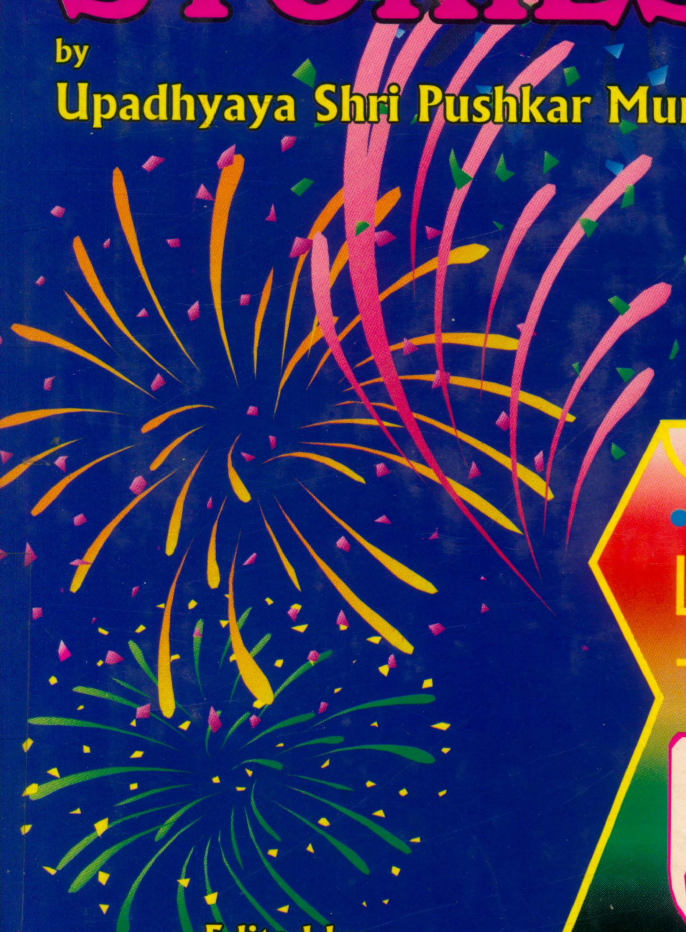


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# BEST JAIN STORIES

by

Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muniji



Edited by

Acharya Shri Devendra Muni



## ***About the Editor.....***

Acharya Shri Devendra Muni Ji is the present Acharya (Head) of the Shri Vardhaman Sthanakvasi Jain Shraman Sangh. He got initiated as a Shraman by Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muni Ji at an early age of 9 years. He has acquired and consolidated his knowledge of ancient languages like Prakrit and Sanskrit during the 52 years of his sincere and in depth studies. He has also done detailed study of Agam literature, logic, philosophy, history and other related subjects. His pen has produced more than 300 books; some of which are detailed research works of 500 to 700 page size. His detailed prefaces on Jain scriptures have been received well and praised by scholars. One of his epoch making works is the detailed analytical study of the Karma-theory in 9 volumes (5000 pages) titled Karma-Vijnana (The science of Karma). His style of writing is research oriented and comparative. The other subjects covered by his writings are Jain ethics, literature and history. He edited the III volumes of Jain stories by his guru Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muni Ji.

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# BEST JAIN STORIES

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*Golden Lotus at Every Step  
&  
Other Stories*

**UPADHYAYA SHRI PUSHKAR MUNI JI**



*Editors*

**ACHARYA SHRI DEVENDRA MUNI JI  
SRICHAND SURANA 'SARAS'**



*English Translator*

**SURENDRA BOTHARA**

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Besides giving his discourse in the common man's language in question-answer style **Shraman Bhagavan Mahavir** also used interesting tales and biographical stories to convey the hard to comprehend abstract philosophical postulations. It was done with the purpose that even those at the lowest level of conventional learning could benefit from the path shown by him. The tradition established by him was enriched by his followers for centuries making Jain literature a great storehouse of stories and tales.

In our humble effort to try to continue that tradition further we have taken up the task of presenting those stories in the languages of modern man. **Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muni Ji** pioneered this effort by compiling and editing a hundred plus volume series and presenting the stories in modern Hindi idiom. His illustrious disciple **Acharya Shri Devendra Muni Ji** has now taken a step further by launching this project of arranging to present these stories in modern English idiom.

