carried out by a shravak who leads a life of partial renunciation. He also explained to him the nature of the life of a sadhu which is one of total renunciation."

The traveller's throat grew dry and hoarse because of continuous talking. He was unable even to move. Perspiration appeared on his face. Sita brought water in the hollow of a leaf and gave it to him. After drinking the water the traveller continued.

"Vajrakarna received from the Mahamuni the vows relating to the life of a Shravak. He took twelve vows and made a pledge."

"What pledge was it?" Shri Ramachandra asked eagerly.

"I will salute and worship Arihant Bhagwan. Henceforth, I will worship and adore only sadhus. I will not worship others even if it means death."

“Ah ! What a pledge did he take ! ...”

“After having taken the vows and after having made the pledge Vajrakarna returned to Dashangapur. Besides ruling over his kingdom he also observed the principles of the *Shravak-dharma* but though he lived like this, an unrealized and mysterious fear ... anxiety filled his heart.”

“What was that unknown fear ?” Lakshman asked.

“He feared Simhodhar, the King of Avanti.”

“But why did he fear Simhodhar ?” Sita asked him eagerly.

“Noble lady ! There was a reason for it. He thought, “I have taken a vow before the great muni that I will not bow my head to anyone except the *Vitragdev*; so I cannot bow to King Simhodhar also and Simhodhar is not a devotee of the Paramatma. He would be extremely angry with me and there would arise enmity between us. He will surely take revenge against me for insulting him. As a result of this, hostility would increase between him and me. Moreover, he is a great hero and a warrior of extraordinary valour and I am nothing before him. His strength and abilities are greater than mine. If I antagonize him, I will have to face defeat, disgrace and death.” Thus, he was filled with countless fears and doubts. He began to think of the way of escaping from that calamity. At once, he was elated when a new idea flashed to him. He got the image of Shri Muni Suvrataswami inscribed on his ring. Later, whenever he met King Simhodhar or whenever he went to the court, he saluted the image on the ring so that the king might think that he had saluted him. Actually, whenever Vajrakarna saluted the ring, Simhodhar thought that he saluted him. Actually, Vajrakarna used to salute only the image of the ring.

Discretion is the better part of valour. We should oppose a strong man not with strength but with cleverness. For some time, Vajrakarna managed the situation cleverly but this drama could not continue for long. At last, the truth came to light. The King of Avanti found out what was happening. It happened this way. One day, some villainous person who was a bitter

enemy of Vajrakarna came to King Simhodhar and vomited the poison in his mind. Divulging the secret, he said, "Vajrakarna does not salute you. He is a devotee of *Vitrag* Paramatma, and such a devotee would not salute others. He has taken a vow not to salute you. Whenever he sees you he bows only to the image of the Paramatma on his ring. He has been deceiving you."

As soon as hearing this secret, King Simhodhar became furious. His indignation knew no bounds. He began to hiss like a terrible cobra."

The traveller paused a little and kept looking at Shri Ramachandra. Shri Ramachandra, Lakshman and Sita were absorbed in listening to the story of the way in which that area of Avanti came to be deserted. The traveller also was interested in narrating the story without concealing anything.

"By chance, a gentleman came to know of the King's anger. He ran to Vajrakarna and informed him of the king's anger. Vajrakarna was stupefied to hear this". He was stunned and said to him :

"But how did that man come to know that Simhodar was angry with him ?"

"Even this is a strange coincidence. A shravak by name Samudrasangam lived in the city of Kundapur. Yamuna was his wife. She was a woman of great beauty and chastity. They had a son by name Vidyutang. He was a promising young man of extraordinary intellectual brilliance. That is none other than myself.

My parents were hereditary dealers in vessels. Our family enjoyed great prestige in society. When I grew up to be a young man my father placed upon my shoulders the responsibility of carrying on the business. He lived a life of retirement. I too with great enthusiasm carried on our business. I became an expert in the business and our family became affluent and well-known. Once, I went to Ujjayini with a cart-load of vessels to sell them there. In those days, Ujjayini was the largest centre

of business in this area. I earned a lot of money selling my vessels at high prices in Ujjayini. Then, I set out seeking amusements in the city. My desire was to see all the sights worth-seeing in the city. I went wandering through the quiet roads and busy path-ways, and bazaars and I was absorbed in watching the splendid prosperity of the city. I spent a long time wandering thus. While I was going through a busy and crowded road I suddenly stopped because I saw a beautiful damsel sitting at the artistically constructed balcony of a magnificent mansion. She was a damsel of extraordinary beauty, a paragon of physical graces and charms. I was greatly fascinated by her sweet smiles and devious glances. For a few moments, I stood like a stone-image. Her graces and movements maddened me.

She was a prostitute....She was the most famous dancer of Ujjayini. Her name was Kamalata. Her infatuating gestures drew me to her. I entertained the desire of having a union with her. I mechanically walked into her mansion. I lost all count of time, immersed in sensual delights with her; and unknown to me four months had passed. I had become completely enslaved to her and within four months I had lost all my money. When there was no money left with me, I began to ask for money from home. My father who loved me, without making any enquiries kept sending me money. In this manner, enthralled by a young lady, I did not continue even my hereditary business. I was so deeply infatuated with her that it was impossible for me to get out of her snares. She once asked me,

“Dear ! Will you please fulfil a desire of mine.”

“My darling ! For your sake, I am prepared even to sacrifice my life. Tell me what your desire is.”

“Darling ! I desire to wear ear-rings which are like the ear-rings of Sridhara, the queen of Simhodhar. Can you get me such ear-rings ?”

I was stunned to hear this. Already I had given her all my wealth. I had surrendered all my wealth to Kamalata. Now, I did not have money even to buy poison but at the same time

I did not like Kamalata to know that I was poor and helpless because I feared that if she came to know that I was poor she would turn me out of her doors. She would stop loving me. So reluctantly, I promised to get her such ear-rings and secretly decided to steal the queen's ear-rings.

Accordingly, on a dark night I went to the palace to steal the queen's ear-rings. Lurking here and there, evading the watchful eyes of the guards and sentinels, somehow I managed to reach the queen's chamber but I heard King Simhodhar and Queen Sridhara conversing inside. On hearing this, I hid myself in a corner overhearing their conversation."

The traveller was continuing his narration. Sita moved nearer and continued to listen to the story with deep interest. Lakshman also was listening to the story with concentration. The story continued to flow like a river.

"In the chamber Queen Shridhara and King Simhodhar were conversing."

"My lord! I think you are agitated today. You do not seem to get sleep at all. I think you are unable to sleep on account of some excitement or agitation. I wonder what problem has been worrying you. You do not seem to have peace of mind."

"Dear queen! How can I get sleep? I cannot sleep until I kill my subordinate King Vajrakarna. That wicked fellow does not salute me. He does not bow to me; on the contrary, he has been deceiving me. Therefore, tomorrow I will kill him. I will kill all the members of his family. Only then can I sleep peacefully. Enough! The night is far advanced."

When I heard this conversation of the king and the queen at once an idea flashed to me. I thought, "Vajrakarna is a noble man; and so my duty is to save him and his family from destruction. I will save them from this danger." Then giving up my plan of stealing the queen's ear-rings I went to tell him of the situation." Saying this Vidyutang ended his narration.

Vajrakarna collected in his fort wealth, food-grain and other commodities abundantly. He also collected weapons, and

war-like materials. He appointed guards and sentinels to keep watch on the battlements. He made special arrangements for the security of important places. Then, he ordered that the main gates of the city should be closed. Then, he began watching the surrounding areas through a contrivance which was like a telescope and which had been placed on the battlements. After he watched thus for a long time he noticed at a great distance large clouds of dust rising towards the sky. At once, he became cautious. King Simhodhar was marching towards the fort with a large army. Battle-drums were beaten in the city. Every nook and corner of the city resounded with the sounds of trumpets. The people of Dashangapur were filled with fear. By midday King Simhodhar's army besieged the fort just as a serpent coils round a sandal tree.

All of a sudden, a messenger sent by King Simhodhar appeared in the court of Vajrakarna.

The messenger instead of communicating a message to Vajrakarna began to speak sarcastically, "You hypocritical Vajrakarna! you have been deceiving King Simhodhar by your hypocritical tricks. Making a pretence of bowing to the king you have been saluting the image on your ring. The truth about your trickery has come to light. You have courted your own death. Therefore, it is certain that today you will die at the hands of King Simhodhar. If you do not at once remove your ring and place it at the feet of King Simhodhar, as a fine for your crime he will send you and the members of your family to the Kingdom of death. Be ready for it."

Not caring for the sarcastic remarks of the messenger Vajrakarna said in a calm and composed manner, "Oh you hero! Please convey to King Simhodhar this message of mine. I am not proud of my valour or strength but I am proud of my *dharma*. I have vowed that I will not bow to anyone except to *Arihantdev*. But this does not at all mean that I do not have regard for the king of Avanti. Of course, this is my spiritual loyalty. What does King Simhodhar expect from me? I am prepared to surrender everything to him except saluting him. I will not bow to him."

The messenger was stupefied to hear this. Pausing for a few moments, Vajrakarna said again; "I do not desire Kingship; nor do I have attachment for prosperity and power. I merely want to be free with respect to my faith. I do not desire a war; nor do I desire any hostility. Kindly release me from here so that I may go away to some other place and practise my *dharma* freely. *Dharma* is my wealth."

The messenger's anger and excitement abated a little. He went away silently to the camp of King Simhodhar and conveyed to him Vajrakarna's message. He did not make any comments on the message but King Simhodhar who was haughty, roared angrily, "I do not care for any *Dharma* or *Adharma*. I have no faith in *Punya* (merit) or *Pap* (sin). Well. Yes. If Vajrakarna loves his life he must salute me" and he intensified his siege. The soldiers began their routine-drill and parade in the Camp. All were engaged in a top-level discussion regarding their plan to attack the fort."

The traveller completed his narration and heaved a deep sigh and said. "Oh noble hero ! Even now King Simhodhar is camping at Dashangapur. The siege has not been removed. On account of King Simhodhar, this area has been deserted. Small villages and hamlets have been ruined. The poor people living in this area have run away to other places. That is why this area is deserted and desolate."

The traveller completing his narration looked towards Shri Ram and wiped the sweat from his face. For a moment Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita kept looking at the traveller. The traveller kept looking at the deserted villages and gardens with melancholy eyes. His face revealed the sadness he was experiencing at the sight. He again said.

"Yes, I forgot to mention a point. On account of this calamity I too deserted my home and went away. Please see there. Look at that small cottage standing here. That was my home."

"But why have you come back ?" Sita asked him with surprise.

"Noble woman! What shall I say ? I do not think it proper to speak of it but what is the use of concealing the truth from you ? In my house, there is that demon... My woman. When we ran away from here we did not take anything. She has sent me to take those things to our new residence. She is a terrible woman ... a shrew. Who can come to blows with her ? Fearing her I came quietly."

The traveller paused a little, looked towards Sita and said.

"But mother! It is a good thing that I came away hearing her harsh words. Otherwise, I would not have got this opportunity of meeting such noble people as you. I am really fortunate."

Shri Ram took out the gold-chain from his neck and gave it to the traveller. Immensely pleased with the gift the traveller went away. Shri Ramachandra accompanied by Lakshman and Sita set off towards Dashangapur.

LXII

VAJRAKARNA'S SALVATION

Shri Ramachandra kept travelling towards Dashangapur walking on stony, flinty and thorny paths; crossing deep valleys and wild forests. His only purpose was to liberate Vajrakarna from his fear of King Simhodhar. After travelling a long distance, Shri Ramachandra, Lakshman and Sita reached the outskirts of the city of Dashangapur. When Sita saw the temple of Bhagwan Chandraprabhaswamy situated in the outskirts of the city her heart bloomed like a blissful flower. She forgot all her fatigue and weariness. She expressed the desire of seeing the Jin. Shri Ram was full of praise for her desire. They went to the sky-high temple of Chandraprabhaswamy. All experienced inordinate felicity when they saw the sublime image of the Lord.

The sun had already set. The evening had appeared with its golden splendour. Shri Ramachandra decided to spend the night there. Lakshman found out a convenient place and the three took rest there for the night. In the morning, Shri Ramachandra ordered Lakshman;

“Dear brother ! Go and meet Vajrakarna, the king of Dashangapur and find out the truth about the situation.”

Acting upon the commands of his elder brother, Lakshman went into the city of Dashangapur. King Simhodhar had laid a siege to the city sometime ago with the result that all the main gates of the city had been closed. The anxiety of the people of the city knew no bounds. Yet they continued to be enthusiastic. Every movement and gesture of the people revealed their heroism. Lakshman walking through the streets of the city reached the main door of the fort. At that time, Vajrakarna was sitting at the window of his balcony. His eyes suddenly fell

upon Lakshman and he was startled to see him. He thought, "Whoever he may be he seems to be a high-born young man." Therefore, even before the gate-keeper could prevent Lakshman from entering the gate he went there.

"Oh you hero! The king of Dashangapur has come to extend a hearty welcome to you. Kindly come in. Your arrival has hallowed my city." Lakshman kept looking at Vajrakarna who stood before him with folded hands. He was pleased with his heroic bearing and gentle manners. His bright, white face was radiant with joy and his eyes expressed a deep feeling of affection. He was none other than Vajrakarna. His heroic bearing would captivate the beholders. He took Lakshman into the palace and offered him a dignified seat and said :

"Oh great man, kindly bless us by accepting our hospitality."

"Oh King! Your noble conduct and your affectionate manners and your affectionate words have captivated my heart but my lord is reposing in a garden outside the city. Until he takes food I cannot accept your hospitality."

"Noble man! Your words are as sweet and tender as your face. This is becoming of great men." Saying this, he placed in the hands of Lakshman a gold plate containing various delicious dishes. Lakshman took it and returned to Shri Ram. The three had their food. They were pleased with Vajrakarna's hospitality. After resting for a while Shri Ramachandra said to Lakshman :

"Lakshman! We must inform King Simhodhar that he is not right in opposing Vajrakarna and that he should not harm Vajrakarna when he is carrying out his dharma."

Lakshman was only waiting for his brother's signal. At once, he got ready to go. Taking the necessary weapons he set off to the camp of King Simhodhar. King Simhodhar was engaged in a discussion with his ministers and officials regarding the war. Lakshman straight went to King Simhodhar. The ministers and commanders of Avanti who had gathered there stared angrily at the stranger who had entered the camp without permission. They were also amazed to see him. Lakshman said without any prefatory remarks;

"Oh King! The emperor of Ayodhya and the son of King Dasarath, has ordered that you should not make a war against Vajrakarna."

"Why does King Bharath favour those dependants who do not have devotion for him? We can bestow our favour only upon those who are obedient to us but our subordinate King Vajrakarna is completely disloyal and disobedient. Though he is my subordinate he does not bow to me. When that is so how can I be friendly with him? Does King Bharath bestow his favour on his disobedient dependants and subordinates?"

"Oh King! Vajrakarna is not impolite. He does not bow to you because of his love for the *dharma*, not because of any impoliteness."

Lakshman explained to King Simhodhar Vajrakarna's principle. But Simhodhar spoke disrespectfully,

"I do not care for any such *dharma*. Everyone must bow to his master. *Dharma* should not be brought into politics because *dharma* is not the only basis of his life and duties."

"Simhodhar! Discard your false prestige; and forget your hostility against Vajrakarna and accept Bharath's overlordship. Don't you know that emperor Bharath's imperialistic sway extends from one end of Bharath to the other. The whole world is under his sway. Do you have anything to say?" Lakshman spoke with burning anger. At once, he got ready to destroy the haughty Simhodhar.

"Who is that Bharath? Who is he to take sides with Vajrakarna and teach moral lessons to me? Oh! I have many such Bharaths among my servants."

Simhodhar's words inflamed Lakshman's anger. Forgetting himself in anger he roared like a lion :

"You meanest of mortals. Don't you know who Bharath is? Come on. I will make you realize who he is presently. Take up your weapons and come forward. I will kill you with one stroke."

King Simhodhar's anger flamed up. At once he leaped up and thundered at his body-guards.

"Why are you standing still ? Go and arrest that senseless youth."

As soon as Simhodhar gave this order his warriors surrounded Lakshman. Simhodhar rushed towards Lakshman but Lakshman did not budge an inch. He remained firm like the Meru mountain and said in a thundering voice :

"If you really want to fight with me come to the front on your elephant. Why do you behave like a child ?"

Simhodhar mounted his elephant. Lakshman went to the stables. Armed soldiers followed him. Lakshman went running; cut off the ropes of a tent and then began fighting with the soldiers. He pulled up a pillar and came forward roaring. A terrible commotion arose among the soldiers. Lakshman began killing the soldiers like a veritable god of death. Within a few moments, countless soldiers lay dead on the ground. Then Lakshman rushed towards Simhodhar and compelled him to fight with him. At once, he enfeebled Simhodhar's elephant; threw away the pillar; leaped straight on to the back of the elephant. He sat upon the chest of Simhodhar; tied his throat with his own, upper cloth and threw him down on the ground. Then he leaped on the ground and just as a cowherd drags a cow, he dragged Simhodhar. The soldiers of Simhodhar kept watching the scene with stupefaction. They were absolutely helpless against Lakshman's fury. Actually, on account of his false pride Simhodhar could not realise Lakshman's greatness. If he had realised that it was Lakshman, he would not have behaved in such a haughty manner. He committed a great blunder. He did so because he was proud of his abilities and strength. Lakshman did not like to tell him who he was. He thought it proper to punish Simhodhar who was harassing a noble man like Vajrakarna.

Lakshman flung Simhodhar at the feet of Shri Ramachandra. On seeing Shri Ramachandra, he was greatly amazed. He at once realised that it was Lakshman who had dragged him to that place. He ran forward and fell at the feet of Shri Ramachandra.

"My Lord! How is it you have come here ? I never even dreamt that the light of Raghu's dynasty would thus consecrate my kingdom, Avanti." Simhodhar was overwhelmed with joyful emotions when he saw Shri Ramachandra. At once, he forgot his disgraceful defeat. He realised the reason for his defeat.

"My Lord! Did you adopt this method to test me ? Kindly pardon me. Kindly forgive me for what I did in ignorance. Kindly show me the right way. I have lost my way. Oh you greatest of men! I am prepared to carry out any command of yours. A master may be angry with his slave but a noble spiritual head cannot be angry with a humble disciple. I have received due punishment for my folly. Kindly forgive me. I am your humble and obedient servant and disciple."

Shri Ramachandra felt mesmerised by Simhodhar's polite behaviour. There arose in his heart amity for him. He said :

"Dear king! Make a compromise with Vajrakarma. He is your subordinate; not your enemy. Whatever he did, he did it only to carry out his Dharma."

"So be it," said Simhodhar and agreed to carry out Shri Ram's order.

Since the siege had been lifted Vajrakarna also came there. Folding his hands, he said in a humble voice.

"O you resplendent light of the illustrious dynasty of the supreme lord Rishabhdev! O you *Baladev!* *Vasudev!* O you emperor of the whole world. I have been hearing about you for a long time and now I have the opportunity of seeing you. O you, mighty hero! You are the emperor of half the empire of Bharath and we are your humble servants."

Vajrakarna's amiable words pleased everyone. Looking towards him, Shri Ram said :

"O you beloved of gods! What can I do to please you ?"

"O you supreme hero ! First release my lord Simhodhar."

Shri Ram gave a signal. Lakshman released Simhodhar. The cries of victory issued by the warriors and solidiers reverberated in the skies. Vajrakarna took the dust of Shri Ram's feet, wore it on his head and said :

"Gurudev! I have received a vow from the great muni Prithivardhan that I shall not bow to anyone except Lord Arihant and munis. Therefore kindly secure Simhodhar's consent to permit me to carry out by Dharma."

Shri Ram glanced towards Simhodhar. Simhodhar at once gave his consent. The two embraced each other.

"Dear Vajrakarna; I never knew that you had taken such a vow and that you were not bowing to me on that account but I thought that you were not bowing to me out of pride. In fact you deserve commendation. You were ready to sacrifice anything to safeguard your vow. But I forgot myself; I lost my way and I have fallen in my own estimate. I would have been totally ruined but fortunately Shri Ram has come here and he saved me from committing a great sin. He has saved me from committing an enormity. Really, he has bestowed a great benefaction upon me and you are my brother. Kindly pardon me!"

In the presence of Shri Ramachandra Simhodhar gave Vajrakarna half his kingdom as a gift. While accepting the gift Vajrakarna remembered the thief Vidyutang a fellow-member of his faith. Vidyutang had played a very important role in this affair. Vajrakarna looked towards Simhodhar and was silent.

"Brother what do you want to say ?"

"My Lord! I have a desire."

"Tell me what it is! I am prepared to grant whatever you wish for".

"I want queen Sridhara's ear-rings."

"Ear-rings ? You want the queen's ear-rings ?" Simhodhar's eyes widened with amazement.

"Yes, my king!"

"But I am unable to understand the matter. There must be some secret behind the ear-rings."

"I do not need the ear-rings but Vidyutang needs them."

"Who is he?"

"It was he who cautioned me against the danger of your invasion."

"But how did he get to know the secret of our invasion?"

"Dear king! He came into your palace to steal Queen Sridhara's ear-rings. He happened to overhear the conversation that was going on between you and the queen. Then giving up the idea of stealing the ear-rings he came to me at once and informed me of the impending invasion. So I took measures to defend my kingdom."

"Amazing! Actually this is a wonderful coincidence!"

"Oh king, don't you think it proper to present him with the ear-rings?"

"Surely, we should."

"At once, Simhodhar got Queen Sridhara's ear-rings and gave them to Vajrakarna. Vajrakarna sent for Vidyutang and in the presence of Shri Ram presented the ear-rings to him. Vidyutang politely bowed to all. Shri Ram also blessed him.

Then Vajrakarna entreated Shri Ram to visit Dashangapur. Shri Ram happily accepted his invitation. King Simhodhar and the other kings also accompanied Shri Ram to Dashangapur. Vajrakarna received Shri Ram and others with great celebrations and jubilations. The people of Dashangapur felt supremely blessed when they saw Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita. The fame of Lakshman as a hero spread everywhere.

Vajrakarna entreated Shri Ram to accept the hands of his eight daughters in marriage. Shri Ram agreed to this and asked Lakshman to accept the hands of those girls in marriage.

Simhodhar the king of Avanti also did not want to lose this opportunity. He offered three hundred damsels, some of whom were his daughters and some of the other kings to Lakshman. Shri Ram accepted this offer also and in consequence the three hundred and eight princesses were engaged to Lakshman. Then Lakshman entreated Vajrakarna and the other kings, "Let these princesses stay with you for the present. My father Dasarath has given the kingship of Ayodhya to Bharath. Therefore, when I return to Ayodhya and assume kingship I will marry these princesses. At present, we are proceeding towards the Malayachal mountains and will stay there in the mountain caves.