We are indebted that we were entrusted with the responsibility of publishing this series. Our thanks to **Shri Srichand Surana 'Saras'** for taking up the production responsibility and to **Shri Surendra Bothara** for agreeing to translate this voluminous series. The English version contains two volumes of the Hindi series. This is the first volume of the new series. We are sure our readers will enjoy these tales and get inspired to accept and practice the Ahimsa attitude, much needed in the modern chaotic world.

**Secretary**

*Shri Tarak Guru Jain Granthalaya*  
UDAIPUR

**Secretary**

*Prakrit Bharati Academy*  
JAIPUR

## GRATITUDE

*Finding this series of publication to be immensely beneficial for masses, well known Jain industrialist and philanthropist, Shriman Sugul Chand Ji Jain has kindly prompted **Singhvi Charitable Trust, Chennai** to extend liberal financial assistance for this publication. We express our gratitude for the same and hope that we shall continue to get his help and co-operation towards such publication activities in future.*

**—Publishers**



## PREFACE

*(To the English Edition)*

Stories are like sweet flowers that provide visual pleasure with their beauty and at the same time enrich the mind with the fragrance of ethics, pious attitudes, upright conduct and other such universal values. Narrative literature is a compendium of folk experiences and that is why this style is universally popular.

In Jain narrative literature the central purpose is to impart an abiding message of this-worldly and other-worldly reality through the multi-dimensional and multi-directional ebb and flow of life. Entwined in these stories are human and superhuman acts and incidents that display the ultimate superiority of human power and its superhuman potentialities that sometimes even appear to be divine. All this is normally beyond human imagination. But nothing is impossible.

Just as the true scope of scientific advance cannot be fully visualized, it is also extremely difficult for us to come to a complete understanding of the sources of the knowledge and energy of the physical and para-physical realms tamed by the men of the past. That is why a true appreciation of the infinite scope of human advance lies in accepting the strange incidents included in these stories of the past and seeing them as astonishing evidence of how extraordinary human powers and the inherent potential of science can be combined. They are thus much more than mere 'fantasy'.

Only with this open attitude will we be able to understand the underlying lessons conveyed by the strange happenings described in this ancient narrative literature and make use of the information contained therein. This, in turn, will be of immense help in preparing ourselves for a breakthrough into new and hitherto unforeseen levels of human achievement and advance.



This vast anthology of stories collected from Jain narrative literature was first published twenty-five years back as "*Jain Kathayen*". Later Gujarati and English editions were also published. These became popular, but unfortunately the English version did not fare well. For the last few years we have felt the need of a good English translation of this anthology and we have also received many requests for a new English edition. This plan is now turning into reality with the enthusiastic participation of Shri Surendra Bothara, who is doing the English translation with the same devotion that he employed in the translation of Kalpa-Sutra, Jnata-Sutra and other serious texts.

Shri D.R. Mehta and Shri M. Vinaysagar of Prakrit Bharati Academy, Jaipur, have provided inspiring and active co-operation in this project. As always, the expertise of Shri Srichand Surana and the most valuable participation of his son, Sanjay Surana, played a vital part in bringing this project to a successful conclusion. My thanks to all those who have put in their efforts into the project. I hope all English knowing readers will enjoy and be benefitted by their encounter with these wonderful Jain stories.

April, 1997

— *Acharya Devendra Muni*

## EDITORS' NOTE

(From original Hindi Edition)

In literature, story or fiction is the most simple, interesting, forceful and quick pervading form of writing. In the world-literature fiction has been the most popular section and, as such, its expansion has been most widespread as compared to other styles of writing. Indian literature also contains a large wealth of narrative works in the form of stories and tales. In fact, the unlimited storehouse of such narrative works is a unique treasure in Indian literature.

Within the Indian literature the Jain and Buddhist works have a special importance. The Shraman tradition, including Jains and Buddhists, has not only added to the glory of Indian narrative literature but also given it a new direction.

The basic purpose of a story is to entertain. However, it also imparts education through this entertainment. But the narrative literature of the Shraman tradition has nothing that is just for entertaining. With entertainment it essentially aims at a vivid presentation of subjects like detachment, conduct, Dharm (the basis of existence of a thing, being, idea, concept, theory, organization, etc.), religion, morality, rebirth, the theory of Karma, etc. *The Jatak-tales* of the Buddhists follow the same style. For the Jains the central theme of narrative literature has been to impart some sagacious inspiration through the medium of story.

There are thousands of famous Jain stories available in the Agamic and Puranic literature, the biographical and folk literature, and the epics and minor poetic works. Many of these are still popularly read and recited in the form of Purans, narrative poetry and discourses. Ironically a large part of this literature is in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsh, Gujarati and Rajasthani languages. As such, the greater part of the modern Hindi speaking population remains deprived of its advantages.

They are only peripherally aware of it through reviews, comments and appreciations.

It is necessary that for the benefit of masses, this invaluable treasury of Jain narrative literature is made available in the language of the masses, our national language, Hindi. Of late, some commendable efforts have been made in this direction and readers have got an opportunity to read a sizeable chunk of the whole. But it is a Herculean task to churn this ocean of stories single handed by any individual. As the large chariot of Lord Jagannath is drawn by thousands of hands, the task of bringing to light the whole ancient narrative literature calls for a continued effort in tandem by numerous creative scholars for a long period of time.

To contribute towards this, respected Gurudev Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muni Ji has been working for many years. On the basis of his wide ranging studies of the Jain literature he has written hundreds of Jain stories. This treasury of tales is very useful in understanding the ancient cultures, civilizations, as well as the human psyche.

We feel fortunate and honoured that we have been given the responsibility of editing this great work of narrative literature incorporating various styles. How far we are successful will be decided by our learned readers. Our happiness lies in the fact that we have got this opportunity to indulge in literary activities as well as to introduce the masses to a friend in the form of good literature.

*—Acharya Devendra Muni*

*—Srichand Surana 'Saras'*





## FROM THE PEN OF THE AUTHOR

(From original Hindi Edition)

### Jain Narrative Literature : Purpose and Form

The historical study of the Jain Agams reveals that while preaching, Bhagavan Mahavir manifested a high degree of proficiency in rendering the abstract and profound theories of religion and metaphysics simple, easily understandable and interesting, with the help of tales, stories, allegories and metaphors. *Nayadhammakaha*, *Vipak Sutra*, *Niryavlika*, *Uttaradhyayan* and other Agams confirm that Bhagavan Mahavir used thousands of such examples and metaphors in his preaching. Unfortunately only a small part of all that is available today, greater part being lost.

In his preaching Bhagavan Mahavir mostly used short stories, tales and short allegories. There was a pious purpose behind that curiosity for the pious awakens and inspires the listener to abandon evil or bad deeds and indulge in pious or good deeds. Such lofty ideal within the framework of a story is a unique speciality of Jain narrative literature.

Generally the purpose of story writing is entertainment or amusement. But about the Jain stories it can be conclusively said that they are aimed not merely at entertainment. With entertainment the purpose has been to establish some lofty ideal and to inspire towards pious activity by revealing the dreadful consequences of evil activity. To promote high standards of social, moral and spiritual values; to nurture basic virtues of human personality, namely courage, discipline, intelligence, righteousness, generosity, good conduct and determination; and to infuse these as basic attitudes of human character—this has been the basic target of Jain stories.

A marked departure in form and style is evident in the post Agamic narrative literature. Picking up stray incidents from the

life of great men and other characters from the Agamic stories, supportive short stories were added. The life-stories were enriched by incidents from earlier births. Such elaborating and extending of the original stories and plots became the accepted style of the post Agamic Jain narrative literature.

A definite influence of *The Ramayan*, *The Mahabharat* and *The Jatak Tales* is evident on this new trend. If we call it the Puranic style of story writing then the earliest Jain work in this style is *Vasudev-Hindi* (mostly in prose) which also happens to be the most ancient reference book on Jain narrative literature. After this, two voluminous epics were written—*Paum Chariyam* by Vimal Suri in the style of *Valmiki's Ramayan* and *Harivamsha Chariyam* in the style of *The Mahabharat*.

In the later period this style became very popular and based on the life stories of great men, innumerable books were written—*Chauppanna Mahapuris Chariyam*, *Trishashti Shalaka Purush Charitra*, *Adinaath Charitra*, *Shantinaath Charitra*, *Mallinaath Charitra*, *Parshvanaath Charitra*, *Mahavir Charitra* and other such biographical works on the lives of Tirthankars, Chakravartis, Vasudevs, Baldevs etc. These main stories were expanded with the help of interesting side stories.