All agreed to Lakshman's suggestion gladly.

After sometime King Simhodhar and the other kings took leave of Shri Ram and returned to their places. Soon after that, Shri Ram decided to set off towards the Malayachal mountains. All bowed to Shri Ram's feet and shed tears and bade farewell to him with tearful eyes.

Shri Ram set off towards the Mayalachal mountains accompanied by Lakshman and Sita.

LXIII

IN THE SAVAGE AREA

A dreary wilderness. The paths were thorny and stony.

The midday sun was shining in the sky. The terrible heat of the sun was unbearable.

Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita sat in the shadow of a tree to take rest. Sita felt terribly thirsty. Shri Ram told Lakshman to fetch water. Lakshman went southwards in search of water. When he had gone a little distance he noticed there green and smiling fields looking fascinating with green trees and plants. He was delighted to see this prospect. He hurried forwards. He found there a large lake which contained sweet and pellucid water. Holy lotuses spread their fragrance over the water. There were groves of mango trees on the banks of the lake. The peepal trees and the champak trees surrounded by cool and beautiful bowers seemed to be soliciting the way-farers. The magnificent rest-house that stood on the bank of the lake and the beautiful gardens looked fascinating with various glorious flowers like the jasmine and the screw-pine. The whole atmosphere was permeated with their fragrance. Lakshman sat on a stone in the garden enjoying the cool breezes that were blowing. Of course, he had to return speedily carrying water.

Sita was not fortunate enough to get the sweet water of the lake at once. Lakshman sat on the bank of the lake, spell-bound by the beauty of nature there. Just then, he noticed some princely personalities passing by at a distance on horseback. He was fascinated by a young man who was extremely handsome and charming. His magnetic bearing and dignified manners showed that he was the leader of the group and actually he was the

leader of the group. He was Kalyanmal, the King of Kubarnagar.

Kalyanmal noticed Lakshman and for a few moments he kept looking at him with fixed eyes. Their eyes met. There arose in the heart of Kalyanmal a storm of impetuous emotions. He experienced a thrill through his veins. Lakshman also kept looking at him with fixed eyes. His mind was filled with doubts. He thought; "He may be in the guise of a man but it is a young lady in man's guise. Her body and her facial features show that she is a lady."

Just then, Kalyanmal came near Lakshman; and said in a polite manner.

"Oh noble man! Come on. Have food with us. We shall happily share our food with you."

Lakshman saw Kalyanmal with fixed eyes. Kalyanmal's voice confirmed his suspicion.

"May I know who you are?" Lakshman said. In reply to this, the rider who was behind Kalyanmal came forward; and introduced Kalyanmal to him; and again invited him to have food with them.

"I cannot have food with you. Kindly excuse me," said Lakshman.

"Are there others with you?"

"Yes, my elder brother and my sister-in-law are reposing under a tree, nearby. I can eat food only after they have had their food."

Kalyanmal looked towards his Chief Minister and said.

"Dear Chief Minister! Please send some guards, Let them bring them here. All of us can have food together."

"As commanded by the King!" At once, the Chief Minister sent some handsome and soft-spoken guards in the direction shown by Lakshman.

The great Acharya Hemachandra Sooriji has mentioned two attributes as essential in those who are sent to invite noble people. They are; a beautiful and sublime appearance and a capacity to speak in a pleasant and agreeable manner. Those who are sent to invite great people must possess beautiful, tender and dignified faces and they should be able to speak in a pleasant and agreeable manner. The invitation extended by such people is at once accepted while the invitation extended by ugly, and unattractive people who cannot speak pleasantly is not accepted.

In other words, those who are sent to invite Shri Ramachandra and Sita possessed the quality of propriety. When they went in the direction shown by Lakshman they saw Shri Ramachandra and Sita reposing under a tree. The officers saluted them. Shri Ram bestowed his blessings upon them.

“Oh noble man! Your younger brother has sent us here. He has accepted the hospitality of our Lord Kalyanmal, the king of Kubarapur and he has sent us to take you there. Kindly come there and make our king blessed.”

“How far are we to go ?” Shri Ram asked.

Sita was agitated with thirst. Therefore, she was unable to walk far.

“Dear Lord, we have to go only a short distance and we will be with you, guiding you.”

Shri Ram and Sita followed the handsome officers whose words were pleasant and agreeable. When they reached the lake Sita's heart was delighted and elated. Within a moment she forgot her fatigue and thirst. King Kalyanmal was ready to receive Shri Ram and Sita. Seeing their magnetic personalities he was deeply delighted. He came forward and received them bowing to them in veneration. Shri Ram spoke to all of them in a pleasant and sweet manner. Later, Shri Ram and Sita were sent into a cottage of leaves and creepers that had been put up for them.

First of all, he offered to Sita the cool and sweet water of the lake. Then they all sat together and had their food. All of them reposed for a while. Lakshman also did the same. He too lay down in a bower near the cottage on the bank of the lake.

Meanwhile, conversing with Sita Kalyanmal found out that those two were Shri Ram and Lakshman, the sons of Dasarath, the king of Ayodhya. He felt greatly delighted to hear this. He decided to reveal the truth about himself to Shri Ram. The Chief Minister also approved of Kalyanmal's decision.

"Your excellency, your decision is absolutely proper. Shri Ram and Lakshman are the greatest men of this age. If we place before them our problems they will surely solve them besides guiding us and extending their co-operation to us."

On hearing the words of the Chief Minister, Kalyanmal felt greatly relieved. Kalyanmal had got a cottage put up for himself near Ramachandra's cottage. He went into his cottage; discarded the disguise, wore the dress of a woman and accompanied by the Chief Minister went into Shri Ram's cottage. She politely saluted Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita and stood a little away from them. Her face had reddened with shyness.

Shri Ram was naturally startled to see an extraordinarily beautiful lady standing before him. He observed her closely and said, "Dear lady ! What is the cause for your putting on the guise of a man ? Why are you trying to conceal your identity ?"

The beautiful damsel sat before Shri Ram and began to narrate her story;

"Oh son of Dasarath ! At a little distance from here there is a beautiful and large city by name Kubarapur. A King by name Varikhil was ruling over the city. Prithvi was his Queen-consort.

Once the warriors of the savage kings of this area invaded the city. King Varikhil fought a terrible war against the enemies but because the enemies were in large numbers he had to face defeat and he was captured by the enemies. In consequence, the

savage kings disgraced him, bound him with strong ropes and took him away.

At the time, Queen Prithvi was pregnant. In due course, she gave birth to a daughter. But Subuddhi the Chief Minister of the Kingdom, acting with farsightedness announced that the Queen had given birth to a son. Therefore, the princess had to wear the dress of a man. King Varikhil was a subordinate of Simhodhar, the king of Avanti. So he sent a message to Simhodhar also that the Queen had given birth to a male child. King Simhodhar ordered that the prince might be established on the throne of Kubarpur.

In the entire Kingdom only two people knew the secret that the Prince was indeed a young lady. Only the queen and the Chief Minister knew this secret. So I have had to put on the guise of a man."

Shri Ramachandra, Lakshman and Sita were listening to the story with deep interest.

"Has not the truth come to light even after so many years ?"

"No, the truth has not come to light on account of the Chief-Minister's intelligence and wisdom."

"Have you tried at any time to release your father from the clutches of the savage kings. ?"

"Yes, my Lord I tried several times."

"What has been the result ?"

"Everytime the savage kings have been extracting large sums of money from me by giving me false assurances of releasing him."

"Has not king Simhodhar tried to get the king released ?"

"No, sir. No, what can he do ? Oh you great man, only you can help us. Just as you saved Vajrakarna from the clutches of King Simhodhar you can save my father from the clutches of the savage kings."

"So be it ! We will undertake the responsibility of liberating your father from the savage kings."

"If you help us by doing so we shall be grateful to you for ever." Kalyanmal said in a voice shaken by emotion.

"One point is to be borne in mind Kalyanmal ! Until we release your father you must continue to rule over the Kingdom in the guise of a man."

Then the Chief Minister Subuddhi folded his hands and said, "O you ocean of compassion ! Kindly bless us by permitting our princess Kalyanmal to marry Lakshman". At once Kalyanmal blushed with shyness natural to maids. Sweet smiles appeared on her face. She experienced a sweet thrill through her veins. Her cheeks grew red.

"Dear Subuddhi ! At present we are travelling through forests. When we return to Ayodhya, Lakshman will marry Kalyanmal".

"Dear Lord ! You are indeed benevolent". Saying this Subuddhi bowed to Shri Ram's feet.

Kalyanmal bowed to him; then she wore on her head, the dust of Sita's feet. Sita embraced her affectionately.

Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita admired the beauties of nature in that area so greatly that they stayed there for three days. During the period, Kalyanmal treated them with great hospitality. She gave all her attention to them. During those three days, Kalyanmal gathered from Sita all the details relating to the occurrences in Ayodhya. She also found out why Shri Ram had to come away to the forests. She said to Shri Ram humbly:

"Dear Lord ! You kindly stay here on the banks of this lake. I will get a magnificent mansion built for you. I will hand over the administration of the kingdom to my Chief Minister and remain here rendering service to you."

But how could Shri Ram comply with her request ? He had come to live in forests. He had voluntarily decided to live in

forests. Therefore, he could not live anywhere thus. On account of Kalyanmal's insistence he had to stay there for three days.

On the night of the third day, when all were asleep, Shri Ram set off on his journey with Lakshman and Sita.

When in the morning, Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita were not be seen, Kalyanmal was greatly grieved. Her face became depressed and, gloomy. She could not enjoy the graces of nature there in the absence of Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman. Deeply anguished by the separation from them, she returned to Kubarpur and began to carry on the administration of the Kingdom as commanded by Shri Ram.

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During his travels, Shri Ram arrived at the banks of the river Narmada. A boatman rowed them across the river to the other shore, with devotion. On the way, they came across many travellers. People put many questions to him. After travelling some more distance they went to areas where they met no one. There they met people rarely. Once they met a group of pilgrims. They said to Shri Ram.

"Where are you going ? If you proceed this way, you will enter the wild forests of Vindhya. It is a wild and desolate place. In that area, wild animals move about freely killing travellers. Notorious robbers plunder and kill travellers. At every point on your way, you will have to face perilous situations because barbarous people live there. You are youngsters. Please do not go into those forests."

But Shri Ram would not be daunted by such dangers. Though the travellers repeatedly prevailed upon him not to go to that area, Shri Ram proceeded towards the Vindhya forests. They began travelling through those wild forests. As soon as they entered that wild area, some crows that were sitting on an acacia tree on the southern side, suddenly flew away. This was a bad omen but Shri Ram did not care for it. He proceeded further. Shri Ram was not terrified by bad omens nor was he elated by good omens. Only weak-minded people attach im-

portance to omens but those who are strong, heroic and fearless do not care for omens. Cowards may taste of danger thus many times but the valiant are never daunted by omens.

Shri Ram was walking ahead. Lakshman was walking at the back and Sita walked between them. Thus they travelled through the forest area. When they had gone some distance they found there a vast army of the savage kings. There were chariots, elephants, horses and armed soldiers and the entire army was marching towards them like a cloud of locusts. Their commander was travelling in a chariot at the head of the army.

The commander saw from a distance two men and a woman coming up. He was greatly startled and fascinated by the incomparable beauty of Sita. He became infatuated with her. He ordered his soldiers, "Somehow you turn away those men or kill them and abduct the woman and bring her here"

As soon as the commander gave this order, his soldiers came running towards Shri Ram. Lakshman heard the order given by the commander and was incensed with indignation. He said to Shri Ram :

"O Lord of Kausala ! You two take rest here for a while. I will go and come back in a moment."

Lakshman went running towards the savage army; stopped the savage army on the way by taking up his bow and arrow. He began causing a rain of arrows over the army which killed large numbers of them. The very sound of the bow paralysed the soldiers. All the soldiers were filled with mortal dread. Just as deer begin shaking with fear when they suddenly hear the roar of a lion, the savage soldiers also began to shake with mortal fear. The commander kept looking at Lakshman for a few moments. He stopped. He thought, "When the noise made by his bow assumes the form of the god of death, he will surely decimate our armies."

He at once alighted from his chariot, threw away his weapons. His face was covered with gloom and distress. He straight went to Shri Ram, saluted him and stood before him. Laksh-

man's fiery eyes were still watching him. The soldiers stood spell-bound. "What will happen next?" Thinking of this all kept watching Shri Ram and the commander. A little later, the commander said breaking the silence.

"I am the son of Vaishwanar and Savithri, who live in the city of Kaushambi. I am their only son. I have been cruel and violent from my boyhood. I have committed many sins, robbery, savagery, killing people, forcing women have been my routine activities. I have been a slave to evil addictions like gambling, lechery and drinking. Once, I was caught when I committed a theft. I was produced in the royal court. The king punished me severely. I was ordered to be impaled. While the executioners were taking me to the scaffold, by chance there came a noble man of Kaushambi. He saw my pitiable condition. He was filled with compassion on seeing me. He paid a heavy penalty and saved my life and I was acquitted. He, placing his hand over my head gave me this precept :

"Noble man ! Never commit a theft."

And without trying to know anything about me he went away. I left Kaushambi for good.

Then I kept wandering here and there. I was homeless and during my wanderings, I came to the Vindhya forests. The head of a village there gave me shelter. I became famous as Kak. Nobody knew my name or antecedents. The tribal Chief admired my valour and abilities and so he made...me the Chieftain.

As soon as I became the Chieftain, I collected a band of thieves and robbers. I began robbing and killing travellers and plundering villages. I also went to large cities and caught princes and potentates and brought them here. My army is larger than that of any king but today, I seek your refuge. I surrender myself to you absolutely. I am your humble slave my lord. Henceforth, I shall carry out all your commands. Kindly pardon my unwisdom and impoliteness and give me a place at your feet. I am indeed a sinner."

Shri Ram heard the Chieftain's story with concentration. He was delighted by the change that had come over him and said :

"Have you captured and imprisoned King Varikhil of Kubarpur ?"

"Yes, My lord ! He is in our prison."

"Release him at once; and send him to Kubarpur."

"I will gladly carry out your commands. I will release him and will personally escort him to Kubarpur but I have an entreaty to make to you."

"What is it ?"

"You must kindly stay here until I return from Kubarpur."

"All right. It shall be so."

At once, the tribal king ordered the release of King Varikhil. King Varikhil was released. King Varikhil came to Shri Ram and saluted him with devotion. Later Kak set off to Kubarpur taking Varikhil with him. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman were staying in the village. Kak returned from Kubarpur the next day. He rendered devotion to Shri Ram. Shri Ram ordered him to discard robbery and violence. Kak vowed to act according to Shri Ram's command and became a great devotee of Shri Ram.

King Varikhil narrated the story of his release and his meeting with Shri Ram to Kalyanmal. The Chief Minister Subuddhi informed Varikhil of the betrothal of Kalyanmal to Lakshman. Waves of joy and jubilation rose everywhere. The people of the city celebrated the event with great jubilation.

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LXIV

RAMPURI...

Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman arrived at the beautiful banks of the river Thaapi. A boatman rowed them to the other bank with a heartfelt devotion. When they had gone some distance from the banks, they saw a village. Shri Ram proceeded in that direction. Sita was walking with great weariness. The sun was shining in the sky. On account of excessive heat, they felt greatly tired and oppressed. Birds and animals unable to bear with the heat were resting in trees, groves and bushes.

They went near the village. It was a small village. It was a collection of small huts and cottages. It was called Arun. As soon as they entered the village they saw an old cottage on the right side of the road. The cottage was surrounded by thorny plants and bushes. In front of the cottage, there was a *Tulsi* plant. Some cattle were kept in a shed nearby. Lakshman asked a villager :

“Brother ! Whose hut is this ?”

“It belongs to a brahmin.”

“What is his name ?”

“Kapil.”

Just then, the brahmin's wife Susharma came out of the hut. She saw the three travellers standing in front of her hut. She kept looking at them for a few moments and then came forward and invited them to her hut. She offered them seats in the cottage and then said in a soft and gentle voice. “Kindly take rest for some time. I will prepare some sweet drink for you.” Susharma prepared the sweet drink and gave it to them. They felt greatly refreshed when they drank the sweet drink. Just then, Kapil came.

He was highly irritable like Durvasa !

He was ferocious like a fiend !

As soon as he entered his cottage he saw the three strangers. At once, he became furious. He shouted;

“O you sinful woman ! How did you allow these unclean and beggarly people to enter our cottage ? O ! the sanctity of my hut is destroyed. If you again do such a thing, I will turn you out of my hut.”

Kapil's angry words provoked Lakshman. He took out his sword angrily but Shri Ram held his hand.

“Brother ! Why do you get angry with this poor man ? Let him alone. Have you forgotten the great principle, “Forgiveness is an ornament to heroes.” It is the duty of heroes to forgive people. Heroes should not be angered by such things. You should ignore such people.”

Lakshman relented on account of Shri Ram's insistence. Then, the three set off on their journey. They did not stay in the village for long.

That was a dreadful forest !

It was raining heavily. Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman stood in the shelter of a large peepal tree. Thunders were rolling; lightnings were flashing; storms were blowing and rain poured down in torrents. It was as though the sky was lamenting and weeping. Everywhere land was covered with water. Countless small animals and birds and creatures were caught in the floods and carried away. The rainy season had commenced. Shri Ram noticed the transformation, that had taken place in nature and said :

“Lakshman ! We have to carry out our *Chaturmas* here.”

He glanced towards Lakshman and Sita.

“As desired by you,” they said together.

Sita observed the place and became engaged in clearing it for their stay for four months. Lakshman also began making the necessary plans for their stay but what Shri Ram said was heard by someone who was in the tree and he was terrified. He began to shiver with fear.

He was a nature-god living in that tree. He was called Ibhakarna. Though he was a heavenly being he had to carry on the task of a watchman. A Yaksha (a demigod) by name Gokarna was his master. Hearing the words of Shri Ram, at once he approached Gokarna. He was greatly terrified. He appeared in the court of Gokarna and said :

“My Lord ! Some great hero who possesses superhuman splendour has come to my residence. I became black and blighted in the incomparable radiance of his face. I could not bear with that extraordinary radiance. He will stay there for four months. Kindly tell me what I should do in this situation.”

“Ibhakarna, do not worry. Nobody can harm you. I will personally come there and find out who that superhuman hero is.”

Then, Gokarna the king of Yakshas exercised his extra-sensory perception (*Avadhiyan*) and saw, Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita beneath the tree. He was greatly delighted and elated by the sight.

“Ibhakarna ! You need not fear anything. Those radiant heroes are Shri Ram and Lakshman. Shri Ram is the eighth *Baladev* of this millenium and Lakshman is the eighth *Vasudev*. Oh! what mighty and sacred men have visited our area ! We should at once go and receive them with grandeur and *eclat*.”

On hearing the words of Gokarna all the Yaksha kings and courtiers who were present in the court were greatly delighted. They said “Dear Lord ! You kindly tell us how we should receive them.”

“Change that place into a magnificent city. It must be a large city. Construct magnificent mansions with marble. The

roads should be studded with extraordinary gems and precious stones. You must build sky-high mansions, broad and fascinating roads and bazaars where all things of the world should be available. At every corner in the city, create beautiful gardens. In honour of Shri Ram, the city shall be called Rampur. The city should be built within this night."

"As commanded by your Highness."

At once, the Yakshas began the task of creating a magnificent city in the place where Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman were staying. Within moments the wild forest became transformed into a fascinating city. At that time, Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman were asleep. Gokarna, the king of Yakshas had cast upon them a spell called *Avasvapini*. Therefore, they had fallen into a deep sleep.

In the morning, when the sun shot out from the east flattering the entire area with his sovereign eye and gilding it with heavenly *alchemy*, Gokarna the King of Yakshas appeared beneath the banyan tree and began playing on the *veena*. He removed the spell. Shri Ram woke up from sleep. He heard the sweet melodies that filled the air and when he opened his eyes, he saw the Yaksha king, Gokarna playing on his *veena* and when he looked around, he saw the magnificent city. Naturally, he was amazed. He kept observing everything around him. He thought, "How did this miracle come about? Can it be that some god or some demon or some Yogi has brought us and placed us here."

When Shri Ram was thus thinking, Gokarna bowed to him humbly and said :

"My Lord! Kindly accept my salutations. You are our honoured guest. Your visit has hallowed our kingdom. We have created this new city to receive you. You are beneath the same banyan tree. All my friends and relatives are here to render service to you. I entreat you to stay here as long as you wish."

Meanwhile, Lakshman and Sita had woken up. They too were watching the magnificent city with amazement. All the

three were greatly pleased with the hospitality extended by the king of Yakshas.

Shri Ram looked towards Gokarna and said in a serene voice,

“We are immensely pleased with your devotion and hospitality. We shall stay here for four months.”

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He was in absolute poverty.

Added to this, he was highly irritable.

Kapil went to a forest to fetch firewood for a sacrifice but his amazement knew no bounds when he saw there a magnificent city. He stood stunned for a while. He thought, “O ! what a miracle ! I think some mighty magician has created this fascinating city by virtue of his extraordinary magical powers, or am I by any chance looking at the enchanted city of a Gandharva King ? I came here only a few days ago; then here stood nothing but a wild forest. And now I see here a supernatural city !”

Kapila who was beside his wits happened to meet a *Yakshini* (a demigoddess).

A beautiful damsel in fascinating dress.

A perfect beauty in a human form !

“Noble young lady ! Whose city is this ? Who live here ?” Kapil asked with irresistible eagerness.

“Oh noble man ! This city has been created by Gokarna the king of Yakshas. He has created the city to extend hospitality to Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman,” the *Yakshini* said,

“What is the name of the city ?”

“Rampuri.”

“But what is Shri Ram doing here ?”

"Oh you ignorant man ! What a question to ask ? Actually, Shri Ram is an ocean of kindness. The poor people, the destitutes, the maimed people, the weak people and the needy who approach Shri Ram for help never return disappointed. He gives gifts to all magnanimously. Anyone who seeks his refuge attains felicity, prosperity and security."

Hearing the story of Shri Ram and of Rampuri from the Yakshini who spoke softly Kapil fell at her feet. He threw away the bundle of firewood and the hatchet and said with great elation :

"Dear goddess ! Can you please tell me, where I can meet Shri Ram and when I can meet him ?"

The Yakshini observed Kapil from head to foot; thought a little and said :

"Oh noble man ! The city of Rampuri has four gates. They are guarded day and night by Yakshas. Therefore, it is impossible for anyone to enter the city."

"Dear goddess ! Kindly suggest to me a way of entering the city."