In the Akhyayika style (a stylized story, in prose or poetry or both, based on real life) also Jain scholars wrote many interesting story books. Some famous and important works in this style are—*Tarangavati* by Paadlipt Suri, *Samaraichcha Kaha* and *Upadesh-pad* by Haribhadra Suri, *Kuvalayamala Kaha* by Udyotan Suri, *Bhuvan Sundari Kaha* of Vijay Simha Suri and *Nirvan Lilavati Katha* of Jineshvar Suri.

In the Jain narrative writing a third style also evolved which is before us in the form of collection of tales or anthologies. As a bouquet of a variety of tales and short stories these works are spreading the fragrance of pious inspiration. Some famous anthological works are—*Kathakosh Prakaran* of Jineshvar Suri, *Akhyanak Mani Kosh* of Amradev Suri, *Vrihatkatha Kosh* of Harishen, *Updesh Maala* of Dharmadas Gani and *Vardhaman Deshana* of Shubhvardhan Gani. *Updesh Prasad* of Vijayalaxmi

Suri may also be put in this class as hundreds of tales on varied topics have been compiled in it. Besides these the learned Acharyas have continued their creative work since long and enriched this storehouse of narrative literature.

These works were initially created in the Prakrit language. Later came the period of Sanskrit followed by Apabhramsh. The journey did not stop there and the baton now was taken by the Gujarati and Gujarati-mixed-Rajasthani authors. Many Jain poets and authors enriched the treasury of Jain tales by writing inspiring and interesting versified tales in a variety of linguistic styles including Raas, Chopai, Bakhan, etc. The variations in tradition, differences in source legends and the void of time brought about different versions of the same stories with much variation in the sequence of stated events. Even the famous stories are not free of these variations. As already mentioned, the Agamic stories have also been greatly expanded by including side stories.

These continued variations make it almost impossible to try to find out the original source of any particular story. To try to give authentic, basic and undisputed versions of all these stories and the entwined side stories is like churning the ocean.

Our purpose should be to look for the inspirational quality of a story rather than searching for its historic authenticity. The variations in names, characters, themes and plots are natural as these stories have been written and re-written by thousands of authors separated by long spans of time and place.

After studying numerous narrative works I came to the conclusion that we should not indulge in the postmortem of old works but instead examine their inherent merits. In whichever book whatever ideal, inspirational and beneficent values are available, they should be accepted without any bias.

In many books it is found that the same story is given in different forms at different places in different context. At some place only the first half of the tale is given, at other the later half only and at yet other place only a part of it. This makes an undisputed compilation of the complete story very difficult. In



such instances I have tried to connect those portions of the story which are complete in themselves, may be from different books and give the full story. But the large volume of the narrative literature does not allow to guarantee that a particular story is now complete, full and in its authenticated original form.

These expectations can probably be fulfilled only by the active co-operation of readers if they inform the author or the editors, whenever they come across some new version of any of these stories, so that necessary alterations and addition could be made.

These little volumes that are being published under the title "*Jain Kathayen*" contain long stories, one in a volume and short stories, more than one in a volume. I earnestly believe that these stories, through their interesting characters and plots, will inspire the reader in many ways. I am sure this will prove to be a work that successfully caters to the intellectual needs of a wide range of readers with a variety of tastes and interests.

This series has been edited by my able disciple Acharya Shri Devendra Muni and the affectionate scholar Srichand Surana. I convey my sincere appreciation to them.