"All right. Listen carefully. On the eastern side of the city there is a Jin temple. If you go there discarding all your vices you can see the Jin and through the temple you can enter the city and see Shri Ram. If you go by this way nobody will object."

As soon as the Yakshini disappeared Kapil began to plan out his next course of action.

"I am absolutely poor. I do not have even a single coin with me. I do not have proper clothes. Added to this, I am always hungry. I do not get food. I do not know what happiness is. I have spent my life in poverty and misery. I have not been able to save even a single coin. So, I should not lose this opportunity."

Moreover, there is no point in my going to Shri Ram alone. I must take my wife also with me. She too once told me that I should become a Shravak. That means I should accept the Jain dharma. If I should accept it I should realize my soul. I should approach a Muni. Only then can I get a thorough knowledge of the Dharma. Thinking thus Kapil set off from there. He searched for a muni. He heard that an enlightened Muni was staying in a garden at a distance from the village, Arun. At once he met the muni. He was captivated by the Muni's spiritual excellence. He bowed to him and offered a prayer to him. The Muniraj explained to him the meaning of the Dharma; and the true form of Vitrag Bhagwan. He explained to him the dharma based on compassion. He also explained the significance of the twelve vows. Kapil tried to understand all those things. He felt greatly happy. He received from the Muni the twelve great vows and vowed that he would lead a clean life. He saluted the muni and returned to his village.

Kapil narrated his experience to Susharma. Susharma also became a *Shravika*. Kapil became a *Shravak*.

Both set off to Rampuri with great expectations. Sometime later they reached the eastern gate of the city of Rampuri. They worshipped the Jin. The Yaksha guards permitted them to enter the city. They went straight to the palace.

Shri Ram was in the court. Kapil and Susharma went into the court. Kapil looked at the throne and began to shudder with fear and amazement. He screamed with fear. He tried to run away from there.

Suddenly, Lakshman saw him. He smiled and said :

“What are you afraid of ? What do you want ? Ask for anything without any hesitation. It will be given to you.”

Hearing the words of Lakshman Kapil felt a little reassured. His fear abated. He slowly approached Shri Ram, received his blessings and sat in a dignified seat.

“Noble man ! Whence have you come ?” Shri Ram asked.

“Oh you friend of the helpless ! I know you. I am Kapil. Once you three came to my cottage as guests and I insulted you instead of treating you with hospitality,” and then pointing towards Lakshman, he said :

“Dear Lord ! You saved me from him. Otherwise on that day he should have put an end to my life.”

Susharma saluted Sita and received her blessings. Shri Ram gave Kapil a large gift of money, gold and precious stones and sent him away. Kapil and Susharma took leave of him and returned home.

A great change took place in Kapil. He discarded all his inner enemies like anger, lust, attachment, hatred, infatuation and deception. He began to pursue the path of spiritual elevation.

Once a muni by name Nandavatamsaksuri happened to come to the village of Arun. He delivered discourses and created spiritual awakening among people. Kapil and Susharma were greatly influenced by his discourses and so they received initiation into the *Sadhadharma* from the muni.

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The rainy season ended. Shri Ram set about making preparations for his further journey. King Gokarna approached Shri Ram and said, “Oh you ocean of compassion ! I learnt that you are preparing to set off on your journey. If in our treatment during these four months there has been any lapse, kindly pardon me. Is it ever possible to render adequate service to a sublime personality like you. I am after all a Yaksha,” and then Gokarna, with great devotion presented to Shri Ram a radiant necklace called *Swayamprabha*. To Lakshman he presented a divine crown studded with gems and to Sita he presented a *Veena* called *Sarvaraaganadini*.

“Oh king of Yakshas ! There has been no lapse in the treatment you extended to us. We have not lacked anything during these days. You treated us with extraordinary devotion. Kindly permit us to proceed on our journey,” Shri Ram said.

Shri Ram set off with Sita and Lakshman.

The king of Yakshas by means of his magical powers made the city disappear in a moment.

And then, there appeared the familiar wild forest.

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ATIVIRYA'S PREDICAMENT

Vijayapur was a beautiful and fascinating city. There were fascinating gardens in and around the city.

The evening was slowly advancing. The sun was slowly declining in the west. At such a time, Shri Ram came to the city of Vijayapur. He halted beneath a huge banyan tree. Since Sita was tired of having travelled throughout the day, she slept. Lakshman was still awake. That was his habit. When Shri Ram and Sita slept he remained awake and kept a vigilant watch.

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Mahidhar was the king of Vijayapur. Indrani was the queen and Vanamala was the princess. Vanamala was a damsel of great beauty. She surpassed all the other girls in the city in beauty. It seemed as though the creator Brahma, created Vanamala out of the divine fire torn from the interior of the sun. It seemed as though Brahma had fixed in her face two bright stars for her eyes. Her long dark hair seemed to have been fashioned out of clouds. The Brahma seemed to have made her forehead by means of the radiance of the lightning flashes. Her tender body seemed to have been fashioned out of material torn from the cool and pleasant moon.

Vanamala had heard from her attendants stories relating to Lakshman's fascinating appearance and astounding heroism. So, she decided, "I will marry only Lakshman and none else."

Several years had passed since she made the decision. The wheel of time kept revolving. One day, the king of Vijayapur heard that King Dasarath of Ayodhya had received initiation

into the *Sadhudharma* and Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman had gone away to the forest.

The news made King Mahidhar sad. His sorrow knew no bounds. He knew his daughter's determination. He too knew that Lakshman was a hero of outstanding valour. So, he had approved of his daughter's determination. When he heard that Shri Ram and Lakshman had gone away to the forest he felt greatly disappointed.

King Mahidhar began to search for a bridegroom for his daughter.

After searching for sometime he found a suitable bridegroom. His name was Surendraswaroop. He was the son of King Vrishabh of Chandranagar, a renowned hero. Surendraswaroop possessed unique splendour like the moon among the stars in the sky. He was the very embodiment of virtues besides possessing a fascinating appearance. King Mahidhar liked Surendraswaroop. He sent his Chief Minister to Chandranagar and Vanamala was betrothed to Surendraswaroop. After the betrothal, Vanamala came to know that she had been engaged to Surendraswaroop. The news came to her like a bolt from the blue.

In consequence, she fell into a state of bitter gloom and despair. Her tender face began to wither like a fallen leaf. Her heart was broken. She lost interest in all amusements and delights. She stopped taking even a bath. She discarded all decorations and began to grieve over her misfortune day and night. She began to grow weak. She lost interest in life. She lost all zest for life and decided to end her life in utter despair.

On one dark night when dense darkness enveloped everything Vanamala experienced a terrible commotion in her heart and set out from her palace discarding everything. Walking slowly in deep gloom she went out of the city. She was going out alone thus for the first time in her life. The night was dark and silent. She had decided to end her life. On account of her determination to end her life her anguish had ended. She went hurriedly towards the garden outside the city.

On the eastern side of the garden there was the temple of a nature-god. She worshipped the nature-god and prayed :

“Oh God ! I have surrendered myself to Lakshman but I may not secure him in this life as my husband but may Lakshman be my husband in my next janma.”

Then she proceeded towards a huge banyan tree. A guard stood watchful beneath the tree. He saw Vanamala coming towards the tree. On account of darkness he could not see her face. So he thought, “I think some goddess of nature is coming there or she may be some *Yakshini* presiding over this tree.” Even while he was thinking Vanamala climbed the tree. The guard was startled. He wondered what she was going to do.

He too silently climbed the tree. He kept observing carefully every movement of Vanamala. Vanamala turned towards the sky; and folding her hands she said with a voice choked with emotion.

“Oh you nature gods and goddesses ! Oh you gods ruling over the eight directions ! Oh you gods flying invisible through the sky ! I loved Lakshman and desired to marry him but in this life I have failed to secure him as my husband. At least, may he be my husband in my next life !”

The guard was greatly amazed and shocked. Vanamala's voice stunned him. He remained breathless with amazement. As he kept watching in the darkness she tied one end of her sash to the branch of the tree and the other end to her neck and then leaped down. The guard at once leaped forward and held Vanamala. He untied the cloth and said :

“Oh you damsel, do not be foolhardy. I am Lakshman.”

Lakshman carried her down the tree. The last phase of the night had begun. Shri Ram and Sita woke up from their sleep. Lakshman narrated to them the story of Vanamala. Shri Ram looked towards Vanamala and said in a serious voice.

“Oh noble lady. You took a rash step. You should have thought well before taking such a step. You would have died if

Lakshman had not saved you. Your desire has been fulfilled. You have found Lakshman for whose sake you discarded everything and even tried to end your life and Lakshman himself has saved your life. You are really fortunate."

Vanamala felt ashamed of her conduct. She had never dreamt that she would meet her lover thus accidentally and unexpectedly. She bowed to the feet of Shri Ram and Sita. Sita blessed her and embraced her.

Lakshman who had been awake throughout the night went to sleep.

* * * *

A confounding commotion! Guards went running! There were loud cries, and a search was being made.

The soldiers of Vijayapur were searching for Vanamala. Her attendants went screaming from place to place searching for her. All were shocked and stunned. King Mahidhar personally set out to search for his daughter. Queen Indrani was lamenting, "Search for my daughter. Some villain must have abducted her."

The soldiers searched for her everywhere in the city and outside it but they could not find any trace of her whereabouts. King Mahidhar went out of the city. They began searching for her in the gardens and fields outside the city.

While King Mahidhar was searching for her, his eyes suddenly fell upon the banyan tree and the people beneath it and was startled. He ran towards the tree. His screams and shouts echoed everywhere. "Ah! Vanamala is there beneath the banyan tree. Some thieves have abducted her. Go and bind them. Bring those wretched fellows to me dead or alive. Be careful lest, they run away."

As soon as the king gave this command the soldiers surrounded the garden. The Chief Commander entered the garden with soldiers and encountered Shri Ram. Lakshman was stunned by this unexpected development but realizing the situation he

became serious. His anger flared up. He took up his bow and arrows.

The metallic sound of Lakshman's bow produced echoes through the sky. Mahidhar's soldiers felt paralysed, and flabbergasted. They began to shudder with fear. Their valour gave way. Their hearts began palpitating. King Mahidhar also felt confounded when he heard the noise of Lakshman's bow. He thought,

"Whose bow is this, that is producing such astounding echoes? Surely he must be a great hero!" He went forward and saw them clearly.

"Is this Lakshman? Yes he is!" He threw away his weapons. Peace descended over the army. King Mahidhar said in a humble manner:

"Oh you light of Raghu's dynasty! Kindly stop pulling the string of your bow. You have visited this place because of the good fortune of my daughter. I extend a hearty welcome to you. On account of my good fortune I have had this opportunity of seeing Shri Ram, the noble hero. Kindly visit our city and sanctify it."

King Mahidhar saw Shri Ram seated beneath the tree. He alighted from his chariot, approached Shri Ram and saluted his feet; and said in a humble manner:

"Oh you ocean of compassion! My daughter has been desiring to marry your brother, Lakshman even from her girlhood. She has chosen him for her husband. Therefore, I too decided to celebrate her marriage with Lakshman. But when we came to know that Lakshman and you went away to the forests, we were extremely sad. Then I arranged the betrothal of Vanamala with the prince of Chandranagar. But our daughter is fortunate since Lakshman himself has come to our city. Indeed, I am extremely fortunate in securing such a great man for my son-in-law."

Shri Ram got up and embraced King Mahidhar; and having requested him to be seated he narrated to him the events of the

previous night. In consequence, King Mahidhar's affection and regard for Lakshman increased a hundredfold. He was greatly delighted to hear all this, and he took Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman into the city with honour. Joy and jubilation filled the atmosphere.

* * * *

Shri Ram accepted King Mahidhar's invitation and agreed to stay at Vijayapur for sometime.

The court met, King Mahidhar sat on his throne. Shri Ram and Sita also sat on thrones beside him. The activities of the Court were in progress. Some decisions relating to the government were being taken. Just then a guard came in; and said politely :

"My Lord ! A messenger has arrived from Nandyavartpur. He desires to appear before you."

"Let him come in."

The messenger came in; saluted King Mahidhar and said;

"Victory to the King ! My lord, Ativirya, the king of Nandyavarthapur has sent me to you."

"What may be his purpose in sending you here ?"

"Dear Lord, it has become inevitable for our King Ativirya to make a war against King Bharath of Ayodhya. Countless kings and potentates are extending their support to the king of Ayodhya. You are a mighty hero. Our king's desire is that you should join us and extend your co-operation to us in this war."

After the messenger had communicated his message, King Mahidhar glanced towards Lakshman. Lakshman asked the messenger, "Dear messenger ! What exactly is the cause for the war between your king and King Bharath ?"

"Oh you hero ! Our King Ativirya strongly desires that Bharath, the king of Ayodhya must accept his supremacy and overlordship. Accordingly, he sent a message to King Bharath to that effect but he has rejected our king's desire. So at present a war has become unavoidable."

"Is King Bharath so capable as to reject the overlordship of King Ativirya ?" said Shri Ram.

"O great hero ! Undoubtedly King Ativirya is a mighty hero. He possesses invincible valour, incomparable strength and astounding militaric abilities but it is also true that King Bharath of Ayodhya is not less heroic. His valour and his militaric and strategic wisdom are well-known. Therefore, neither of them is willing to accept the other's overlordship. But of course actually King Ativirya wants Bharath to be his subordinate. His greatest desire is that Bharath should accept his overlordship."

"Dear messenger, you may go back. We will come there at once."

After the messenger went away King Mahidhar looked towards Shri Ram. His face was serious.

"How ignorant Ativirya is ! He is really devoid of sense, though he is a king. He is planning to fight against Bharath with our assistance."

Suddenly, King Mahidhar grew angry with King Ativirya. He thought of Ativirya with contempt. He went away to his chamber taking Shri Ram and Lakshman with him.

Commencing the discussion, King Mahidhar said :

"Oh hero ! I think that we should proceed to Nandyavarthpur with our armies. Ativirya may think that we are going to help him but we shall not join him. We shall support Bharath and we shall kill Ativirya who is despicable."

Lakshman looked towards Shri Ram. Shri Ram was deeply pondering over the situation. There was silence everywhere. No one said anything. No one seemed to have anything to say. After a little while breaking the silence Shri Ram said with an elevated voice.

"Oh King ! You need not take the trouble of going to Nandyavarthpur. Your armies also need not be taken there. I will go there personally and do what is proper."

King Mahidhar became silent on hearing Shri Ram's proposal. He could not make any suggestion. So, he thought it best to be silent. Sometime passed in this manner. Then he said :

"As you like it. You are right but I want to make an entreaty to you. Please do not reject it. I will not come to Nandyavarthpur but you please take with you my heroic son and the necessary armies."

"So be it."

Shri Ram accepted Mahidhar's suggestion.

* * * *

The city of Nandyavarthnagar.

It was surrounded by green and smiling fields; fascinating gardens rendered glorious by the fragrance of extraordinary flowers.

Shri Ram and Lakshman camped in the garden with their army. A large number of tents were pitched. It was as though a small city had appeared there. They decided to stay there for the night and to enter the city the next morning.

It was midnight. There was silence everywhere. Only the musical and metallic cries of grass-hoppers and frogs could be heard. Cool breezes blew over the area filling the people with a new zeal and consciousness. The fragrance of the flowers filled the air. Shri Ram and Lakshman were sleeping side by side. They were still half-awake. Just then suddenly a tremendous radiance descended from high skies before them. There emerged from that radiance a divine being. He was none other than the presiding deity of the garden. He was the invisible care-taker of the garden. When he saw Shri Ram and Lakshman he felt delighted because two great men had come to his garden as guests. So he appeared physically.

"Oh you heroes ! You are my honoured guests. I extend a hearty welcome to you."

"But who are you ?" said Shri Ram looking towards him.

"I am the presiding deity of this garden. Kindly tell me what service I may render to you."

"We are immensely pleased to have visited your garden. We are not experiencing any discomfort here."

"You are right but I wish to render a service to you and help you to achieve your objective. I will transform your army into women soldiers. I will transform you into extremely beautiful women."

Hearing the words of the god, Shri Ram and Lakshman were amazed.

"Why do you want to do this?"

"Only to punish Ativirya who is unjust and wicked. He will be defeated by an army of women. That will be a great disgrace to him. The story of his disgrace will spread far and wide". Even without waiting for Shri Ram's reply the god transformed all of them into women. At once, Shri Ram and Lakshman became beautiful women. They looked at each other and laughed heartily.

A little later Shri Ram sent a message to Ativirya, "King Mahidhar has sent an army to assist you."

"Has not King Mahidhar come?"

"No".

"Then where is the need for his army? He has become haughty. The day of his death is not far. He will surely taste death at my hands. Well, I will myself fight against Bharath. I do not need anyone's assistance. I will teach these fellows a lesson when the time comes."

Just then a minister said interrupting the conversation. "Oh king, King Mahidhar has not come. That does not matter but he has sent an army of women to assist you."

That was enough. The minister's words added fuel to the fire of his anger. Ativirya's anger flared up to the sky. He

thundered. "What did you say ? Has he sent women soldiers ? Now, it is certain that I will destroy him whatever may happen. I will seize his country, I will burn his royal splendour and I will make him a beggar."

Incensed with indignation he began to walk briskly to and fro in the chamber. Anger rose like waves in his heart. Just then Shri Ram and Lakshman who had been transformed into women came in. Looking at them Ativirya thundered.

"Throw these two out of the city."

The army of women soldiers had already approached the gates of the palace. All were shocked to see them. No one had seen such an army before. Ativirya's subordinates and warriors began to make fun of them and to misbehave with them. Some tore their dress. Some pulled their hair and all began to misbehave thus with the women soldiers.

At once Shri Ram took up his bow and arrows and began shooting arrows at the warriors of Ativirya. Many of them fell down dead. The sudden attack made by Shri Ram filled them with mortal dread. They were all overawed by Shri Ram. When Ativirya saw the fate of his warriors his irritation knew no bounds. In consequence, he leaped into the fray wielding his sword. As soon as he leaped into the fray Lakshman pounced upon him like a vulture and seized his sword, broke his crown into pieces and holding his hair he beat him on the ground. At once, he bound him with his upper-cloth.

Lakshman ! Flames of fire seemed to be flaring out of his eyes.

Like a ferocious lion dragging its prey, Lakshman dragged Ativirya to the centre of the city. The people of the city were shamed to see the condition of the king. They were helplessly looking on. Ativirya who wanted to subjugate Bharath was subjugated by his brother.

Lakshman dragged Ativirya into the garden and thrust him there just as a fuel-carrier throws down his bundle of fuel.

Sita could not bear to see Ativirya's misery. She felt sorry for him. She was the very embodiment of compassion. She released Ativirya. Meanwhile, Shri Ram and the army returned, Lakshman obtained from Ativirya a promise to accept Bharath's overlordship.

Ativirya wanted to enslave Bharath but he himself was enslaved to Bharath.

This is the way of the world. The deity's task was over. He removed the spell that he had cast upon Shri Ram and his army. Now they became transformed into men. It was then that Ativirya realized that Shri Ram and Lakshman were Bharath's brothers.

In consequence Ativirya was filled with repentance. He begged for Shri Ram's forgiveness and he extended a magnificent welcome to them. But he had become heart-broken by the disgrace he had suffered at the hands of Lakshman. He lost interest in samsar. He was agitated by one question, "Is it proper to accept Bharath's overlordship and to render service to him?" He thought it would be better if he died or if he became a mendicant instead of that ignominy. In consequence, he decided to become a mendicant.

Accordingly he installed his son Vijayaraj on the throne of Nandyavarthpur and announced that he would become a mendicant.

Shri Ram was fully aware of Ativirya's feelings. So he said consoling him,

"Dear King, you are like my brother Bharath. Therefore, you give up the idea of becoming a mendicant and carry out the administration of your country. Therein lies the welfare of your family and of your subjects."

"Oh you noble hero ! I am now pursuing the path of spiritual welfare. Please do not dissuade me from this endeavour. Man proposes; God disposes. We desire something and something contrary to it happens. Then what is mine in this world ? Unless

I become a sadhu I cannot attain salvation. Without salvation there can be no permanent peace or felicity.”

Sometime later Ativirya renounced samsar and received initiation into the *Sadhudharma*.

Later, King Vijayaraj entreated Shri Ram to give his consent to the marriage of his daughter Rathimala with Lakshman. In accordance with Shri Ram's desire Lakshman agreed to take Ratimala with him while returning to Ayodhya.

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LXVI

SOME NEW EVENTS

“Dear Lord ! Kindly marry me now and take me with you.”

“Dear one ! That is not possible now. I am now carrying on the duty of rendering service to Shri Ram. If I take you with me now that may cause some impediments to me. Lapses may occur in my duties.”

“Dear Lord, I will never be a cause of any impediment to you. In fact, I will help you in carrying out your duties; otherwise, I will end my life.”

“Dear one, listen to me a little. Do not become agitated. You are the queen of my heart. How can I forget you ? I will take you with me. When the right time comes, I will come back. I will marry you and take you to Ayodhya with all grandeur and *eclat*.”

“My Lord, they say that man’s words are unreliable.”

Hearing the words of Vanamala, Lakshman was silent for a while and then smiled at her. After they returned to Vijayapur when Shri Ram was engaged in making preparations for the next phase of his journey, Vanamala met Lakshman privately and insisted upon his taking her with him.

“Dear one, what shall I do ? How can I make you believe my words ? What shall I do to make you believe my words ?” Lakshman said to win her confidence.

“You take a vow.”

“What vow shall I take ?”

"If you do not keep up your promise you will have committed a sin equal to the sin of eating food in the night. Do you agree?"

"Yes. I will take that vow, Anything else?"

"No, that's enough".

Lakshman's promise satisfied Vanamala.

* * * *

The day was about to dawn.

It was the *Brahmya Muhurt* !

Shri Ram set off on a journey with Sita and Lakshman. After having crossed many forests, many woods, many mountains, caves and valleys, they reached a city called Kshemanjalinagar. They halted in the garden outside the city. Lakshman went about the area and brought some fruits. Sita consecrated the fruits. Then the three ate them.

"Dear brother, you two take rest here. I will go into the city and come back soon."

With Shri Ram's consent Lakshman went into the city of Kshemanjalinagar. The city of Kshemanjalinagar was prosperous and felicitous as its very name signified. It was the abode of peace, prosperity and felicity. The roads were clean and attractive. The mansions were magnificent and artistically perfect. The palace was remarkable for its sculptural beauty and architectural excellence. The roads and bazaars were teeming with highly cultured people. It was a splendid and glorious city. Lakshman, felt greatly delighted to see the city. He went to the palace. When he was passing there he noticed four citizens making some proclamation beating a huge drum. They were making that proclamation in every circle of the city.