—*Upadhyaya Pushkar Muni*

## STORIES IN THIS VOLUME

### (1) GOLDEN LOTUS AT EVERY STEP

The story of Dhanna and Shalibhadra is among the most famous and popular stories in Jain literature. Its original source is still a subject of research. In the tenth section of the tenth part of *Trishashti Shalaka Purush Charitra*, Acharya Hemchandra has written the story of the life of Dhanna and Shalibhadra in great detail. They both were initiated during the fifteenth monsoon stay of Bhagavan Mahavir in Rajagriha. In TSPC more details have been given about Shalibhadra as compared to those about Dhanna. In later period many side stories connected with Dhanna were included to make it more interesting and eventful. This story has been further embellished by Purnabhadra in his *Dhanya Shalibhadra Mahakavya* (an epic in verse) and Jnanasagar Gani in his *Dhanya Charitra* (prose). Short narratives of incidents from the life of these two characters can also be found in *Bharateshvar Bahubali Vritti* (part 1 leaves 106 to 111) and the second part of the commentary on *Sthanang Sutra*. These little stories are also available in *Upadeshmala* and *Kathakosh*. *Dhanna ji ka Raas* is another famous book about these characters. All included, it can be said that Dhanna and Shalibhadra are very famous and interesting characters in the Jain narrative literature. The yarn is spun with abundance of twists and turns and is full of wit and wisdom.

The turns of events in this story are interesting as well as educative. Sincerity of Dhanna in following the code of conduct, maintaining his poise and love for his brothers in face of repeated misbehaviour by them, victory of good over evil, are some of the inspiring incidents in the story. The results of the good deeds of his earlier births are evident at every step of

Dhanna's life and this is the inspiring factor for the title of this story—Golden Lotus at Every Step.

### **The Theme**

Dhanna's courage, incisive wisdom, pioneering spirit and pious attitude of repaying harm with beneficence, combined with the lofty virtue of charity evident in the life of Shalibhadra are like pronouncement of resounding victory of detachment over indulgence in all that is mundane.

In this way the story, besides being absorbing with the incessant flow of events, is studded with brilliant gems of a variety of inspirations.

We hope that the readers will make this entertaining reading useful by absorbing the inspiring lessons included in this story.

### **(2) SATI SUR-SUNDARI**

The story of Sati Sur-sundari epitomizes the courage and wisdom of woman. What is it that a woman cannot do? This question finds a loud answer in this story. With the use of her wisdom she purchased a kingdom in seven Kaudis (a shell used as the smallest denomination of currency in many parts of India in the past) and showed that woman is ahead of man.

The source books for this story are *Sur-sundari Charitra* in Prakrit by Dhaneshwar Suri, *Sur-sundari Raas* by Nayasundar Muni (1646 V) and others.

### **(3) RATNAVATI - RATNAPAAL**

This story presents the courage, wit and wisdom of woman in a highly interesting way. The original source of this story is still a matter of research. This story has also been penned by poet Mohan Vijay Ji, the author of the famous *Chand Charitra*. *Ratanpaal Charitra* is the best of his poetic works. Based on that Shri Chandan Muni (Terapanthi) has re-written this story in Prakrit prose as *Rayanval Kaha*.



#### (4) MAHASATI ANJANA

The story of Sati Anjana, the mother of Veer Hanuman, is known almost to every Indian. It is difficult to find a more eloquent portrayal of altruism, sacrifice, discipline, submission and tolerance anywhere else. The glory of Indian women is evident in the character of Anjana in all its brilliance. The earliest source of this story is the seventh part of *Trishashti Shalaka Purush Charitra*. This is a part of the story of Ram. Based on the story of Anjana many poetic works have also been written. The popular Hindi novel *Muktidoot* by Virendra Jain is also the story of sacrifice of Anjana.

#### **The Theme**

The last three stories included in this book effectively inspire virtues like altruism, sacrifice, discipline, submission and tolerance. The theme of the stories is to expound that Indian women have surpassed men in all these virtues. We are sure our readers would appreciate this.

**—Editors**

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## GOLDEN LOTUS AT EVERY STEP

*(Dhanna : The Epitome of Devotion)*

( 1 )

On the banks of river Godavari in the central region of the Bharat area that is now known as India there was a beautiful city known as Pratishtanpur. All the roads and lanes in the city were clean and attractive. The markets were built around eighty-four squares. Pratishtanpur was a rich and affluent commercial center having a large population of merchants. The business community of this town was renowned for its honesty, religiosity, and transparent business policy. The beauty and grandeur of the town made it seem to the onlooker as if the abode of gods had descended on the earth.

King Jitshatru was the ruler of this extraordinary city. He was a just, religious, and benevolent ruler. He bestowed benefits to the good and gave punishment to the cruel with equal zeal. When Jitshatru, the best among men, sat on the throne, his assembly looked like the assembly of gods. The name of the beautiful and devoted queen of this virtuous king was Gunasundari. Her virtues and attributes reflected in her name—Guna-sundari (virtues-beautiful). Such a harmonious combination of beauty and virtue is rare indeed. The royal couple was blessed with a respectful and obedient son named Shatrudaman.