"King Shatrudaman will give his daughter in marriage to anyone who can bear with his mighty strokes, on the chest." Lakshman was filled with eagerness. He approached the announcers and asked them.

"Dear sirs ! Why are you making this announcement ?"

The announcer paused. He looked at Lakshman with fixed eyes and said in a serious voice :

"Oh you great hero ! King Shatrudaman, the king of the city is indeed an extraordinary hero. He loves his subjects. Jitapadma is his only daughter. She is the very embodiment of beauty and all womanly virtues. She has stepped on the threshold of youth. In order to find a suitable bridegroom for her the king has made this plan."

"Well, has not a hero appeared so far who could accept this challenge ?"

"No. No one has appeared so far."

"Well. Take me to your king."

"Surely, I will."

Lakshman went to the palace accompanying the announcer. The announcer saluted the king and said humbly :

"Your excellency ! Hearing our proclamation this hero has come to meet you."

King Shatrudaman looked at Lakshman with fixed eyes. All the courtiers also looked towards Lakshman enthusiastically. Lakshman stood calmly in front of the king.

"Oh you hero, who are you ? What's your purpose in coming to our court ?" King Shatrudaman said.

"Oh king ! I am a messenger of King Bharath of Ayodhya. I happened to be passing this way when unexpectedly I heard the proclamation made by your officers. I have come here with the desire of marrying your daughter", Lakshman said making his position clear.

"Oh hero ! Can you bear with the mighty strokes of my fist ?"

“Why not ? Not one : I can bear with five strokes.”

The news of Lakshman's arrival in the court spread like wildfire in the city. The news reached even the harem. The queen came into the court accompanied by princess Jitapadma. She sat in a throne near the king and looked at Lakshman. On seeing him, she felt dazed by the splendour of his face and kept seeing him oblivious of herself and her surroundings. Princess Jitapadma felt fascinated by Lakshman at the very first sight. Love ran through her veins with electric rapidity. She kept looking at him spell-bound. She became excited on hearing that Lakshman would bear with five mighty strokes of King Shatrudaman. She could not control her emotions. She, forgetting herself, entreated the king :

“Dear father ! Do not deal your mighty strokes to him. I have fallen in love with him.”

“No, dear child, that is not possible. How can a Kshatriya give up his pledge ? Therefore, strokes have to be dealt,” Shatrudaman said firmly.

“Dear king ! You may deal not one stroke but five. I agree to your condition.” Lakshman said with a smiling face.

Jitapadma was filled with mortal dread. She despised her father's conditions and pledge.

Then, in the full court, King Shatrudaman dealt a stroke to Lakshman. Lakshman bore with it calmly. The king dealt the second, the third and the fourth strokes but Lakshman remained firm and unshaken like the Himalayas, the king of Mountains. The king dealt his fifth stroke upon Lakshman's teeth. He bore with that stroke also.

Jitapadma's joy knew no bounds. At once, overwhelmed with joy, she stood up; went to Lakshman and decorated his neck, with a garland.

“O you mighty hero ! I am supremely pleased with your extraordinary strength and valour. Kindly marry my daughter and render our lives blessed.”

“Oh king ! You are right. I should marry your daughter but I am not independent. I cannot accept your daughter without my elder brother’s consent.” Lakshman said in a serious voice.

“Who is your elder brother ? Where is he ?”

“My elder brother is Shri Ram, the son of Dasarath and he is taking rest with Sita in a garden outside this city.”

Soon after hearing who Lakshman was, King Shatrudaman descended from the throne and embraced Lakshman with overflowing affection. Greatly amazed and delighted, he said to Lakshman, “So you are Lakshman !”

And with great honour and affection he held his hand and made him sit beside him on the throne. Then addressing the court and the people, the king said :

“My dear courtiers ! my beloved people ! I am overwhelmed with joy. Princess Jitapadma has been extremely fortunate in getting such a hero for her husband. Shri Ram and Lakshman, the sons of King Dasarath have visited our city. At the same time, Lakshman has become our son-in-law. This is a matter of great delight to us. We proclaim that a grand jubilation should be organised to celebrate this happy event. First of all, all of us should go to the garden and receive into the city, Shri Ram and Sita.”

“Victory to the sons of King Dasarath.” This cry issued by all simultaneously reverberated in the skies. The king, the members of the royal family, the ministers and the people went to the garden. An ocean of humanity flowed into the garden. Shatrudaman entreated Shri Ram and Sita to enter the city.

Shri Ram entered the city. At the main gate of the palace; Queen Kanakadevi performed *Arti* to receive Shri Ram and Sita and marked their foreheads with holy *tilaks*. The king was full of adoration for them. The people of the city bowed to the feet of Shri Ram. When they went to the rest-house, Lakshman narrated to Shri Ram and Sita the story of Jitapadma. Sita

embraced Jitapadma and blessed her. Shri Ram bestowed her blessings upon her.

Having stayed there for a short time Shri Ram decided to set off on his journey. Jitapadma insisted upon joining them. Lakshman prevailed upon her not to insist upon following them. He said :

“Dear one ! When I return to Ayodhya, I will take you with me. You are still young and you will not be able to live in wild and desolate forests. Moreover, my task of rendering service to my brother may be impeded. So, please do not insist upon following us into the forests.”

“My Lord ! When I am with you even a forest is a heaven to me. I will not be a source of impediments to you. I will always be rendering dedicated service to Sita and you.”

“That is all right but please give up your insistence. Are you willing to face dangers and calamities at every step in the forest ?”

Jitapadma stopped insisting upon following them. Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita set off on their journey.

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It was a mountainous area.

The evening sun had rendered the whole world golden.

Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman arrived at a valley near the Vamshasthal mountain. The city of Vamshasthal lay in the shadow of the sky-high peaks of the mountain. Though it was a beautiful and fascinating area, the king and the people of the city were in a state of fear. Shri Ram could not understand why they were in such a state of fear. Just then, Shri Ram noticed a traveller passing along a road. He stopped the traveller and asked him.

“Why are the king and the people of the city terrified ? What happened ?”

“Oh you hero! During night times a terrible sound arises from these mountains. The noise is so deafening and terrifying that common people feel totally paralysed by it and even extraordinary people feel enervated by it. It is a mysterious and terrifying noise. Nobody knows what it is, how it originates or who makes it. Therefore all the inhabitants of the city go away in the night times and return home in the morning. This mysterious and dreadful phenomenon has been a cause of mortal dread to the people of the city.

And within the twinkling of an eye the traveller hurried away from there. The sun had already set.

Shri Ram fell into a state of worry. The misery of the people moved his heart. He began to think of a solution to this mysterious problem. Lakshman noticed that Shri Ram was worried. So after thinking a little, he said :

“If you agree we can climb the mountain and spend the night there. We can discover the secret of this noise and find a way of ending it.”

Shri Ram approved of Lakshman's suggestion. He began climbing the mountain accompanied by Lakshman and Sita. Seeing the three travellers climbing the mountain and walking into the very jaws of death, the people of the city were horrified. Their amazement and horror knew no bounds. Their agitation was boundless but no one had the courage to stop them.

Shri Ram reached the top of the mountain with Sita and Lakshman. The mountain peak was fascinating with beautiful surroundings. Everywhere, green trees and plants stood. The whole atmosphere was permeated with the sweet fragrance of various glorious flowers. Here and there, cool streams flowed with pellucid waters but though the place was so delightful there was no bird or animal there.

While observing the beautiful surroundings Shri Ram noticed the two munis seated at a place in deep meditation. As soon as they saw the two munis their hearts overflowed with the emotion of devotion. They saluted the feet of the munis and sat before

them silent and still. After a little while, Shri Ram began playing on the divine *veena* presented to him by Gokarna, the king of Yakshas.

Shri Ram was playing on the *veena* producing divine melodies. Lakshman was singing sweetly vocalizing the whole gamut of tunes, and darkness slowly covered the area. The music and the dance continued for sometime and then stopped. Shri Ram became conscious. He believed that the supernatural being that had been making that sound every night would appear on that night also. The same thing happened.

In the sky there appeared some black and monstrous figures making terrific noises. Slowly those black and diabolical figures went behind the munis.

At once a supernatural being with a monstrous form became visible. He stood before the munis and began laughing arrogantly. He was a supernatural being called *Bethal*. The other monsters also began to cause impediments to the munis by their horrid cries and their frightful gestures. Shri Ram looked towards Lakshman. He made a sign to Sita suggesting to her that she be seated near the munis. Then Shri Ram and Lakshman assumed their ferocious and formidable forms and attacked the monsters. The Bethal and the monsters felt paralysed by the astounding splendour of Shri Ram and Lakshman. All their supernatural powers and abilities began to fail and they began running away and the spell they had cast also disappeared. Since the impediments disappeared and serenity descended upon the area the two munis attained *Kevaljnan*.

The sounds of divine trumpets were heard in the sky. Gods, goddesses, *Gandharvas* and *Kinnars* and *Vidyadhars* came to celebrate the event of the attainment of *Kevaljnan* by the munis. There was a grand celebration and jubilation. Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita offered their devotion to the *Kevaljnanis*.

After the great celebration was over Shri Ram saluted the munis and said :

“Oh great men ! What is the secret of the Bethal who was causing impediments to your endeavours ? Who is he and why

did he commit this enormity of impeding your spiritual endeavours ?”

“Oh *Baladev* ! It is a long story. His original name is Analaprabh. There are some reasons for his coming here to cause impediments to us.” Kulabhushan Maharshi said in a serene voice.

“Oh Lord ! We have time enough. It is still night. Still several hours have to pass, before the sun rises. We wish to hear from you the story of this monster.”

The Maharshi could not evade Shri Ram’s insistence. Then, he narrated the story of the monster.

“This event took place countless years ago.

Once there was a beautiful city by name Padmini on this earth. King Vijayaparnvat ruled over it. He was heroic, handsome and absolutely capable as a king. He had a trusted servant by name Amritswar. Amritswar had a beautiful wife by name Upayoga. In the garden of their life two buds bloomed by name Adit and Mudit. Amritswar had a dear friend by name Vasubhuti. He was a wicked man. Vasubhuti used to visit Amritswar’s house off and on. In course of time, there arose an attachment between Vasubhuti and Upayoga.

In course of time, the attachment assumed the form of love. But Amritswar was completely unaware of it. He was an impediment on the path of Vasubhuti and Upayoga. Upayoga told Vasubhuti to find out some way of getting rid of this impediment. Vasubhuti was waiting for a suitable opportunity. During that period, Amrit had to go to a distant place out of his country in accordance with the king’s commands. In accordance with his plan, Vasubhuti also got ready to accompany Amritswar.

The two friends set off together on their journey. The heart of one overflowed with sweet amity for his friend; but the heart of the other brimmed with bitter and baleful venom for the other.

During their journey, one day, they halted in a safe place in the midst of a dense and wild forest. Asking Vasubhuti to keep awake and watchful, Amritswar lay down. He had placed his dagger at hand. Within a short time, he fell into deep sleep. A terrible conflict of cruel, and evil thoughts arose in the mind of Vasubhuti. With the idea of removing, from his path the impediment for ever he took out the sword and cut off the throat of Amritswar. Steaming blood flooded the area. Amritswar lay in a pool of blood.

Then, as if nothing of the sort had happened, Vasubhuti returned to the city of Padmininagar. When people asked him why he had returned alone, he gave some false reasons. Vasubhuti straight went to Upayoga. She asked him impatiently.

“How did you return ?”

“Our plan has succeeded. Now Amritswar can never return.”

Upayoga infatuated with lust forgot herself in the embraces of Vasubhuti.

“Come on ! We have achieved freedom for ever. The impediment has been removed. Now let us taste the sweets of our life forgetting everything.”

The two forgot themselves in the enjoyment of sensual desires. They flowed together like two impetuous rivers inevitably converging as if in a valley uniting, swelling and then flowing on with a sweep that touched the ocean of joy.

Just then Udit and Mudit entered the house. Vasubhuti spoke to them with a display of affection and then told them that their father had gone out of the country.

Upayoga became irritated and began to fret when her two sons came home unexpectedly. She thought; “Somehow we have got rid of Amritswar but now these two will be an impediment on my way. Sometime or the other they will come to know of the truth.” Thinking thus one day she gave a suggestion to Vasubhuti privately. According to that plan from that day onwards he was not coming to her house. On the contrary she used to go to his house.

In this manner she kept going to Vasubhuti's house regularly. Noticing that Upayoga came to their house off and on Vasubhuti's wife apprehended danger. She could not even bear the sight of that woman. In consequence, frequent quarrels took place between the husband and wife. At last, Vasubhuti said to Upayoga :

"On account of your coming to my house quarrels have been taking place in my family. Therefore, in future I myself will come to your place."

"In that case we have to do one thing."

"What is it ?"

"We should send the two children to their father. Then we will be absolutely free."

"Understood."

This secret conversation that took place between the two was overheard by Vasubhuti's wife. She at once gave a caution to Udit and Mudit.

"Vasubhuti is planning to kill you. Therefore, you must be always extremely careful and cautious."

Hearing this Udit became furious.

The next day in accordance with their plan Vasubhuti went to Upayoga's house. Udit was standing behind the door with a sword in his hand. No sooner had Vasubhuti entered the house than Udit attacked him with his sword and cut off his head. Upayoga was amazed and dazed by the occurrence. She was filled with agitation and fear. Her voice was choked and she could not even scream. She ran away from there to save her life. A long time passed.

Once a great sage by name Mativardhan visited Padmininagar. King Vijayparvat influenced by his enlightening words embraced mendicancy along with Udit and Mudit. He, Udit and Mudit together began to pursue the path of *Samyam* under the guidance of the muni.

After being initiated into *Sadhudharma* Udit and Mudit carried out severe spiritual austerities and were absorbed in their endeavours to attain spiritual elevation. Once the two munis set off on a pilgrimage to Sametshikhar, a holy place but during their journey they lost their way. In consequence, they happened to reach a village in a forest in which savage and cruel people lived. The village was called Navapalli.

After dying at the hands of Udit, Vasubhuti had taken birth in this village. Seeing the two munis entering the village Vasubhuti who was now a robber ran forward to kill them but the chieftain of the village stopped him and then showed the munis the way to Sametshikhar.

The sage Kulabhushan continued his narration with deep absorption. Just then Shri Ram asked the muni :

“Gurudev ! Why did the Chieftain of the robbers save the life of the munis ?”

“Oh you great man ! The chieftain was a deer in his earlier janma. During that time Udit and Mudit had taken birth in the family of a farmer.

Once they took pity on the deer and saved its life from a hunter. This was the cause for his kindness to the munis.”

“What happened later ?”

After having visited Sametshikhar, they carried out *Vihar* for a long time through many areas. They carried out extremely austere spiritual endeavours and breathed their last, while they were in *Samadhi*, (a state of spiritual ecstasy). After their death they took birth in heaven as heavenly beings.

Vasubhuti's jiva after his death was born in a heavenly world called *Jyothish*. After ending his existence there he was born as the son of Kanakprabha, the queen-consort of king Priyamvad of the city of Arishtapurnagar. He was named Anuddhar.

Udit and Mudit after ending their existence in the heavenly world were born as the sons of Queen Padmavati, a gentle and

noble woman and the Queen-consort of King Priyamvad. They were named Ratnarath and Chitrarath. They were men of outstanding virtues as signified by their names.

On account of the enmity of his earlier janma Anuddhar hated and despised Ratnarath and Chitrarath. So whenever he got an opportunity he belittled them and disgraced them. A long time passed thus. In course of time, King Priyamvad installed Ratnarath on his throne and carried out a fast unto death and reached heaven.

Though Anuddhar was the eldest son of the king he was not given the kingship. So he was full of animosity against Ratnarath and Chitrarath. Once, he became infatuated with a beautiful princess by name Sriprabha. He sent messengers to the father of that princess to request him to give his daughter in marriage to him but that king gave his daughter in marriage to Ratnarath. This event naturally incensed Anuddhar. He in a mood of excitement and agitation went away from Arishtapur and became a dacoit.

After becoming a robber he began robbing and killing people on the highways mercilessly. Robbery became his routine. On account of Anuddhar's robberies and violence the subjects of Ratnarath felt miserable. Complaints were received every day in the court. Naturally, Ratnarath was terribly indignant. He captured Anuddhar alive and inflicted upon him a severe punishment. After being released from the prison he became a mendicant.

He went to a wild forest and carried out severe, spiritual austerities but he could not get over his sensual cravings. In consequence, he developed intimacy with a woman and all his spiritual attainments were ruined. After his death he kept wandering through *samsar* through various janmas.

Once he was born as a human being. He again became a *Tapasi*. Carrying out austerities, in ignorance, he died and was born in the heavenly world called *Jyothish*. Analaprabha is himself. It was he whom you routed and compelled to take to his heels.

In course of time, Ratnarath and Chitrarath received initiation into the *Samyadharma*. While carrying out the meditation called *Shukladhyan* they reached the heavenly world. After their span of life in heaven ended the two were born as human beings again. They were born as the sons of King Kshemankar and Queen Vimaladevi of Siddhartapurnagar. One was named Kulabhushan and the other was named Deshabhushan. Oh great King! I am Kulabhushan and this muni is Deshabhushan."

The muni who had attained the *Kevaljnan* narrated the entire story to Shri Ram thus. Yet Shri Ram's curiosity did not end. In the silence and peaceful atmosphere of the night Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita experienced great delight. Shri Ram again asked the muni :

"Oh Lord! What impelled you to renounce the samsar in this Janma? Kindly narrate the story."

"Oh, great man! In our boyhood our father sent us to a mighty scholar by name Ghosh to be educated by him. We studied under him for twelve years and attained mastery over all arts and accomplishments. In the thirteenth year our Gurudev Ghosh took us to the capital city called Kshemankarnagar. The people of the city, were delighted by his visit and extended an excellent welcome to us. While we were passing through the main road of the city we noticed a damsel of great beauty sitting at the balcony of the window of her palace. At the very first sight we became infatuated with her but restraining our infatuation we went to our father. In the court of our father, in the presence of the courtiers and the people we displayed our attainments. The king was supremely delighted. He bathed us with his affection; honoured our teacher by giving him precious presentations and sent him away. When we later went to meet our mother and salute her, what did we see there? That very beautiful damsel was seated near our mother.

We saluted our mother and politely sat before her. Our mother received us with great affection and looking towards the damsel, she said :

“Dear sons ! This is your sister Kanakaprabha. She was born after you went away to your teacher’s house. Therefore, you do not know her.”

On hearing this from our mother we felt greatly unhappy. We were filled with repentance. “Oh ! What a sin did we commit? We became infatuated with our own sister. Fie upon our lives !” That very moment the spirit of renunciation arose in us and it began to bloom in our hearts like a flower and we later received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* at the feet of a great muni.

Shri Ram was greatly astonished when he heard about the way in which the kevaljnanis had been inspired to pursue the path of spiritual elevation. He saluted the munis. The muni continued his narration;

“Unable to bear with the separation from us our father fasted unto death and after his death he became a heavenly being by name Mahalochan. His throne in heaven began to shake when our spiritual endeavours were impeded. He saw us and our condition by means of his *Avadhiñjan* (extrasensory perception) and out of his affection for us he appeared before us. In the same manner by chance Analaprabhadev also came to know of our presence here.

Once, along with other heavenly beings Analaprabha approached the Kevali Anantavirya not on account of devotion but on account of curiosity. After the discourse ended a muni said :

“Oh lord ! After you, who will attain *Kevaljnan* in the tradition of Bhagwan Munisuvrat ?”

“After my *Nirvan*, in the tradition of the Bhagwan, two brothers by name Kulabhushan and Deshabhushan will attain *Kevaljnan*”, the Mahamuni said.

Analaprabha felt dazed and lost his lustre when he heard the words of Kevali Bhagwan Anantavirya. He returned agitated. He decided to falsify the prophecy of the Kevaljnani. Then by means of his supernatural power *Vibhang-jnan* he found out where we were. He also found out that we

were carrying out the *Kayotsarg* meditation here. He began causing impediments to us so that we might not attain *Kevaljnan*. Since Analaprabha is a lover of *Mithya*, he was determined to falsify the words of a *Kevaljnani* and began causing impediments to us.

Accordingly, for the last four or five days he has been haunting this place in the nights and has been harrassing us. He comes here soon after the sunset and keeps causing havoc throughout the night. This night also he came as usual and when he began troubling us you happened to come here. He could not bear with the splendour of your greatness; so he ran away but in fact he has been a benefactor to us in our endeavour to destroy our karmas. If he had not caused impediments thus we would not have been able to destroy our karmas so soon."

At this point Mahalochan, the father of the two munis said :

"Oh you great man ! By coming here you have done a noble deed. I would like to repay my debt of gratitude to you."

"Revered Lord ! We do not need anything. We deem ourselves fortunate in having had this opportunity of showing our devotion to the *Kevaljnanis*."

"Yet, sometime later when the proper time comes I will do you a good turn," saying this the god vanished.

The day dawned. The eastern horizon reddened. The cool bréezes of the morning brought felicity. Suraprabha, the king of Vamshastalnagar came there. He saluted the munis and Shri Ram and offered them his devotion.

"Oh king ! Get a magnificent temple built here for Paramatma Jineshwar." Shri Ram suggested to King Suraprabha.

"As commanded by the son of Dasarath." King Suraprabha constructed a magnificent Jin temple on the mountain. It became a pilgrim centre for the people of the city. It became famous as Ramgiri.

A little later Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman set off, on their journey.

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LXVII

IN THE FOREST OF DANDAKARANYA

The forest of Dandakaranya !

It was a dense and dreadful forest. Huge trees and wild bushes abounded everywhere. Sky-high trees stood like giants, striking terror into the beholders. The paths were stony, thorny and flinty. Even during day, the interior of the forest was dark.

Shri Ram, Sita and Lakshman entered the Dandakaranya. The forest abounded in wild animals, venomous snakes, terrible scorpions and countless kinds of poisonous creatures but they walked on fearlessly with pure hearts. While they were thus walking through the forest they noticed a mountain called Mahagiri. Lakshman thought it an ideal place for their stay. After reaching the valley at the foot of the mountain Shri Ram stopped.

“Dear brother, you two take rest here for a while. I will climb the mountain and find some safe cave where we can stay.” After having got Shri Ram’s permission Lakshman began leaping up a path towards the top of the hill. He did not like to climb the caves at the top of the hill. He liked a cave which was on the side of the mountain a little above the valley. That cave was clean and convenient for their stay. He examined the cave carefully and then returned. Taking Shri Ram and Sita with him he went to the cave.

Sita also liked the cave. Filled with joy she said to Lakshman, “Ah ! beautiful.....really beautiful ! I feel as though I am at home here.”