In Pratishtanpur lived a merchant named Dhansaar. His business ethics and acumen combined with his affluence and devotion to religion made him respected and prominent, not only within the trading community but also in the king's court. He was wealthy beyond assessment and

could be called a Kuber (the god of wealth) on the earth—in other words, the richest among the rich.

The name of his devoted, obedient, and virtuous wife was Sheelvati. In due course she gave birth to three sons, one after the other. The names of the sons in descending order of age were Dhandutt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra. The parents and relatives affectionately called them by their nicknames—Lala, Bala, and Kala.

These handsome, delicate, and intelligent little sons of the merchant were attractive and lovable. At the proper time Dhansaar sent his three sons to school. Under the tutelage of able teachers they completed their education with flying colours. When the boys became older, Dhansaar married them to beautiful, virtuous and able girls from the merchant community. The names of the wives of Dhandutt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra were Dhanshri, Dhandevi, and Dhanchandra respectively. Merchant Dhansaar led a happy married life enjoying his wealth and prosperity with an ideal wife, obedient sons and daughters-in-law.

After some time Sheelvati became pregnant once again. One night she saw in her dream a fruit-bearing Kalp-vriksha (wish-fulfilling tree) standing in her courtyard. She got up with a start. On recalling the dream she became joyous and went and woke up her husband who was sleeping in the adjacent room. She described the dream to her husband with joy, "Swami ! I just had a dream. There is a Kalp-vriksha standing in our courtyard and we all are sitting under it. Please tell me what this dream signifies?"

Dhansaar replied, "This is an excellent dream. It seems that the child you bear will have qualities of the Kalp-vriksha. However, we shall ask the experts for a detailed interpretation in the morning. For the present you just consider this to be an auspicious dream. Don't go back to sleep, my dear. We will spend the rest of the night in

religious activities.” Sheelvati accepted the advice and acted accordingly.

The next morning the merchant started the new day with charity. Later he summoned the expert dream-diviners. These experts interpreted the dream as follows—

“Know it O great merchant ! You will be blessed with a handsome son who will fulfill all your wishes like a Kalp-vriksha. He will be a religious, pious, and upright individual. His fame will spread throughout the world like the fragrance of a perfume. Wherever this sagacious and spiritual son of yours goes he will enhance the glory of your family.”

Pleased with the predictions, Dhansaar honoured and amply rewarded the experts. He spent the rest of the day engaging himself in various religious activities.

Sheelvati started taking all the care required during pregnancy. The sages say that the mental condition and the thoughts of a pregnant mother influence the growing fetus. The basic attitudes of a child are formed when it is still in the womb. It is the thoughts of the mother that make a child brave or coward. It is mentioned in *the Mahabharat* that Abhimanyu, Arjun’s son, had learned the strategic moves needed to penetrate the Chakravyuha (an attack formation in the war) while he was still in the womb. As his mother, Subhadra, slept just after that he could not learn the moves to come out of it.

Guided by all this information Sheelvati engaged in various religious activities including discussions, discourses, beholding the guru, and charity, in order to impart pious and religious attitudes to the child in the womb.

During the third month of pregnancy Sheelvati had a Dohad (the pregnancy desire). She craved to engage in various religious activities like taking vows, worshipping god and guru, enjoying charity, taking care of sick or hurt

animals, doing Paushadh (periodic living like an ascetic) and Samayik (a specific system of Jain meditation).

Dhansaar recalled that his wife did not see any special dream during her three earlier pregnancies. But this time she had such a dream and had a Dohad similar to the meaning of the dream. This inspired him to fulfill his wife's desires with great enthusiasm.

When nine and a quarter months of the period of pregnancy were completed, Sheelvati gave birth to a son. It is said that makings of a man are reflected in a child. The new-born son of Dhansaar started giving indications of his pious personality right from the moment he was born. When the midwife dug up a hole in which to bury the umbilical cord she found a pitcher full of gold coins. As it is, the merchant had abundance of wealth, but the lucky new born brought a fresh flow.