They spent some days happily there. They ate fruits and drank the sweet water of a lake which lay nearby. They seemed to have forgotten all the hardships of living in a forest.

Then an incident took place. One day, Shri Ram and Lakshman sat down to eat food. Sita was serving food to them on fresh leaves and small cups made of leaves. Just then, two radiant munis who had been travelling through the sky descended at the door of the cave. Seeing the munis Shri Ram Sita and Lakshman stood up. They saluted the munis and entreated them to have food.

The Munis had been fasting for a month and on that day they had to celebrate the completion ceremony. Sita gave them food. The heavenly beings caused a shower of flowers over them.

Just then Ratnajati, the Vidyadhara King of Kambudweep came there accompanied by two heavenly beings. They presented on the occasion of the ceremony to Shri Ram a divine chariot and two divine horses.

Attracted by the fragrance of the scented water a vulture came there. It lived in a tree near the cave. For a long time it had been ill. On seeing the munis it experienced great joy. It thought, "I have seen these Mahamunis somewhere." It tried to remember where and when it had seen them. Then, it remembered its past janmas. It remembered countless events of its past janmas. It swooned and fell on the ground. Sita sprinkled cool water on the bird. Within a short time, the bird regained its consciousness. It fell at the feet of the munis. The touch of their feet remedied its malady. It became healthy.

Its wings became golden. Its beak grew red and radiant. Its feet shone like precious stones. Its body seemed to be studded with gems. On its head there appeared a crest of gems. It became famous as *Jatayu*.

All this happened within a moment in a miraculous manner. Shri Ram's amazement knew no bounds. Sita and Lakshman were rendered speechless by the incident. They kept looking at it. After a while they asked the Muni.

“Oh you great sage ! You are omniscient. This bird normally eats flesh and it always looks for carrion flesh. How did it become healthy by touching your feet ? How did its ugly body become splendid within a moment ?”

“Oh you great man ! This event took place long ago. In those days, there was a city called Kumbakarakat, in this place. A king by name Dandak was ruling over the city. This vulture is the Jiva of that king,” said sage Sugupta.

Shri Ram was hearing the narration with deep interest. The muni continued the narration. In those days, King Jitashatru ruled over Shravastinagari. Dharinidevi was his Queen-consort. She gave birth to a son. He was named Skandak.

Skandak had a sister also by name Purandarayasha. She married King Dandak.

Once King Dandak sent his messenger Palak to Shravasti on some errand.

Palak followed the Vaidik dharma. He did not like the Jain dharma. When he went to Jitashatru's court by chance the king happened to be praising the Jain Dharma. Palak spoke critically of the king. All were angry. Prince Skandak also was present in the court. He possessed incisive intelligence. He defeated Palak in an argument. Palak felt helpless against his logical arguments. The people in the court applauded the prince. Palak was defeated. So he hated the prince but he could do nothing. He merely fretted and went away.

A long time passed. The prince lost interest in the samsar. Just then, Shri Munisuvratwamy happened to visit Shravasti. A grand celebration was organized to receive him. Prince Skandak along with five hundred other princes received initiation into the *sadhudharma*.

After being initiated thus into the *sadhudharma* Skandak Muni carried out severe spiritual austerities. In course of time, he was elevated to the status of an acharya.

Once he entertained the desire of meeting his sister Purandarayasha, the queen of Kumbakarakat and to bring about in her spiritual awakening. So, he humbly entreated Munisuvrat-swami :

“Oh, you venerable lord ! I desire to go to Kumbakarakat and to bring about awakening in my sister and others.”

“Dear Skandak, if you go there you may have to face some difficulties. You may have to face dreadful calamities. All your people may have to suffer hellish tortures.”

“But my lord, are we going to be adorers of Dharma or opponents of dharma ?”

“Dear son, with you, all will become adorers.”

Then accompanied by five hundred Munis Skandakacharya went to Kumbakarakat. All came to know of the arrival of the Munis. Palak also heard about it. He had not forgotten the event that had occurred in Shravasti once. Even he was smarting under the defeat he had experienced. He knew very well that the muni Skandakacharya was the prince himself who had once disgraced him.

Palak began to think of taking revenge against him. He wanted to make Shandak pay for his actions but he had only one night at his disposal. He would not be able to do anything after the acharya came into the city. So he began to think about it deeply. He spent some hours thinking thus. Then a plan flashed and at once he went to the king's treasurer.

The care-taker of the arsenal was faithful to the treasurer. He woke up the treasurer; explained to him his scheme and said:

“Dear friend, we need some weapons. Please make urgent arrangements.”

“But for that the king's order is necessary.”

“Don't worry about it. I have the king's order.” The treasurer knew very well that Palak enjoyed the trust of the king. So he opened the door of the arsenal. He took from the arsenal

the weapons necessary for five hundred soldiers. When the treasurer locked the door of the arsenal and turned to go home. Palak hit him on the head from behind. The treasurer fell down dead.

Palak taking armed soldiers with him went to the garden. He ordered his soldiers to hide themselves in bushes and trees. He spent the whole night in these activities. Until now his plan went on very well and he heaved a sigh of relief.

In the morning, Skandakacharya entered the city accompanied by five hundred munis. According to their plan they halted in the garden. King Dandak and his family went to meet the muni in the garden. The Acharya blessed them and delivered a discourse. They were all delighted by the discourse. All developed a spirit of detachment under the impact of the discourse.

King Dandak and Queen Purandarayasha also were delighted by the discourse. They returned to the city thinking of the way in which they could destroy their karmas. Palak was waiting for them in the palace. When the king was resting after having had his food Palak went to him and said.

“Dear king, I have found out a secret.”

“What is it?”

“Let us go to the secret chamber. There I will tell you what it is.”

“Tell me at once what it is.”

“Dear king, you may find it difficult to believe it; yet it is true.”

“You tell me what it is.”

“I have found out that Skandakacharya is not indeed a sadhu. He has come here with some evil designs. He is a hypocrite.”

“What are you prattling? How can Skandakacharya be a hypocrite? Impossible! I think you have lost your senses. Before making such accusations you must think of the consequences a little.”

The king stood up in anger.

"Dear king ! I am speaking the truth. I have known Skandak for many years. He has brought with him five hundred armed soldiers. Indeed his hypocrisy is shocking !"

"No. No, this is not true. Such a thing cannot happen," King Dandak spoke angrily.

"Oh king, I am speaking the truth. This is not a concoction but a truth. If you cannot believe it you can see it for yourself. At least, then you will believe it. I have some proof and I am prepared to show it to you."

"Well, what proof do you have ?"

In the garden where the acharya is staying, his soldiers are hiding themselves in bushes and trees. You can yourself go and see this."

"Anything else ?"

"The officer in charge of your arsenal was killed in the night. If you want any more proof I can give it to you."

"In that case, I have to examine the situation," said the king with agitation. Then King Dandak ordered his spies to verify the words of Palak. He himself went to the garden. He closely observed every bush and tree. Indeed there were soldiers hidden in those places. The king's sorrow knew no bounds. Palak was with him. Making use of the advantage, he said :

"Oh king ! Skandak can capture your kingdom and become the king of Kumbakarakat. He is not only a pretender but also a valiant fighter."

"Palak ! You are right. Till now I believed that Skandak was a great man. I thought he was a man of truth and virtues. He received initiation from Munisuvratswamy and became an Acharya but now I find that he is a hypocrite."

"My Lord ! In this world we cannot easily distinguish good men from hypocrites. It is a good thing that I came to know of the truth in time. Otherwise, a calamity would have occurred."

“Palak ! Indeed you have done a great benefaction to me by warning me in time and by saving Kumbakarakat from a disaster. Now, I empower you to deal with this pretender. You can punish him as you like. You need not ask for my opinion in this matter.”

“What a mockery of samsar ?” King Dandak believed the false evidence given by Palak. He did not try to discuss the matter with the acharya. On the contrary he empowered Palak to punish him. Ah ! If he had any desire to know the truth he would have approached Munisuvratswami and sought a clarification of his doubts and suspicions. Contrariety in thought appears when a calamity is impending. The king went to his palace. He did not discuss this matter even with the queen Purandarayasha. She was in high spirits because after a long time she was seeing her brother who had become a Sadhu.

Palak's joy knew no bounds. He felt triumphant. He was intent upon wreaking vengeance against Skandak muni. Taking some flatterers of the king, he went to the garden. Behaving in an arrogant manner, he said in a harsh manner :

“O you pretender ! Your hypocrisy has been exposed and the truth about you has come to light. All your evil designs and hopes have been dashed to pieces. You have come here with a number of soldiers to capture Kumbakarakatnagar. We have found out this secret. So, by the order of the king, you are declared a traitor.”

“Oh Palak ! What are you saying ? I am unable to understand anything. We are devotees of the Paramatma Jineshwardev. How can Sadhus who are totally detached from the samsar possess weapons ? How can they have with them armed soldiers ? What is the use of weapons to us ?” Skandakacharya said in a calm voice.

“O you hypocrite ! You still pretend that you are innocent. Your dream of capturing the city has fallen to pieces. Do you want to escape by throwing dust in our eyes ?”

“Palak ! We do not desire either kingdom or royal splendour. I renounced my prosperous Kingdom of Shravasthi. I have renounced the samsar. So, the question of my desiring kingship does not arise. Why do you increase your sin by making this false accusation against us ?”

Skandakacharya was deeply pained by Palak's harsh words. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the words of his Gurumaharaj. He remembered his words.

“You will have to face terrible calamities.” Now he sensed the conspiracy of Palak. Just then, he again heard Palak's harsh words. “Prince ! Get ready with your five hundred friends to face death. All of you will be killed and buried here. You will have to taste the bitter fruit of your offence here in the presence of all, in the midst of all.”

Palak's arrogant laughter echoed through the garden. Then, his soldiers surrounded the garden. He got heavy iron-bars and prepared a contrivance for punishing them. The Acharya looked at his followers in a serene manner. Then, he said in an affectionate manner :

“Dear Munis ! Today we are facing a terrible calamity. I think our death has approached. Palak has made a false accusation against us. He has slung mud against our fair names. He has declared us traitors and is bent upon killing us as a punishment. Yet he is not our enemy . . . he is a friend. He is greatly helpful to us in destroying our karmas. Therefore, you must forgive him and face the situation with smiling faces. O you sadhus ! You know very well that the soul is different from the body. You also know very well that Palak will crush only our bodies; not our souls. He will grind our bodies in the crusher; he cannot harm our souls. When he throws us into the crusher, you must think of the Arihant Bhagwan with a pure mind and destroy our karmas. This is what you have to do now.”

“Dear munis ! You have been following the path of spiritual elevation like lions, and you have been following the path of purity with determination. To-day, you have the opportunity of pouncing upon karmas like lions. Do not lose this opportunity of destroying your karmas.”

"Remember that you should not give way to distress, fear or weakness. You should not allow the attachment for the body to agitate you. Bhagwan Munisuvratswami is always watching us with his spiritual eyes. His compassion will give us strength to face any calamity. We must tell Palak." Palak you may very well break our bones, you may peel off our skins; you may spill our blood but you cannot do anything to our immortal souls."

"O you heroes ! O you heroic munis ! The goddess *Shivaramani* (salvation) is waiting for you on *Siddhashila* with a garland in her hands. You must not act in such a way as you would be ashamed of your action. You should not bow your heads in shame afterwards. You must discard your attachment for the samsar, and you must adore *Nirvan* which brings you immortal felicity and serenity. You must decide upon spending your time in spiritual contemplation. That will be your provision for your spiritual journey. This is the final precept of your Gurumaharaj. You must always bear this in your minds. Well ! I bid you all farewell."

Then, suddenly, Skandakacharya's voice was choked with emotion. He shuddered when he imagined the terrible calamity that was going to overcome him and his disciples but he restrained himself. We can escape the decrees of destiny ? He folded his hands and recited an auspicious hymn of benediction.

Just then Palak came there. His men prepared the crusher and he decided to crush the munis to death.

"Get up. Get ready all of you !" Palak said bursting into a fit of arrogant laughter and waving his whip in the air.

"Oh you fool, we are always ready to embrace death. Wherever we may be wandering we always keep welcoming death."

Inspired by the words of Acharya Skandak all the munis got ready to face death. Their faces were radiant with courage and composure. There was no sign of fear or gloom in their faces. Skandakacharya slowly approached the crusher and he said in a lofty voice :

“Palak ! I will first jump into the crusher.”

“No, Gurudev, I will first leap into it,” said a young muni holding Skandakacharya’s hands.

Palak was looking at the sight with his eyes widened with astonishment. Then the first disciple of the acharya jumped into the crusher, shouting, “Victory to Rishabhdev. Victory to Munisuvrat.” The crusher began revolving. Suddenly Skandakacharya’s voice was heard : “Oh hero ! Seek the refuge of the Arihant and the other four Parameshtis.”

“I salute the Arihantas ! I salute the Siddhas ! I salute the Acharyas ! I salute the teachers and I salute all sadhus.”

Thud...thudud...the bones were cracking. The machine was cracking the bones. Steaming blood flowed and the muni who was absorbed in *Shukladhyan* attained *Kevaljnan*. He attained salvation.

Another muni jumped into the crusher and he was also crushed. While Palak was crushing the bones the munis were crushing their karmas.

One after another the munis jumped into the crusher. Palak crushed them. The munis attained moksha but Palak kept gathering sins.

This went on for sometime. At last two remained; Skandakacharya and a young muni.

Skandakacharya addressed Palak and said, “Palak, now you may crush me also. I cannot bear to see this young muni being crushed. At least, grant this wish of mine.”

But Palak wanted Skandakacharya to experience as much agony as possible. So he did not care for his appeal. He stuck to his guns.

Then the young Muni came forward and said, “First crush me to death. Let me destroy my karmas.”

Turning towards his acharya he said.....

“Gurudev ! Please recite the *Navkarmantra*. I will surely destroy my karmas.”

Skandakacharya was in great anguish. He embraced the young muni and said, “Oh muni ! You are indeed heroic. You are a lion. You must destroy your karmas. Say, “Victory to Rishabhdev. Victory to Munisuvrat.” The young muni jumped into the crusher. Skandakacharya performed the final ceremonies for his disciples. The young muni was crushed but he attained salvation.

Now, Skandakacharya was the only one left. Palak was arbitrary in his attitude.

The acharya said;

“Oh Gods ! If I have really served you and attained spiritual excellence let me become a destroyer and destroy Palak, King Dandak and his kingdom.”

And then he leaped into the crusher. Palak crushed him also. After his death the acharya took birth as Agnikumardev.

A terrible event took in the garden of Kumbakarakat. Blood flowed over the garden. Palak who was covered with blood looked a monster and ran away from there. Crows and vultures swooped upon the garden.

Acharya Skandak's *Rajoharan* lay there drenched in blood. A vulture flying over the area, carried it away thinking that it was flesh. It found out that it was not flesh and dropped it.

Where did it fall ? It fell at the window of Queen Purandarayasha. It was evening. The queen was reposing, seated at the window. She shuddered at the sight of something drenched with blood falling there. When she stood up and saw it she was petrified. It was a *Rajoharan*.

She at once called her attendant and asked her to wash it. She recognized the *Rajoharan*. Her heart began to palpitate with doubts and fears.

Once Purandarayasha had presented an expensive woollen blanket to Skandak muni. The *Rajoharan* had been made out of the threads from that blanket.

“Oh ! This is Skandakacharya’s *Rajoharan*.” She went running to King Dandak.

“What a great enormity has been committed ! You have killed Skandakacharya.” The queen began to weep aloud. King Dandak experienced a horripilation. He turned pale. He bowed his head in shame.

In due time, terrible clouds of calamities enveloped the city. Agnikumardev remembered his *poorvajanma* by means of his extrasensory perception “The garden of Kumbakarakat flooded with blood ! Vultures Jackals and crows, abounding .. the wicked Palak and King Dandak.” He became mad with anger. He caused ferocious fires that burnt the city to ashes.

The guardian angel rescued Purandarayasha and conveyed her to the presence of Munisuvratswami. The Acharya consoled her. Renouncing the *samsar* she became a *sadhvi*.

The beautiful city of Kumbakarakat was burnt down to ashes by the fires caused by Agnikumardev.

“Oh Ram ! So this forest has come to be known as Dandakaranya.”

King Dandak after many *janmas* is now a vulture. At our sight he remembered his past and at our touch he was cured of all his maladies.”

On hearing the words of the muni Jatayu bowed to his feet again. The muni created spiritual awakening in it. It took three vows.

Discarding violence to *jivas*.

Discarding meat-eating.

Discarding the habit of eating food in the night.

And then they said to Shri Ram, "Dear Ramachandra ! You must love this bird as a fellow-creature."

Then the muni went away flying through the sky.

Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita began to travel through the Dandakaranya by their chariot, with Jatayu by their side.

LXVIII

IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF CALAMITIES

Pathal Lanka !

The city of Pathal Lanka ! The capital of Ravana's brother-in-law. Khar looked fascinating.

Khar had two sons by name Shambuk and Sundh. The two princes entered the threshold of youth. They achieved mastery over various *shastras*, arts and accomplishments. Shambuk was extremely intelligent and capable. He was an ambitious young man. He was always yearning to attain the divine weapons called *Suryahaskhadga*. So, once, he approached his father, Khar and said in a humble voice :

"Dear father ! I desire to attain the divine sword *Suryahas*. This is possible only in the Dandakaranya. So kindly permit me to go to the Dandakaranya."

"Dear son ! You may attain *Suryahas*. I see no harm in this but I do not agree to your going to the Dandakaranya."

Just then Queen Chandranakha came in and said :

"Who wants to go to the Dandakaranya ?"

"Your son ! Who else can it be ?"

"No, dear son. Then Dandakaranya is a wild forest. You should not go there. You can carry out your endeavours in some other forest," Chandranakha said affectionately.

“Mother ! Why are you so fearful ? Don’t you have confidence in your son’s heroism. It is impossible to attain any great objective without courage and firmness. Therefore, please do not dissuade me from my path. Please do not oppose my wish. I am determined to go to the Dandakaranya.”

Shambuk stuck to his guns and he set off to the Dandakaranya. He entered the terrible forest; found a convenient place and then declared :

“If anyone impedes my endeavours I shall make an end of him.” Then he tied his feet to a branch of a banyan tree and hung his head downwards. He became absorbed in reciting the mantras to attain the sword called *Suryahas*. He had to carry out this *tapas* for twelve years and seven days. Shambuk was an absolutely celibate young man. He had conquered his senses. He with a pure mind began carrying out *Tapas* to attain that supernatural weapon.

Year after year passed. Shambuk was carrying out his *Tapas* with an unbroken concentration.

Twelve years passed and only seven days remained. Even there four days had passed.

If he continued the penance for three more days, he would attain the *Suryahas* sword.

He was almost on the point of attaining the *Suryahas*.

The *Suryahas* sword kept shining in the sky with an extraordinary radiance. The great sword produced lightnings in the sky flashing out divine radiance. It was absolutely at hand. If he had a longer hand, he could have seized it easily. Such was the proximity of the sword. Shambuk by means of his determination was about to attain his objective.

Meanwhile, Lakshman happened to come near that bamboo grove. Shambuk was performing his *Tapas* in that bamboo grove. Lakshman suddenly noticed the radiant *Suryahas* hanging over him. At the very first sight, he found out that it was

the *Suryahas*. He held its handle; seized it and to test its sharpness, he began cutting off the bamboo trees. Shambuk was in that bamboo grove. So, the sword fell upon him also and at once his severed head fell on the ground.

Lakshman was amazed. He never knew that there was a person in the bamboo grove and that he would cut off his head like that. When he slowly entered the bamboo grove, he found Shambuk's body hanging down from a tree. He was greatly sad to see this. He began to think, "O! I have killed an unarmed and an innocent human being." He went straight to Shri Ram carrying the *Suryahas* and narrated to him how unknowingly, he had killed a man.

"Dear brother! This is a divine sword called *Suryahas*. Someone performing *Tapas* to attain it was killed by you. It is possible that in future some other person may endeavour to attain it."

"Revered brother! What will happen now?" Lakshman said in anguish.

Sita kept staring at the radiant sword with astonishment.

Shambuk's mother was counting every day, to see when the period would end. Thinking that her son would attain the *Suryahas* in a day or two Chandranakha began making preparations for a celebration. She took a vessel containing holy water. She put on clean and holy dress and went to Dandakaranya. She knew very well the place where her son was carrying out the *tapas*. During the past twelve years, she went there many times and did whatever was necessary for her son.

Chandranakha was in high spirits because after a long period of *Tapas*, her son was going to attain an infallible weapon. She could not contain her joy, but the poor woman did not know what lay concealed in the womb of time; that within a short time a thunderbolt of anguish would strike her; and that her son had been killed by Lakshman. This is one general feature of the *samsar*. The *jiva* goes on entertaining aspirations and building castles in the air but on account of cruel *Karmas* those aspira-

tions end in frustrations. Then, the Jivatma loses patience and begins to lament and the jiva in consequence begins cursing his or her Karmas and fortune and then the Jiva becomes weaker.

Chandranakha went strutting to the place in the Dandakaranya where her son was performing *tapas*. She placed the plate containing holy substances on clean ground and she crept into the bamboo grove. Suddenly, she saw her son's body hanging from a branch of the banyan tree. The head had been cut off and blood was pouring out. She was thunder-struck to see the sight. Her heart stopped beating. She stood petrified like a stone-image. Her eyes were unmoving. Her hands and legs began to shake. She screamed aloud in utter anguish. "Alas, my son. . . . Dear Shambuk ! What has happened to you ? My dear child ? Who killed you ? Oh ! How did this calamity occur ? Where have you gone my son ?" Then she placed Shambuk's severed head on her lap and wept aloud like a child. Her lamentations were so heart-rending that even the trees were moved to pity.

A little while ago she was floating on the waves of joy. Now, she was whirling in a whirlpool of anguish. Her radiant face became bleak and blighted. Her aspirations ended in bitter frustration.

At once, countless thoughts and feelings arose in her mind. "Who might have come here ? Who might have killed my son in this heinous manner ?" Then placing her son's head in the plate she began to look for foot-prints in the surroundings.

Lakshman noticed her from a distant place. Chandranakha noticed Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita seated beneath a tree. Suddenly, she stopped. She kept staring at Shri Ram's radiant face. She was beside her wits. Shri Ram's splendour was strange. He possessed such beauty as would make the god of love look dull and devoid of lustre.

His beauty was such that it would make the three worlds spell-bound.

Chandranakha also stood spell-bound at the sight of Shri Ram's beauty. A strange passion shot through her veins. Mad-dened by infatuation, she went forward to embrace Shri Ram. In a moment, she assumed the form of a beautiful damsel.

Chandranakha was verily the sister of Ravan of Lanka. She was an expert in assuming any form.

"Oh! What a strange passion? What a sport of sensual cravings?" She was experiencing terrible anguish a moment ago on account of her son's death and now even while his dead body lay there she became infatuated with Shri Ram and desired a union with him. She was blinded by her passion.

"What a strange sensual craving in an atmosphere of sorrow and anguish?"

"Dear lady! Why have you come into this terrible forest alone? This is a dreadful forest." Shri Ram said in a querulous manner.

Chandranakha narrated a false story.

"My dear hero! I am the daughter of the king of Avanti. I was sleeping on the roof of my palace and some supernatural being carried me away from there and has brought me here. Here some Vidyadhar prince happened to meet me. At once, he became infatuated with me. As a result of that he attacked the supernatural creature. There ensued a terrible fight between them. At once, they killed each other there and then. I began wandering through the forest alone. By chance, I came here. On account of my great *punya* I have found a refuge here I have found a benevolent man here. Now my dear Lord, you are everything to me. Kindly give me a place at your feet. Kindly marry me. It is said that the entreaties made to great men will never be in vain".

Hearing the entreaty of the damsel the two brothers glanced towards each other. They thought deeply for a while. "It is likely that she is some deceptive being like a siren. Assuming an attractive form she might have come here to deceive us. There is some mystery behind the appearance of this damsel."

The two brothers communicated to each other their ideas.

At once, smiles appeared on the face of Shri Ram. He said in a calm voice : "Oh you damsel with dark gazelle eyes, I am a married man. My wife is with me here. If you really want to marry someone approach my younger brother Lakshman. He is single."

Chandranakha who was blinded by her passion, looked at Lakshman. At once, she went near Lakshman and began staring at him with maddening passion.

"Oh you youthful damsel ! I am unable to marry you. You have already fallen in love with my elder brother. So you are as venerable as my mother now."

On hearing the words of Lakshman Chandranakha's infatuation was frustrated. Her dreams broke into pieces. Her desires were frustrated. So she went away in a huff.

Even the trees and the forest began to sway with joy seeing the way in which Shri Ram and Lakshman made fun of Chandranakha.

Omens have great significance. Chandranakha was in anguish on account of her son's death. She became infatuated at the sight of Shri Ram. She was terribly angry when her entreaties were rejected.

Chandranakha decided to take a severe revenge against them. She straight went into the Pathal Lanka. She went into the palace and began weeping aloud. On hearing her cries, Khar, the king of Vidyadhars came running to her. Chandranakha lay on her bed sobbing.

"Dear queen, why are you weeping thus ?" Khar said sitting near her.

"My dear, Lord ! Our son has been killed," said Chandranakha lamenting aloud.

"What do you say ? Do you say that Shambuk has been killed ? Who killed him ?"

“My dear Lord ! He was killed while he was performing the *tapas* to attain the *Suryahas*. Those who slew him are staying in that vicinity. They are two brothers by name Ram and Lakshman.”

“I will at once go to the Dandakaranya and I will return home only after avenging our son’s murder.”

“But you should not go alone. They are two and we have to face them. Moreover, they are extraordinarily valiant. Therefore, take a large army with you. I too will join you.”

A little later Khar set off to the Dandakaranya with fourteen thousand warriors. Chandranakha also accompanied him.

Shri Ram and Lakshman knew that the wily woman had been incensed and that she would cause some havoc and their expectation came true soon. A large number of warriors came into the Dandakaranya like a cloud of locusts.

Shri Ram took up his bow and arrow to encounter them. But Lakshman said : “Revered brother ! Why should you fight when I am here ? This cannot take place. Kindly give me the command. I will decimate these deceptive demons.”

“Go on brother ! May you be victorious ! In case some difficulty arises roar like a lion I will come there at once.”

“As commanded by you.”

At once Lakshman went into the field. When he began producing terrific sounds by pulling the string of his bow the *danavas* were terrified and a mighty commotion arose among them. At once, Lakshman began shooting arrows at them and within a short time he slew countless warriors of Khar.

Seeing this terrific sight Chandranakha thought, “My husband Khar cannot face Lakshman and our soldiers are dying like insects. Therefore, I should find out some other way.” She decided to go to Lanka.

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The magnificent city of Lanka !

The capital city of Ravan the *danava* king, the conqueror of the world.

Chandranakha straight went to her brother, Ravan. Ravan made polite enquiries regarding her welfare. In reply to his enquiries she began shedding tears and weeping aloud.

"My dear brother ! My anguish knows no bounds. Your dear sister's son Shambuk was killed by Lakshman, in the Dandakaranya. Your brother-in-law has gone there with fourteen thousand Vidyadhar soldiers; and has been fighting against them. A terrible fight is going on. The great Vidyadhars are being cut to pieces by Lakshman; and Shri Ram and Sita are happily taking rest."

"Sita !"

"Yes. Shri Ram's wife and the daughter of Janak. She is so beautiful and charming that I do not find words to describe her beauty and graces. She is absolutely beautiful. She is the embodiment of grace and loveliness. No angel, no *apsaras*..No divine damsel...None can stand comparison with her in beauty and grace."

"In the three worlds, there is no damsel who can be compared to her. She is a paragon of feminine graces and charms. Her beauty is incomparable and extraordinary. She is an ornament to ornaments. Of course, there may be many beautiful ladies in your palace but all of them are ugly and unattractive compared to her. It is no exaggeration to say that they are fit only to be Sita's attendants. She will add lustre to your harem; and until she is brought to your harem, it will be lustreless; and if you cannot attain her what is the use of your attainments and heroism ? When you see her personally, you will find that every word of mine is true. You will find that I have spoken the truth.

Chandranakha !

She possessed the ability to bring about a disaster by her skilful words.

She sent her husband to fight against Shri Ram and Lakshman, out of her desire to take revenge against them for her son's death; and to make them pay for insulting her. She went to her brother Ravan. She knew her brother's weakness. Ravan was not the kind of man who would keep quiet when he heard about the beauty of a woman. He would move heaven and earth to secure a beautiful woman who took his fancy. So, he fell an easy victim to Chandranakha's evil designs.

"Chandra! Indeed, you are my sister. I thank you for thinking of my happiness and delights. I will at once set off to the Dandakaranya; and bring Sita here."

Ravan totally forgot that Shambuk had been killed. He just ignored it. The account of Sita's beauty given by Chandranakha made a deep impact on his mind. Now, he was obsessed with the desire to secure Sita. Seeing that her plan had succeeded, Chandranakha went to Pathal Lanka. Ravan ordered the guards concerned to get ready the *Pushpak*. He went into his chamber to change his dress; and to get ready for the travel.

Then without wasting a minute, he sat in the *Pushpak* and set off towards the Dandakaranya. "Oh *Pushpak*! Take me at once to the place where Sita is staying."

The *Pushpak* carrying Ravan began flying at a tremendous speed towards the Dandakaranya. Having landed the *Pushpak* among the bamboo groves, Ravan set off in search of Sita. While wandering about there, he saw Sita seated beside Shri Ram beneath a banyan tree. He stood spell-bound at the sight of her beauty. He kept staring at her extraordinary grace and beauty with fixed eyes. He went near them concealing himself in bushes and groves. He saw Shri Ram and he felt terrified by the radiance of his face like a lion that is terrified by the flames of fire. He moved back a couple of paces. He found himself in a strange difficulty. He found it impossible to abduct Sita when Shri Ram was there. He thought, "What should be done now? It is impossible to fight against Shri Ram and defeat him and when he is by her side, it is impossible to abduct Sita." Even though he thought much, he could not find a suitable way.

Finally, he had to take recourse to a superhuman power called *Avalokini*. Ravan found the *Avalokini* power very helpful. That power appeared before Ravan in the form of an attendant. Ravan folded his hands and said : "O goddess ! I desire to abduct Sita and I seek your aid in this".

"O you king of Lanka ! It is easier to seize the gem that shines on the hood of the king of cobras, than abducting Sita when she is by the side of Shri Ram. Not only you, no one can do it though he may be a god or a *Yaksha* or a *Kinnar* or a *Gandharva*. You are only courting your ruin by planning to abduct Sita."

Hearing the words of the goddess, Ravan felt abashed. His heart sank and he felt grieved and helpless. Throwing away his *Chandrahās* aside he fell at the feet of the goddess.

"O goddess ! If you want to save my life and honour, show me some way. I cannot live even for a moment without Sita."

The great hero who conquered many kingdoms; defeated many heroes and sent shocks of fear and horror through the three worlds now stood devoid of lustre, depressed and helpless.

"O goddess ! Show me some way." He said in a humble voice.

"Yes ! There is one way."

"Mother ! Kindly tell me what it is ?" said Ravan sitting at her feet.

He kept looking towards her.

"Shri Ram should be somehow sent away from here."

"But how is it possible ? Would he go away leaving Sita alone. No. He will not."

"He will surely go. Shri Ram has extraordinary affection for Lakshman. Now, Lakshman is engaged in a war against

Khar at a great distance. Shri Ram has told Lakshman to give a signal when he is in danger, and when he needs his help."

"What is it?" Ravan asked eagerly.

"Dear son! He has told Lakshman that if he finds himself in some danger he should roar like a lion and that he would go to his rescue at once. Therefore, if Shri Ram hears a roar, he will leave Sita and will go to Lakshman's rescue and you can carry out your plan of abducting Sita."

"This is an absolutely easy method. I am grateful to you O goddess! You have bestowed a great benefaction upon me. Now you kindly roar like a lion and make Shri Ram go away. Then within the twinkling of an eye, I will carry out my plan." The Avalokini power prostrated to Ravan and disappeared. Ravan took up his Chandrahas. He began to sway in the swing of delight. He kept staring at Sita hiding himself in bushes. His infatuation for her increased every moment. His impatience and agitation increased. He was eagerly waiting to hear the roar.

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LXIX

THE ABDUCTION OF SITA

“My noble Lord ! I fear, Lakshman is in some dreadful danger. Otherwise, he would not have roared thus like a lion. Therefore, kindly go at once to Lakshman’s succour.”

“Dear Sita ! I have also heard the roar but I wonder how any danger can overcome Lakshman who is an incomparable hero in the three worlds. Lakshman facing a danger ! I cannot believe this. I really cannot.”

“Dear Lord ! This is not the time for thinking. Lakshman is surely in some peril. You kindly go there. It is not proper to waste even a moment now.”

Shri Ram fell into a strange conflict. Sita was insisting upon his going at once. Helplessly, Shri Ram took up his bow and proceeded towards the place where the fight was going on.

Ravan’s joy knew no bounds. He came out of the bamboo-grove. Sita was standing at the door of the cave looking towards the direction in which the fight was going on. Ravan slowly and silently moved forward and stood behind Sita. At once he assumed a monstrous form; seized Sita holding her waist and at once began flying through the sky, in his *Pushpak*.

On account of this sudden occurrence Sita was stunned. She inspite of her dazed condition, sensed that she was being abducted. She began to weep aloud. The sky reverberated with her cries. Jatayu who was in the tree near the cave heard her cries and was startled. He saw Ravan putting Sita in the *Pushpak* and flying away. At once, it flew towards Sita and said;

“Noble lady ! You need not fear anything. I am here. O you demon ! You despicable fellow ! Wait a little.” Jatayu

repeatedly attacked Ravan and kept attacking him with his sharp and pointed beak in a fierce manner. At once, Ravan, cut off its wings with his sword. Then, Ravan began to fly in the sky in his *Pushpak*.

The entire atmosphere began to reverberate with Sita's loud cries and screams. "O Lakshman... my dear father Janak... O brother Bhamandal... listen. Your Sita is being abducted by some wicked person. Save me. Save me. Rescue me from this sinful monster at once."

She kept weeping aloud but what could be done? All her cries were in vain. There was no one there to come to her succour.

The *Pushpak* was flying over the sea, with the speed of an electric flash. Just then Ratnajati a Vidyadhar prince who lived in an island in the midst of the sea heard her heart-rending cries and stood stupefied. Since she was repeatedly crying out, "O Ram! O Lakshman!" he guessed that it was Sita, the wife of Shri Ram. The *Pushpak*, of course belonged to Ravan. He thought: "Ravan must be carrying away Sita. What should I do? Sita is the sister of my Lord Bhamandal. Therefore, I should go to her rescue. I should try to release her from the cruel clutches of Ravan." At once, Ratnajati soared to the sky; stood before the *Pushpak* and impeded its movement. He said in a thundering voice, waving his sword, "O you wicked fellow! You are abducting Sita like a thief. If you are a hero, fight with me."

But what was Ratnajati compared to Ravan who had mastered countless arts and accomplishments? Within a moment, Ravan deprived him of all his powers. In consequence, he fell whirling down on Kambudweep. He fell down unconscious. When he regained his consciousness, he, feeling helpless, took shelter on the mountain called Kambuparvat.

The *Pushpak* was proceeding towards Lanka at a great speed. After having gone a long distance Ravan reduced the speed a little. He looked towards Sita. Her eyes were red with

continuous weeping. Ravan's infatuation kept increasing but he did not want to force her. So, he went near her and said :

"Dear Sita ! You are weeping unnecessarily. You should be happy now instead of weeping. You are going to be the Queen consort of Emperor Dashmuk, the Emperor of the entire Vidyadhar world."

Sita turned away from him. She could not hear his ignoble words. But Ravan who was blinded with passion continued. "Dear Sita, it is a great misfortune that you should be wandering with Ram who is a beggar. Actually, he is not worthy of being your husband. Now, you have reached the right place. You are going to be the Queen of Lanka."

"O Sita ! Call me once, 'My Lord'. I deem myself honoured to be your slave." And at once Ravan fell at the feet of Sita. He folded his hands and began entreating Sita with an agitated face. Sita's tender heart was torn with grief and anguish. She moved away from him out of utter contempt for him.

Ravan again fell at her feet. She at once moved away. Noble women do not allow other men even to touch them. After sometime, she said in venomous words :

"You shameless, heartless, hard-hearted man ! Are you not ashamed of your ignobility ? Very soon you are going to taste the bitter fruit of your desire for another man's wife. Wicked fellow ! Shri Ram and Lakshman will punish you for your sin. Keep off. Keep away from me. If you move one step further, you will die."

The *Pushpak* reached the outskirts of the city of Lanka. The Chief Minister Saran and the heads of the army extended a hearty welcome to him. The Chieftains and the leading citizens of the city received him with great honour. The people of the city extended an honourable welcome to him.

At that moment, Sita took a vow before all.

"Until I hear that Shri Ram and Lakshman are safe, I will not eat food. I will fast till then."

“Dear one ! What is this you have done ? Why should you care for those mendicants who keep wandering in forests ? I am here to render service to you like a slave. A tender lady like you should not take such severe vows.”

“Nothing can shake my vows,” said Sita with an adamant voice. There was a garden on the eastern side of Lanka by name *Devaraman*. It was a large and magnificent garden. Only the women of the royal family and of top officials could enter that garden. It was a heavenly garden. Ravan decided to keep Sita in that garden and said to Trijata, an attendant :

“Take Sita to the *Devaraman* garden and arrange for her stay in the Ashoka grove. You too remain there rendering the necessary service to her. Let there be armed soldiers at the gates of the garden.”

The command of the King of Lanka was at once carried out. Sita was taken to the Ashoka grove in the garden. Ravan personally made all arrangements and then he returned to his palace.

Ravan had no peace of mind. His mind was full of doubts and fears. His passion blinded him to realities. His sensual desires remained unsatisfied inspite of his having hundreds of beautiful queens in his harem. He kept thinking only of Sita. He kept repeating her name every moment. He did not want to use force against Sita but he wanted to win her love and make her his queen. He tried his best to prevail upon her to accept his love. He also fell at her feet, and begged her to accept his love but Sita remained firm. She did not budge an inch.

Ravan went to his chamber. For sometime he kept walking to and fro in deep agitation, but he had no peace of mind. He lay on his bed but he could not get a wink of sleep. He did not eat food. He went to the window and looked out. He could get no relief. He was deeply agitated. He looked towards the *Devaraman* garden like a man searching for something, he had lost.

He was the Emperor of Lanka.

He had conquered half the country of Bharat.

He had mastered one thousand arts and supernatural powers.

But Ravan was now pining for Sita. A tremendous commotion was raging in his mind.

“Ah ! I could not abduct Sita when Ram was by her side and so I had to use my *Avalokani* power. But Sita has not been caring for me at all. Well ! How can she give her consent within a day ? Let her stay in the garden for some days. Then she will automatically forget Ram. How beautiful she is ! How tender her body ! Her hair resembles dark clouds. Nature seems to have fixed gems in her eye-sockets. Her beauty is incomparable. Her physical grace is fascinating.”

A dark cloud covered his eyes. His head reeled and he held the window lest he should fall and then he sat down.

The sun set in the west. Lights appeared on all the mansions of Lanka. All the streets and roads of Lanka were brightened by lights but Ravan's heart was filled with darkness. Sita's heart was also filled with the darkness of distress. Ravan was agitated with his desire for Sita. Sita kept weeping thinking of Shri Ram.

What a mockery of infatuation ! What a strange manifestation of karmas ! Ravan was agitated by infatuation and Sita was facing the mockery of her karmas. We do not know when karmas manifest themselves in human lives. Sita was waiting for news relating to Shri Ram whereas Ravan was planning to make Sita his queen.

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“Noble brother ! Why did you come away leaving Sita alone ? How can she remain alone there ?” Lakshman asked Shri Ram.

“Dear brother ! I came away on hearing your roar. I feared that you were in some danger, and your roar suggested it.”

"But my dear brother ! I never roared. I wonder how you heard the roar. Surely someone must have played a trick upon us."

"Do you say that you did not roar ? Then someone has deceived us."

"Noble brother ! I believe that someone has adopted this plan to send you away from Sita and to abduct her. I am sure that she has been abducted. Therefore, at once you go back and protect Sita."

"But brother ! You are here fighting."

"Do not worry about me. I will rout these enemies and I will come there soon."

Shri Ram was naturally worried. He was horrified at the thought of Sita's abduction. He went back hurriedly. His heart began palpitating with fear. When he came to the cave, he found that Sita was not there. He was greatly agitated. He swooned at the door of the cave.

Shri Ram had not experienced such grief even when he discarded his vast kingdom, and the throne of Ayodhya. He had not swooned at the time of his going to forests; nor did he swoon at any time while experiencing those terrible hardships in the forests but on this occasion he swooned. He had never even imagined that he would thus be separated from Sita. He remained petrified for a while. Sometime later, he regained his consciousness. He sat up and carefully looked everywhere for Sita. Just then, he noticed Jatayu lying there in a pool of blood.

He thought, "Some wicked fellow must have come to abduct Sita. Jatayu must have opposed his action and must have tried to safeguard Sita and that wicked fellow must have killed Jatayu."

Jatayu was not dead. It was breathing. Shri Ram gave Jatayu the provision for its spiritual journey. He recited *Shri Namaskar Mahamantra*. Jatayu died after hearing the *mantra*.

After its death, it was born as a heavenly being in the *Mahendra* heaven.

Jatayu's death filled Shri Ram with anguish. From the time he came to Dandakaranya, Jatayu was living with him as a member of his family. It had assumed the shravakdharma after recollecting its previous janma. It gave up meat-eating. It ate food along with Shri Ram and Lakshman. At the very touch of the Mahamuni, it was cured of its dreadful diseases and its body had turned golden in colour. Jatayu's death filled Shri Ram with great anguish. Shri Ram began to think; "Is it not possible that the abductor of Sita is hiding himself somewhere in the Dandakaranya? But this is not possible because the enemy who produces the roar of a lion cannot be an ordinary one. He must be an extraordinary hero or a man of incisive intelligence. Yet if he is hiding himself anywhere in this forest I will destroy him" and Shri Ram began wandering through the forest in search of Sita. "Oh Sita! Oh dear one! Oh Maithili! Where are you?" Crying out thus for Sita, Shri Ram searched for her in every nook and corner of the forest, under every tree, in every bush; in every valley and every cave but he could not find any trace of Sita. At last, drawing a blank everywhere he sat down in dejection beneath the tree of Jatayu. He was totally upset by Sita's disappearance.

"Oh! How much did she love Lakshman! As soon as she heard the code-sound she became impatient and anxious for his welfare? How much did she insist upon my going to his succour? She even rebuked me, saying, "Why don't you go to his succour when he is in danger? How can you be so unkind to your brother?" If she had not insisted upon my going I would not have gone leaving her alone. Of course, I knew that Lakshman was an incomparable hero. Even a vast army of valiant soldiers cannot encounter him. Yet on account of her extraordinary affection for Lakshman she forgot her own safety and security. She did not think of the danger of her being alone. She did not think, "How can I stay here alone? The enemies have come into the Dandakaranya. Some one may—." If she had thought of this danger she would not have compelled me

to go away from her. Oh ! how much agony she must have suffered when that wicked fellow abducted her ! She certainly would have called out for me and Lakshman. Even now she must be groaning wherever she may be. She would not be taking food at all. How can she ? Her habit was to eat food only after serving food to me and Lakshman. She always remained with me like my shadow. The abductor would certainly compel her to eat food but my dear Maithili would not at all eat food. I know it. She is the very embodiment of chastity and nobility. She always remembers my name with devotion and affection. She has become a part and parcel of myself and my name keeps echoing in her heart."

"Let my brother Lakshman come here. He will search for her in the three worlds. Even if some gods or demons have abducted her he will destroy them and bring back Sita. If some evil spirits have carried away Sita to the netherworld Lakshman will go to *Pathal* and bring back Sita. If any human being or Vidyadhar has abducted her Lakshman will cut him to pieces and throw the pieces to kites. But surely he will bring back Sita. When my dear Lakshman comes to know that Sita has been abducted he would fall down unconscious. He will burn with anger and his thundering roars would shake and quake the earth.

"But, what might be the motive of the abductor in abducting Sita ? Can this be a plot of that deceptive damsel who appeared here sometime ago ? Lakshman and I made fun of her. Is it possible that she has done this to take revenge against us ? She will certainly pay for her sin."

Shri Ram's blood began to boil as he thought of Sita's disappearance. The cave and the surroundings which used to be full of joy and jubilation were now dreary and desolate. The whole place seemed to have been enveloped in clouds of gloom and despair. Even the birds and animals that used to keep frisking about joyously had become silent and inactive. The fawns were anxious on account of Sita's disappearance. They too were looking towards Shri Ram in absolute distress. The birds were experiencing deep anguish on account of Sita's disappear-

ance. Every creature there seemed to be sympathising with Shri Ram. But at the same time there was no one who could remove Shri Ram's sorrow.

Shri Ram himself, such a great man had to experience anguish. He was the noblest man of the time. He was a man of extraordinary merit. Even he had to experience anguish. He was thousands of miles away from Ayodhya. The Dandakaranya was a far cry from Ayodhya. Dandakaranya was Ayodhya for Shri Ram. But Ravan ruined the splendour of Ayodhya. Shri Ram was surrounded by dark, dense clouds of despair.

Sorrow is a part and parcel of life. In this world, no one is free from sorrow. Of course Kevaljnanis attain Moksha and live an absolutely happy life but the path of salvation is not an easy one. It is arduous, uneven and hard.

A sudden thought arose in Shri Ram's mind which shook him to the brims of his being. "The abductor might try to force Sita but she will not yield to him as long as there is life in her but she may end her life to safeguard her chastity." Shri Ram's mind was paralysed by this thought. He again fell down unconscious.

Shri Ram regained consciousness when cool breezes blew over him and when birds brought water with their beaks and sprinkled it on his face but he began weeping like a child. Even the trees, plants and creepers began to weep moved by his misery. Even the stones of the cave shed tears.

It was a day of grief and anguish in Shri Ram's life. No poet however gifted he might be, can fully describe Shri Ram's anguish and agony.

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LXX

PATHAL LANKA

“Dear elder brother ! I will fight against Lakshman. You kindly try to keep away and watch how heroic your younger brother is”. Trishir approached Khar, the Vidyadhar and said in a humble manner. Khar was immensely pleased with Trishir’s entreaty; and Trishir went into the battle-field in his chariot. Lakshman pulled the string of his bow; fixed arrows to his bow and caused a rain of arrows over the enemies. The fourteen thousand warriors of Khar began to fight against Lakshman. At once, Trishir drove near Lakshman.

Lakshman also was in a chariot. The two chariots were near each other. The two stared at each other for a few moments as if to evaluate each other.

“Oh you slayer of an innocent man ! Your death is certain today. I will compel you to follow Shambuk to death.” Saying this Trishir challenged Lakshman. Lakshman shot two arrows. The arrows pierced the bodies of Trishir’s horses. Moreover, Lakshman drove his chariot to the side of Trishir’s chariot and even before Trishir could get into another chariot Lakshman cut off his head with the *Suryahas*.

The slaying of Trishir created a terrible commotion in Khar’s army. The army terrified by the event began to retreat. Just then Lakshman heard a noise behind himself. He thought, “Is Khar attacking me from both the sides ?” But within a few moments a young hero riding on horseback came near him. He bowed to him and said :

“Oh you valiant hero : I am the son of King Chandrodar of Pathal Lanka. I am Viradh. Many years ago Khar and Dushan

dethroned my father and drove him out of the country. They captured our kingdom....All these are the pet dogs of Dash-mukh. Oh you hero ! Your enemy also is my enemy and I am your humble servant. I have brought a large army and it will readily carry out your commands. Oh hero ! You are radiant like the sun. Defeating such enemies is a sport for you. Kindly give me an opportunity of taking revenge against them for having disgraced my father. Today, I am determined to destroy Khar and Dushan."

Lakshman was greatly delighted to hear the heroic words of Viradh. He smiled joyously and said :

"Dear prince ! Please see first how I will destroy these enemies of ours. It will be beneath my dignity to achieve victory with the help of others. Yes, from today onwards my elder brother Shri Ram will be your lord also and I proclaim here and now you as the king of Pathal Lanka."

As soon as Khar heard about Trishir's death he was greatly incensed. He drove into the battle-field in a chariot and challenged Lakshman to a fight. Just then, he noticed Viradh and his anger shot up to the skies. He thundered :

"Oh you sinner ! You killed my son heinously while he was carrying out *Tapas*. By committing this enormity you imagine that you are a world-conqueror. Your death is certain now. Within a moment I will send you to the abode of death. That coward Viradh will not be able to save you from death. Offer your last prayers to your deities and get ready to die. You wretch !"

"Oh you arrogant fellow ! Khar ! Trishir was your brother. He too desired to follow your son and his nephew. I have sent him there and now if you also desire to go and join them, I will not surely disappoint you. I am ready to send you to the abode of death. Oh you fool ! I slew your son unknowingly. He died just as worms and flies may get killed when two opposites clash and collide. There was no heroism in that act of mine. But today I have found an opportunity to display my heroism. I will

surely send you to the abode of death. You imagine that you are the mightiest hero of the world. Don't you ?”

Lakshman's insinuating words incensed Khar and he grew mad with fury. At once, he attacked Lakshman. A thousand soldiers joined him in the attack. Viradh's army collided with Khar's army. A terrible war broke out between the two. Viradh's soldiers fought ferociously, cutting off the heads of Khar's soldiers in large numbers. The battle-field was covered with severed heads, mutilated bodies and steaming blood.

Khar drove his chariot face to face with Lakshman's chariot and collided with him. He shot arrows at him and rendered Lakshman's arrows ineffective. Viradh's soldiers on the other side were killing Khar's soldiers and a commotion appeared there.

Just then, a divine voice was heard in the sky.

“Khar's valour is indeed greater than that of *Prativasudev*, when he is fighting against *Vasudev*, Lakshman.”

Khar drove nearer Lakshman, without even a moment's delay. He attacked Lakshman but Lakshman with great cleverness and skill broke Khar's sword into pieces. Feeling ashamed of himself, he thought, “It is really shameful on my part to be taking such a long time to defeat and kill my enemy”. He leaped from his chariot and sat upon Khar's chest. At once, he cut off Khar's head with his dagger.

Khar's death produced a mighty commotion everywhere. His soldiers began running away. Dushan ran away with the surviving soldiers. Viradh with his army was supporting Lakshman. His soldiers repeatedly shouted, “Victory to Lakshman !”

Just then, Lakshman's left eye shook. A cloud of fear rose before his eyes. His jubilation became sobered. He began to entertain doubts and fears. He remembered with devotion, Lord Rishabhdev and then he thought of his brother and Sita.

After proclaiming Viradh the King of Pathal Lanka he returned to the Dandakaranya.

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The cave looked dismal. Jatayu lay in a pool of blood beneath the tree. Shri Ram was sitting alone beneath the tree. Lakshman was shocked to see this terrible sight. For a few moments, he stood like a stone-image, motionless and still. Viradh felt helpless. It was beyond his power to understand the calamities of great men. He stood silent at a distance. Shri Ram kept looking towards the sky. His face appeared bleak and blighted. He said in great grief :

“Oh you gods and goddesses of nature ! I have searched for Sita throughout the forest...in every cave, in every valley and in every bush and grove. I searched for her everywhere but I could find no trace of Sita anywhere. Oh you trees and plants ! Don't you know where Sita has gone ? Who has abducted my dear queen ? Alas ! I left her alone in this forest teeming with wild animals and evil spirits and I left Lakshman in the midst of thousands of demons. Fie upon me ! I curse myself. Sita has disappeared. Lakshman also is not to be seen. Oh how heartlessly I left her alone in this forest ! What had happened to my sense then and I left brother Lakshman alone in the midst of those demons.” Shri Ram became unconscious and fell down. The birds in the trees began to lament. Lakshman sat near him silently. Cool breezes enabled Shri Ram to regain his consciousness. He sat up and began to look around dazed and shocked.

“Dear brother ! Your brother has returned victorious. Do not worry about anything. Discard your grief,” Lakshman said.

There was silence everywhere. A few moments passed. Then Shri Ram noticed Lakshman by his side. He looked at Lakshman with fixed eyes. His voice sounded sweet like *manna* and it filled him with a fresh courage and confidence. He embraced Lakshman. Lakshman's eyes welled up with tears. He said to Shri Ram.

“Some deceptive fellow must have made that noise to abduct Sita. But dear brother, be patient. I swear that I will slay that wicked fellow and fetch Sita and place her at your feet. But for the time being our duty is to find out who the abductor is and why and how he abducted her.”

“Lakshman ! You are right. I will send our guards and our ablest spies to search for Sita.” At once Viradh sent his warriors in search of Sita in all directions. Countless warriors went in search of Sita and began searching for her in the Dandakaranya.

Shri Ram looked towards Viradh. Viradh prostrated before Shri Ram. Lakshman introducing Viradh to Shri Ram said :

“My lord ! He is prince Viradh, the son of Chandrodar, the king of Pathal Lanka who was usurped by Khar and Dushan. I have proclaimed him the king of Pathal Lanka. Kindly bestow your blessings upon him.”

“Dear brother, we must keep up our promise at any cost. Soon after we receive news of Sita we shall instal him on the throne of Pathal Lanka. That is our responsibility.”

“Only your grace my Lord !” Viradh said politely and the three sat waiting for the soldiers and spies who had gone in search of Sita. Shri Ram was in great anguish. Lakshman was burning with anger as he thought of the abductor. Viradh kept looking in all directions for his officers and spies.

In the evening, one by one the officers and spies returned disappointed. When Shri Ram asked them for news about Sita they stood silent with bowed heads. His anguish knew no bounds. Shri Ram said :

“You have tried your best to search for Sita. No trace of Sita has been found but it is not your fault. Who can alter the decrees of Destiny ?” Shri Ram said in a tone of deep despair. Just then Viradh said politely;

“My Lord ! Do not give way to despair. Hope brings success. Retain hope. I am your slave. I shall always be rendering service to you. Kindly come to Pathal Lanka. Please first crown me king there and afterwards it will be easy for us to search for Sita.”

Lakshman said endorsing Viradh’s opinion, “Dear brother ! Viradh is right. It will be easy for us to search for Sita if we

stay in Pathal Lanka. At the same time, Viradh also can be installed on the throne."

Shri Ram accepted Viradh's entreaty. Shri Ram, Lakshman and Viradh set off to Pathal Lanka with the army. They reached Pathal Lanka.

Khar's son Sund was ready with a large army to encounter any eventuality. He had already received news from his spies that Viradh would come to occupy the throne.

Therefore, even before Viradh could enter Pathal Lanka Sund attacked him. Suddenly, a terrible fight broke out between the two. Sund was determined to destroy Viradh risking his life. A terrible war took place between them. Even Chandranakha was in the front of the battle-field to safeguard her son. When she saw Shri Ram and Lakshman leading Viradh's army she was terrified and paralysed. She went near Sund and whispered to him, "Dear Son! Be cautious, Lakshman who killed your father and Shambuk is supporting Viradh. Now, there is no point in fighting. Discretion is the better part of valour. We should run away to your uncle's palace in Lanka. That is the only way for our survival."

Sund, of course, fought heroically. He was burning with revenge. He felt that his mother's advice was improper and irrelevant. He said with indignation :

"What kind of mother are you ? You are advising your son to run away from the battle-field without realizing his valour. Do not forget that this is a battle-field. You cannot save your son's life by interfering thus with this affair. Let me also see a little of the heroism of that hypocrite, Lakshman."

"Dear son ! Where is the need at all to test the ability of Lakshman who single-handedly encountered your mighty father and routed his army ? Moreover, look there ! Shri Ram, the valiant hero is standing beneath a tree. His power is astounding and incalculable. So the best thing that we can do is to get away from here."

“Mother ! The enemies may be stronger than we but does it mean that we should not encounter them ? If we fearing defeat run away we will be accepting defeat ourselves. Yet if you insist that I should not fight we shall go away to Lanka.”

The very next moment Sund drove slowly out of the field. His soldiers also retreated. When Viradh noticed that Sund was retreating he went forward and attacked him but Sund taking the surviving soldiers with him set off towards Lanka.

Viradh accompanied by Shri Ram and Lakshman entered Pathal Lanka with all grandeur and *eclat*. Khar had constructed the city of Pathal Lanka artistically and beautifully. It was like an image of Lanka.

The sky-high mansions of Pathal Lanka; its broad and attractive roads, its fascinating flower-gardens; the temples, the pillars of victory, the bazaars and circles reminded one of *Indrapuri*, the heavenly capital of Indra.

Viradh entreated Shri Ram to stay in Khar’s magnificent palace and he decided to stay in Sund’s palace. He was supremely happy to have regained his father’s kingdom and he always rendered service to Shri Ram and Lakshman who had helped him in regaining his kingdom but Shri Ram was in deep anguish. Lakshman’s anguish also increased.

“Viradh ! Have you received any news about Sita ?”

“No, dear Lord ! I have not yet received any news from anyone. I have sent my ablest officials in search of mother, Sita. The task of searching for Sita is being carried out with all caution and quickness. Yet we have not so far received any happy news.”

“Then, how long are we to wait here ? Lakshman ! Prepare for our journey. Let us go in search of Sita ourselves. Oh ! I do not know what difficulties Sita is experiencing.” Shri Ram heaved a deep sigh.

“Oh you venerable hero ! You need not go in search of Sita. I am engaged in that task. My ablest officers are searching for

her everywhere. Kindly have a little patience." Viradh entreated Shri Ram thus.

After entering Pathal Lanka Viradh first undertook the task of searching for Sita. But so far, the search had not brought any success. He was doing everything he could but there appeared no sign of success. So he was greatly agitated but what could he do ? There seemed to be no way out.

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CHANDRANAKHA REACHED LANKA

She began weeping aloud in anguish. Her lamentations seemed to crack the skies. Ravan was taken aback. He could not understand what the matter was. He was greatly stunned and he kept watching her.

There arose a commotion in the court of Ravan. All were amazed and shocked; and were unable to understand why Chandranakha kept weeping thus. Ravan felt perplexed; and asked her;

"Chandranakha ! What happened ? Why are you weeping thus ?"

"What else should happen, dear brother ? I have been robbed of everything that was mine. Though my brother Ravan is the conqueror of the world, I have to wander from place to place as a beggar. I am robbed of all that was mine."

"What happened ? At least, tell me what exactly happened." Ravan said anxiously.

"What has not happened ?"

"That means ?"

"Shambhuk has been killed....."

"What else has happened ?"

"Your brother-in-law has been killed in the battle. Pathal Lanka has been captured. . . . What else should happen ?" And Chandranakha wept aloud.

"Did Ram and Lakshman do all these things ?"

"Who else can it be ? Who else can kill Khar, the valiant hero ?"

Ravan's face grew gloomy. He began to think deeply.

"Added to all this, those wicked fellows have driven us out of Pathal Lanka."

"How did all this happen ?"

"Viradh, the son of Chandrodar invaded Pathal Lanka with his army. He brought Ram and Lakshman also with him. My son Sund fought against them to defend his country. But you do not know the heroism of those two brothers. We were obliged to run away from there to save our lives."

Ravan suddenly stood up. A tremendous commotion arose in his mind.

"*You do not know the heroism of those two brothers.*"

These words of Chandranakha kept ringing in his ears.

He began to think :

"Are Ram and Lakshman so valiant ? Yes, I saw Ram once. A mysterious radiance emanated from his face. Heroism seemed to be radiating from his body. When I went near him, I experienced a shudder through my veins. Moreover, to goddess of *Avalokani* said, "Human beings, demons or gods cannot abduct Sita when Rama is beside her." But even the supernatural powers are influenced by Ram. I too have heard that Lakshman is a hero of incomparable valour. Oh ! He killed fourteen thousand soldiers alone. He killed such a great hero as Khar and now he has entered even Pathal Lanka."

Ravan began walking to and fro in his chamber. He began to ponder over what Chandranakha had said.

"And now Viradh has joined those two brothers." They will surely begin searching for Sita. They will move heaven and earth to find Sita but there is no need for anxiety. It is not a joke for anyone to liberate Sita from Lanka. No power in this Universe can take her away from Lanka. When that is so what about Ram and Lakshman ? They do not know yet Dashamukh's tremendous abilities and heroism. So far no one has been able to face me with any success. Can these two brothers face me ? What did Sahasrakiran, Indra, Yamraj, Kuber and many other mighty heroes think of themselves ? What happened to them at my hands ? I made them all lick the dust of my feet. I have sent the mightiest heroes to the abode of Death. Ram and Lakshman may move heaven and earth. They may sweat blood but they cannot harm me.

Yes, if Sita accepts my love, if she complies with my entreaties, Ram and Lakshman can do nothing then. How can they release Sita from my clutches ? But how can I prevail upon her to accept my love ? Every day, I go and entreat her to accept my love but she does not care for my entreaties. I have been doing everything in my power to win her love but she does not care for me at all. Has not Trijata done her best to win Sita's love for me ? But Sita has never budged an inch and now she has given up food.

Oh ! I have not seen such a woman anywhere. I abducted countless Vidyadhar damsels and brought them to my harem. There was no need at all to plead with them. They simply accepted my love and surrendered themselves to me but Sita.... I cannot discard her; nor am I able to win her. She slights me and derides me. She abhors me. At every step, she disgraces me. Yet my infatuation for her has not decreased. On the contrary, it has been growing intenser, day by day. I do not know what will happen to me.

And what shall I say about Sita ? Sita is Sita herself. Even such a beautiful lady as Mandodari looks dull and repulsive in

her presence. Oh ! Without Sita my life would be meaningless, joyless, dreary and dull. I do not care for the Empire of Lanka. I do not care for my wealth and prosperity. I would be happy if I could secure Sita."

Ravan's mind was deeply agitated. He provided a palace to Chandranakha. He asked her to forget her sorrows. He provided all facilities to his sister but since he himself was in anguish he had no mind to console her in her distress. Ravan was absorbed in thinking of the ways and means of winning the love of Sita.

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SUGRIVA'S GRIEF

The Vanardweep was fascinating like heaven.

The city of Kishkindha was situated on a high mountain peak. It was the capital of Sugriv, the valiant ruler of the Vanardweep. The Vanardweep was prosperous and happy because of Sugriva's able administration and his constant concern for the welfare of his people. There existed a strong bondage of amity between King Sugriv and Dashmukh Ravan, the King of Lanka. Similarly, Khar, the Rakshasa King of Pathal Lanka also was a friend of Sugriv.

Sugriv had married an extraordinarily beautiful lady called Tara but after his marriage, there appeared hostility between him and Sahasagathi, the Vidyadhar prince. They became bitter enemies. The cause for their enmity was that Sahasagathi desired to marry Tara but she married Sugriv. Sahasagathi loved Tara greatly but he could not marry her. Therefore, he became hostile towards Sugriv but he was helpless against Sugriva's valour. Yet, somehow he was always yearning to win Tara. He went to the valleys of the Himalayas and performed a tremendous *Tapas*. He attained a divine power called *Pratharini*. As soon as he attained this power he came to Kishkindha with the purpose of fulfilling his desire.

By means of the power called *Pratharini* he assumed the form of Sugriv. He looked fascinating. At once, he went into the garden of Kishkindha. At that time, Sugriv had gone to the outer gardens of Kishkindha to play sports. Sahasagathi who had assumed the form of Sugriv decided to take advantage of Sugriva's absence from the harem. Accordingly, he entered the

palace. The guards saluted him and received him thinking that he was Sugriv. They opened the doors of the harem also. Sahasagathi desired to enter the harem where Queen Tara resided.

The guards were surprised by the sudden and unexpected visit of King Sugriv. The attendants conveyed to Queen Tara the news of the king's unexpected visit.

"Honoured queen ! The king has come."

"What ? At this time ?"

"Yes, dear queen !"

"Request the king to wait for sometime. After taking a bath I will come and receive him." Queen Tara at once went to take a bath. The pretender-Sugriv kept walking to and fro impatiently at the door of the harem. He was eagerly expecting the arrival of Tara. His sensual craving had grown intense.

King Sugriv after having completed his sports in the forests returned to the garden. The guards stopped him there and when the King asked them why they were stopping him thus they replied;

"King Sugriv has already gone into the palace. Who are you ?"

"I say ! I am Sugriv . . . Your king. Can't you recognize me? When I am here how could Sugriv go into the palace ! I hope you are not dreaming."

Hearing the words of Sugriv, the guards, the sentinels and the warriors fell into a conflict. In shape, stature, appearance and in voice there was no difference between the two. They were absolutely alike. So they found it difficult to distinguish the genuine Sugriv from the false one. The news reached the ears of the ministers. It also reached the ears of Sugriva's sons. Chandrarashmi, the son of Vali thought, "There is some mess somewhere. Who is the genuine Sugriv and who is the counterfeit ?" We should take great caution lest some unpleasant

event should take place. Therefore, until the genuine Sugriv is recognized both of them should not be allowed to enter the harem" and he at once hurried to the door of the harem. The pretender Sugriv was impatient to get into the harem. Chandrarashmi stood at the door preventing him from entering the door of harem. The pretender-Sugriv was not prepared for this eventuality. When he found Chandrarashmi impeding his path he was agitated. Queen Tara put on excellent dress and decorations and came to receive King Sugriv. Chandrarashmi bowed to her and made an appeal to her, "Mother ! Kindly go in and at once take shelter in the secret vault."

"But what is the matter, Chandra ?" She was amazed and shocked to see Chandrarashmi standing there with his sword drawn.

"Mother ! Two Sugrivas have appeared in Kishkindha mysteriously. One is at the door of the harem and the other is at the gates of the city. Therefore, until the genuine Sugriv is recognized, neither of them can enter the harem."

Chandrarashmi ordered the guards to guard the harem on all sides.

"Dear prince ! What is the meaning of this controversy ? I am Sugriv and I have a right to enter the harem."

"Please have some patience. First, we have to find out whether you are the genuine Sugriv or the one who is at the gates of the city."

"Then, what do you want to do ?"

"Neither of you can enter the harem now."

"Who are you to stop me from entering the harem ?"

"I am Chandrarashmi, the son of Vali. I have every right to stop you."

"Well ! You may be the son of Vali but you have no right to stop me in this manner."

"You cannot enter the harem", Chandrarashmi said decisively. The pretender-Sugriva became furious. He took out his sword and rushed towards Chandrarashmi.

"Be careful ! If you place one step forward you will die that very moment" Chandrarashmi thundered pulling the string of his bow.

An emergency meeting of the ministers, commanders, subordinate kings and other important persons was called. They discussed the matter for a long time but they could not solve the problem. Nobody could suggest a way of distinguishing the genuine Sugriva from the false one. In the course of the discussion, the members fell into two equal groups. One group supported the genuine Sugriva and the other supported the pretender-Sugriva thinking that he was the real Sugriva. Each group stuck to its guns. But both the groups forgot the problem.

Chandrarashmi did not allow the pretender-Sugriva to enter the harem. So he stood disappointed but he was not the kind of person who would accept defeat easily. He began shooting arrows at Chandrarashmi. Chandrarashmi also shot arrows and rendered all his arrows inefficacious. He began fighting against the pretender-Sugriva. A terrible fight broke out between the two. It was not easy for anyone to defeat Chandrarashmi. After fighting for a long time the pretender-Sugriva lost his patience. He was eager to fulfil his desire. In spite of all his efforts, he could not defeat Chandrarashmi. So he ran away from there.

"Dear prince ! The problem is very confounding. No solution seems to be in view."

"But until the truth is found out, I will not allow anyone of these two to enter the harem." Chandrarashmi did not budge an inch.

"Of course, what you say is true. But it is impossible to find out the truth about them. Who can find it out ? The situation continues to be perplexing. The Vanara army also has become divided into two groups. Even the citizens of our city have

become divided into two groups and they are fighting against each other. If we do not take a proper decision at once, there will be a civil war, and our warriors will kill one another," said the Chief Minister.

"Dear Chief Minister! The war will take place. Now, no power on earth can stop it. Now the genuine Sugriv will try to prove his genuineness and the counterfeit Sugriv will try to achieve his objective but do not worry. Until the truth is found out regarding these two, Chandrarashmi, the son of Vali will not allow anyone to exercise any right over the harem. What more can I do? I do not think it proper to support either group because such a support to anyone group may result in the death of the genuine Sugriv."

A civil war broke out in every street of Kishkindha. Both the Sugrivas tried to gather as many soldiers as they could; made propaganda and announcements and prepared for the war. They accused each other indignantly. Elephants, horses, chariots and infantry entered the fray. The ministers and the wise people unable to do anything became helpless and silent witnesses to the adversity that had overtaken Kishkindha. Many warriors were killed in the civil war. The roads of the city were filled with the dead bodies of elephants, horses and men. Everywhere a tremendous commotion appeared. The atmosphere of the city became polluted with the foul stench emanating from the rotting carcasses.

When the genuine Sugriv saw the misfortune that had befallen the city, the people and the soldiers, he began shedding tears. This heart was greatly grieved. He was full of abhorrence for the pretender-Sugriv. Suddenly, he grew wild with rage; took his sword and rushed towards the pretender.

"Oh you, wicked fellow! Oh you hypocrite! Are you not ashamed of entering my house?" They began to fight in a ferocious manner.

"Oh you hypocrite! You are trying to enter my house. I will decide this question at once", saying this, the pretender-Sugriv challenged King Sugriv and began to fight in a feroci-

ous manner. He caused a rain of arrows. The genuine Sugriv broke all his arrows to pieces. Then, the two began to fight with maces. When their maces were broken they began to fight with swords. Fiery sparks flew from their swords. At last, when their swords were also broken they began to fight with spears. Each evaded the stroke of the other. Each tried to make the other grow weak and tired and thus when they were fighting like intoxicated elephants, the earth shook. When their spears were broken they began to fight a duel with their fists. The genuine Sugriv leaped into the sky and threw down the false Sugriv supine. The false Sugriv within the twinkling of an eye seized the genuine Sugriv, whirled him and threw him down.

They were equal to each other as warriors. Though they fought terribly neither was defeated. They stared at each other, frowned at each other and stood facing each other. It was evening. The fight ended for the day. The real Sugriv was greatly anxious. His anguish knew no bounds.

"Fie upon my life ! I have brought disgrace upon Vali, the valiant and his illustrious family. My elder brother Vali is indeed blessed. Even after attaining a victory he received initiation into the *Sadhudharma* and began to pursue the path of salvation and I have not been able to punish a pretender and a deceptive fellow. My kingdom is ruined. My army is about to be ruined. The Vanara dynasty itself may end in this war. In such a situation, what can prince Chandrarashmi do ? Of course, he is doing the right thing in personally safeguarding the harem. But how can I win him over to my side ? How can I prove that I am the real Sugriv and that this pretender is a mean hypocrite ? The fight will begin again tomorrow. What will happen if I cannot defeat him ? Sugriv began to shudder with a mortal dread. Just as he was thinking thus a new ray of hope flashed through his mind : "If Hanuman, the son of Pavananjay of Hanupurnagar comes here he will certainly deliver me from this calamity." The night had far advanced. The dawn was at hand. Sugriv sent for his commander. He at once appeared before him.

"You must at once go to Hanupurnagar."

"As my Lord commands me!"

"Request Shri Hanuman to come here at once."

"Surely, I will do so."

"At any rate, he must be here by morning."

"I will go to Hanupurnagar flying through the sky."

"Very good." The commander went away. He went traversing the sky and reached Hanupurnagar. He met Hanuman and introduced himself to him. He explained to Hanuman the situation that had arisen in Kishkindha and communicated to him Sugriva's secret message. For a few moments, Hanuman thought over the matter deeply. There was silence for a while.

"Dear commander! What you say is true? But, what can I do if I come there? Whom can I support? I may kill the genuine Sugriv. Of course, I am deeply grieved by the situation that has arisen in Kishkindha. Such a thing should not have taken place. But who can prevent the decrees of Destiny from taking effect? I am ready to render every necessary service. But how can I recognize the genuine Sugriv? Without recognizing the genuine Sugriv how can I support any party? Added to this, prince Chandrarashmi also is helpless."

"My lord! You kindly come to Kishkindhapur. Examine the situation personally. Meanwhile, some solution may show itself...."

"All right. Let us go."

"Dear Lord! We have to reach Kishkindha before dawn; the airship is ready."

Then, Shri Hanuman went out accompanied by the Chief Commander; and sat in the airship that was ready in the garden; and the airship set off towards Kishkindha at a tremendous speed.

The sun rose. The counterfeit Sugriv entered the battle-field roaring like a lion. The genuine Sugriv was standing in the battle-field ready for the fight. A terrible fight broke out between the two. Shri Hanuman stood watching them from a distance, with his weapons ready. He saw them both and fell into a confusion. "Whom shall I kill? Who is the genuine Sugriv? and who is the pretender? There is no difference at all between the two. Both are of the same form, shape, stature, complexion and features." Hanuman stood confounded. The pretender attacked the genuine Sugriv with his mace; and threw him down. Paralysed by his tremendous stroke he lay powerless on the ground. Sometime passed thus. Soon after regaining his consciousness, he stood up; and attacked the pretender, summoning all his strength; but he was tired of having fought continuously. The pretender evaded the stroke dealt by the genuine Sugriv; hit him with his mace. The real Sugriv again fell down; and the pretender hit him with his mace. The warriors were stunned by this; and the genuine Sugriva's condition, was miserable. He was on the point of death. The moments of his life seemed numbered. The soldiers took him to the tent nearby. Shri Hanuman was a silent witness to this scene. He could not do anything. No solution flashed to him. He met Chandrarashmi and said to him, "Dear Prince! The situation has become serious. I do not know what I should do in this situation."

"Revered sir, until the truth is discovered and the final decision has been taken and the genuine Sugriv is identified I will stand here safeguarding the harem. Who has the courage to enter the harem, when I am here?" Chandrarashmi said saluting Hanuman.

"Dear prince! What you are doing is the right thing."

Shri Hanuman began wringing his hands in sheer despair and helplessness. He could do nothing; so he returned to Hanupur. The pretender-Sugriv set off towards the harem. He was greatly agitated with the desire to have a union with Tara but Chandrarashmi stopped him on the way. A terrible fight broke out between the two. Chandrarashmi at once threw the pre-

tender-Sugriv on the ground, took out his dagger and said ferociously :

“What do you desire ? Do you desire to go to the harem or the other world ?”

“Oh dear prince ! Do not be so wrathful. Why do you kill me ? I am the real Sugriv and your uncle,” he said in a humble voice.

“But we have not yet identified the real Sugriv.”

“Dear prince ! Please spare my life. I swear that I will not attempt again to enter the harem.” He implored Chandrarashmi to spare his life.

Chandrarashmi thought for a while and released him. He ran away from there. His despair knew no bounds. He went to his camp; he lay on his bed, in deep anguish.

The genuine Sugriv recovered his spirits a little. He recovered his consciousness. He was greatly agitated by sorrow. His condition moved everyone. He began to mutter to himself, “Oh ! I have lost my valour. I have stained the honour of the Vanara dynasty. I have dishonoured the name of Vali, the valiant. I have no right to live anymore. Even while Hanuman was here, I was beaten but he is not to blame. Whom could he kill ? All my ambitions and aspirations have ended in a bitter frustration. Where shall I seek refuge ? To whom shall I surrender myself so that I may get rid of this stain upon my name ? If Khar, my dear friend were alive now he would have helped me but he was killed by Lakshman. Yes, there is yet one more hope... one more prop. It would be best if I seek the refuge of Ravan the emperor of Lanka. No. This is not proper. He has a craving for women. He will kill both of us and abduct Tara Rani..

Inviting Ravan to help me would amount to total ruin. Yes. The ideal thing is to seek the refuge of Shri Ram and Lakshman. They are still in Pathal Lanka. I have heard that they are mighty heroes and that they stand by their word. Moreover, I have

heard that they are men of benevolence and that they always act according to the highest norms of justice. What's wrong in trying out this method ? I see no other way out of this calamity."

He felt this was the best method. He decided to try out this method and to send a trustworthy messenger to Shri Ram and Lakshman.

"At once go to Pathal Lanka, meet king Viradh and describe to him the situation that has arisen here. Say, "Dense clouds of calamities have descended upon Sugriv, the king of Kishkindha. He desires the refuge of Shri Ram and Lakshman."

Accordingly the messenger set off to Pathal Lanka. Sugriv remained in the outer garden of Kishkindhapur awaiting the return of the messenger.

The messenger reached Pathal Lanka. The guards stopped him at the gates of the city and asked him : "Who are you ? Where have you come from ?

"I am the messenger of Sugriv, the King of Kishkindha. I have brought a message from him to King Viradh."

"Wait here. We will make arrangements to convey your message to King Viradh."

Sugriva's messenger dismounted from his horse and stood waiting for Viradh's orders. He was greatly amazed and delighted to see the prosperity of Pathal Lanka. He was spell-bound at the sight of the magnificent palace of Pathal Lanka.

"The king desires to see you."

"I am really fortunate." Saying this the messenger went straight to the court of Viradh. He saw Viradh on his throne and two divinely radiant heroes seated on golden thrones beside him. He felt thrilled to see them. He said aloud :

"Victory to the King of Pathal Lanka !"

"I hope all are well at Vanaradweep. I hope king Sugriv and the people of Vanaradweep are happy and prosperous," Viradh said in an elevated tone.

“Dear king. King Sugriv is caught in a calamitous situation. He has sent me to seek your assistance.” He narrated all the events that had taken place in Kishkindha. Viradh looked towards Shri Ram.

“In this calamity I seek the help and assistance of Shri Ram and Lakshman, the sons of Dasarath. Except them no power in this world can rescue King Sugriv from this calamity. Therefore, King Sugriv desires to meet you personally.”

“Dear messenger ! We are supremely pleased and happy to hear that Sugriv is coming. It is only by the efficacy of some *punya*karma (merit) that we get the association of noble men.” The messenger was happy. Saluting King Viradh, Shri Ram and Lakshman, he returned to Kishkindha at once.

Sugriv was anxiously waiting for the messenger. His last hope depended on the news brought by the messenger. The valiant Sugriv was now in a state of despair. He had become enfeebled. He had not experienced such defeat and disgrace at any time in his life before. Such an occasion had not arisen before.

This only illustrates how karmas can bring about anguish in the life of human beings. Sugriv was in a dazed condition. Of course, Sugriv was a Vidyadhar king and he was a master of many great powers but even such powers could not help him out of that distressing situation. Chandrarashmi was the prince and he was taking care of the harem. Even he could not relieve Sugriv from his anguish and now the only ray of hope was the help of Shri Ram and Lakshman and their power to relieve others from their anguish.

The messenger returned from Pathal Lanka and informed Sugriv of what Viradh, Shri Ram and Lakshman had said. Sugriv was supremely happy. In a moment, he forgot his anguish and became cheerful. Elated by the news, he gave the messenger his necklace of gems as a presentation. That very night Sugriv set off on horseback to Pathal Lanka taking with him some chosen warriors.

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LXXII

QUEEN TARA

A man who is in anguish goes to help another man who is in anguish. This is a natural virtue in great men. Great men deem it their supreme duty to help others ignoring their own interests. Shri Ram realised Sugriva's anguish and at once decided to go to Kishkindha. Without delaying even for a moment he agreed to help Sugriv.

During that journey to Kishkindha, Viradh informed Sugriv of the abduction of Sita. According to Shri Ram's suggestion, Viradh returned to Pathal Lanka. Sugriv undertook the responsibility of searching for Sita. As soon as they reached Kishkindha, Sugriv challenged the pretender to a fight. Even the pretender Sugriv was weary of the long fight and so he was ready to come to some settlement. He had not been able to enter the harem inspite of all his efforts. Chandrarashmi assuming a terrible form effectively prevented him from entering the harem; so he accepted Sugriva's challenge and entered the battle-field with a large army. Shri Ram saw the pretender-Sugriv and he was stunned. Of course, even while he was at Pathal Lanka, he had heard about the pretender but now when he saw the two Sugriv he himself fell into a conflict, "It is difficult to decide who is the genuine Sugriv here." Lakshman also was watching the sight with amazement. But after thinking for a little while Shri Ram took up his bow called *Vajranart*. He fixed an arrow and produced a mighty noise.

Soon after he made this noise the power called *Rupa-paravartini* disappeared and the pretender's true form was now evident. There stood Sahasagati greatly irritated and petulant. He was in a helpless condition. Shri Ram's anger exploded like a volcano.

"You wicked fellow ! You mean hypocrite. You treacherous fellow ! Now you show your heroism. Take up your bow."

In a moment, Shri Ram killed Sahasagati. King Sugriv fell at the feet of Shri Ram. Shri Ram again crowned Sugriv, King of Vanardweep. Sugriv was greatly moved by Shri Ram's benevolence and magnanimity. He was deeply moved by Shri Ram's nobility and sense of justice.

".....How can I repay this debt to Shri Ram ?" A new question arose in his mind.

Noble men are always ready to help others and they are equally ready to repay their debt of gratitude to their benefactors by doing some good turn to them.

A large meeting was held in the court of Kishkindha. Shri Ram and Lakshman sat on golden thrones which were studded with gems. Sugriv sat at their feet. Shri Ram stood up and made Sugriv sit by his side. Lakshman made prince Chandra-rashmi sit by his side on his throne. The court was packed to its capacity with the ministers, the Chieftains and the leading citizens.

The world-famous *Veena* artist of Kishkindha, Mrigendra began to play a song on his *Veena* by way of an invocation addressed to *Bhagwati Saraswati*. Divine melodies were emanating from the *Veena*. The invocation was over. Sugriv stood up. He saluted Shri Ram and began.

"My beloved citizens of Kishkindha !

The sky was covered with the clouds of disaster. A tremendous commotion arose with terrible tempests and cyclones and with a heavy down-pour of rain. Many of my dear people lost their lives in this cyclone. My dear citizens ! You know very well how the wicked fellow Sahasagati brought me to a calamitous situation. Indeed, even in that time of calamity our prince Chandrarashmi took care of the harem risking his life and brought honour and glory to his father. He did everything to safeguard the chastity of the queen."

"Victory to prince Chandrarashmi !" The court reverberated with this cry.

"My anguish knew no bounds. I invited Shri Hanuman from Hanupuranagar but what could he do ? The situation was confounding. He could not extend his support to anyone without knowing who the real Sugriv was. He went back to Hanupur. I was in great despair. Just then I remembered the noble heroes Shri Ram and Lakshman, the sons of Dasarath. The benefaction that they had bestowed upon Viradh was still fresh in my mind. I sought their refuge and help. They granted my wish and came here. Shri Ram by his unexampled heroism saved me from a terrible disaster. He killed Sahasagati and liberated Kishkindha from fear and anxiety for ever. How can I repay his extraordinary benefaction ? But one idea has arisen in my mind." He looked at Shri Ram and then continued.

"My wish is that Shri Ram should marry our thirteen princesses. This is my heartfelt wish."

"Victory to Shri Ramachandra !" The citizens issued this cry endorsing Sugriva's proposal but Shri Ram sat silent and serene.

Pausing for a while Sugriv bowed to Shri Ram and said :

"Oh you noblest of men ! My entreaty is...."

"Oh you king of Vanaras ! My desire is that we should search for Sita. I do not want anything else. I am in anguish. I am unable to bear with this separation from Sita."

"Oh you superhuman hero ! You give up all your worry and stay in our palace. It is my duty to search for Sita. At any rate, I will search for her and bring her to you."

"No king ! Until we get news about Sita, we will stay in the outer garden."

"Oh you compassionate hero ! You may stay where you like in our Kingdom. You are the lord of the entire Vanaradweep."

The court was dismissed for the day. In accordance with the commands of Sugriv the Vanara sculptors and architects made the outer garden magnificent like the heavenly garden, *Nandanvana*. Shri Ram and Lakshman settled down there. Sugriv engaged trusted servants and attendants to attend on them and proceeded towards his palace.

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"My dear Lord", Queen Tara was overwhelmed with joy on seeing Sugriv. She came forward and received him affectionately.

"My dear queen, I had to face a disaster. I had to experience much anguish but at last truth has won the victory. Truth is always victorious."

"But my dear Lord ! How much commotion has been created by untruth ? It shook the whole kingdom of Kishkindha. But all has ended well because of your patience and valour."

"No, dear queen ! It was not my heroism that saved me. It was Shri Ram's heroism that saved me from the disaster. We should be grateful to him."

"I have not had the opportunity of seeing those great men but I have heard that they are mighty and magnanimous. The very sound of Shri Ram's bow made the pretender Sahasagati lick the dust, and with a single arrow Shri Ram killed him."

"But oh King ! Chandrarashmi risked his life for my sake. If he had not safeguarded me, oh ! a terrible calamity would have happened." Queen Tara began to shudder. Her bright face grew bleak for a while.

"Chandrarashmi safeguarded the honour of Vanaradweep and of our country. He brought glory to Vali. He did not allow anyone to enter the harem. Yet, my dear queen...."

"My Lord ! I had no doubt at all regarding your success. I kept adoring the *Panchparameshti* and praying to the Paramatma for your welfare."

"My queen! I had to face a terrible ordeal."

"Yet you came out successful!"

"My dear....!"

"My Lord....!"

Silence prevailed everywhere. Sugriv kept looking at Tara. Tara blushed. Overcome with love, she leaned over him. Sugriva's body had grown weak. He looked fatigued. She stood up slowly and said in a soft voice.

"My dear Lord! You require rest. I will get you milk. You drink milk and take rest." She went out of the chamber. Sugriv tried to sleep.

Sugriv continued to be in the harem. Absorbed in sensual delights he forgot his kingdom and his guests. He became totally forgetful of everything. He also forgot that Shri Ram and Lakshman were staying in the outer garden. Actually, he had promised Shri Ram that he would search for Sita but he forgot the promise absorbed in sensual delights in the company of Tara.

When Lakshman found that Sugriva had forgotten his promise he became terribly indignant.

"Dear brother! Giving a gift to an unworthy person and helping a shameless person do not bring any fruit."

"What happened dear brother?"

"I was under the impression that Sugriv had gone in search of Sita but he is enjoying himself in the harem."

Shri Ram looked towards Lakshman and fell into deep thought. He too seemed to be searching for a reply to Lakshman's question. "Lakshman! Sugriv is not to blame; neither is Tara to blame! They experienced great anguish when they were separated. Dear Lakshman! Attachment is powerful in human life. The whole human life depends on it. Just as I love Sita, Sugriv loves Tara. After regaining Tara, he has become absorbed in her. I too may do so when I regain Sita; so do not get angry with him. If a similar situation arises in our life we too would forget the world."

He was agitated by his separation from Tara and that problem is solved but the problem relating to Sita is not solved."

"Shall I remind Sugriva of his promise," Lakshman looked towards Shri Ram.

"Yes of course ! He has to be reminded of it."

And Lakshman set off armed towards Sugriva's palace. The door-keepers stood aside fearfully. The attendants were frightened by Lakshman's boiling anger. The attendants went to the harem and conveyed the news of Lakshman's arrival to Sugriv. At once, Sugriv came and saluted Lakshman. He was shuddering with fear. His face had grown pale. He could not look at Lakshman on account of a deep sense of shame.

"Oh you Vanar ! Are you not yet satisfied with your sensual enjoyments ? Have you forgotten your promise ? My lord Shri Ram is plunged in grief and here you are lost in your enjoyments !"

"Dear son of Sumitra ! Kindly forgive me. I forgot my duty and such a thing will not happen again." Sugriv was full of repentance.

"Forgiveness ? What for ? Until we can find out the whereabouts of Sita..."

"I will at once set about searching for Sita."

"If you do not do so you will share the fate of Sahasagati. Then even Shri Ram cannot save your life."

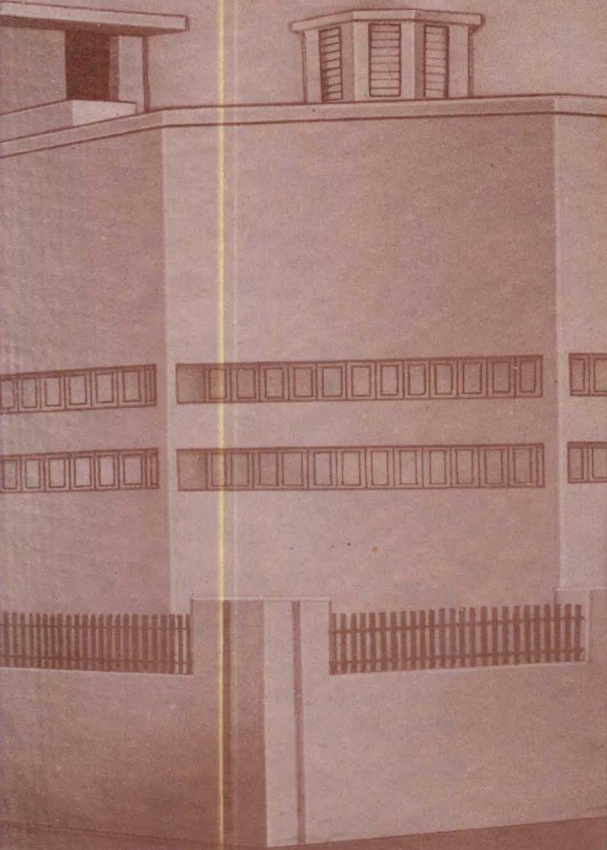
"My Lord ! Kindly forgive me. I cannot forget the help Shri Ram and you bestowed upon me. From today onwards, I will carry out the duty of searching for Sita." Then, Sugriv followed Lakshman to the garden and sought Shri Ram's forgiveness also.

Bhamandal also was in great anguish on account of Sita's abduction. He came to Shri Ram.

Viradh also came with a large army to help Shri Ram.

Sugriv sent his officials in all directions to search for Sita. Sugriv's officials went to every town and city and to every kingdom around. Sugriv himself set off in search of Sita.

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