The birth ceremony was performed with great enthusiasm and grandeur. The merchant opened his coffers for liberal charity. On the day of the naming ceremony Dhansaar arranged for a large feast and invited all his relatives and friends. After the feast gifts of apparels and ornaments were distributed to all the guests. The blessed and pious son was named Dhanya Kumar. The parents affectionately called him Dhanna (a nick name).

Five governesses were appointed to look after the infant Dhanya Kumar. The child became a beloved plaything for the family. All the three elder brothers and sisters-in-law adored the child. The house of merchant Dhansaar reverberated with exclamations of "Dhanna-Dhanna" during the playful activities of the infant.

When Dhanya Kumar was eight years old he was sent to an able teacher for education. In due course intelligent and talented Dhanya Kumar absorbed all the knowledge of seventy two subjects. He had equal command over diverse subjects like astrology, music, dance, augury, etc. While learning about politics he gave equal importance

also to spiritualism. He knew that as food is tasteless without salt, even if it is richly garnished with all other condiments and flavours, all knowledge is incomplete in absence of sagacity.

When Dhanya Kumar turned out to be a youth, accomplished in various subjects and arts, his fame spread all over the great city of Pratishtanpur. The elders in the city felt happy while showering their affection on Dhanna. People of his own age-group brimmed with feelings of friendship and goodwill for him. And the younger ones were filled with feelings of admiration and respect for him. With his virtues, behaviour, and appearance Dhanna almost mesmerized the townspeople. He solved various problems of all and sundry without creating any obligation, and this made him very popular. Dhanna was the embodiment of strength and courage.

Dhansaar commanded even more respect and popularity. He enjoyed the glory of his son and the resultant fame it brought to him. Although his three other sons, too, were able, educated, and polished, Dhansaar was partial in his affection for Dhanna. This sometimes pinched the brothers and they did not like this seemingly undue favour to Dhanna.

One day the three brothers, Dhandutt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra, deliberated—"Father keeps on praising our younger brother all the time. There is nothing wrong in it. What is wrong is that he criticizes us on the pretext of praising him. We jointly manage our business whereas Dhanna hardly does anything. Our father still looks down upon us. This is now beyond our tolerance. Therefore we should frankly reveal our feelings before our father without any further delay." Deciding thus they went to Dhansaar.

After formal greetings they said, "Respected father, the salt that is put to make the food tasty spoils the taste when added in excess. Our love for our younger brother Dhanna is no less than yours. We too adore him. However, we are



surprised that you criticize us on the pretext of praising him. The wise say that excessive commendation and complimenting of a person have a spoiling influence. They also advise that a guru should be praised in his presence, friends should be praised in their absence, slaves or servants should be praised on completion of their duty or work, but wife and son should be praised only after their death."

The moment Dhansaar heard this submission he realized that his three older sons were plagued by jealousy. Dhanna's progress is irritating these fools. He said—

"Sons ! Can't you understand the difference between person and personality? What I praise is the virtues of Dhanna, not the person. When you were born I suffered losses in business. On the other hand, the moment Dhanna was born fortune smiled on us. The first act after his birth (burying of umbilical cord) brought us an urn full of gold and since that day our wealth continues to multiply and we have not looked back. Not I alone, but everyone in the town praises the virtues of Dhanna. So, sons ! abandon such thoughts. As sons you all are as dear to me as Dhanna. However, as regards his virtues he is certainly worthy of the praise."

The explanation by their father did not satisfy any of the three sons. The eldest one grumbled, "You are partial to Dhanna. Fondness turns one blind towards vices, and averse towards virtues. Dhanna brought along wealth when he was born, but day after day we too toil hard to add to the family wealth. It is a known fact that we alone put in all our efforts to run the family business smoothly, including enduring the hardships of travel, whereas Dhanna does nothing but vegetate. Even then, in your eyes he is worthy of praise and we of criticism."

Even this outburst did not reduce the discontent. When the eldest son had concluded, the middle one, Dhandev commenced—

“Respected father ! According to you Dhanna is lucky and pious and we three are unlucky and sinful. You said that when Dhanna was born an urn full of gold was found. Who can say if it was not purposely buried beforehand, to be found while digging for the ritual burial of the umbilical. You lavishly spent on the birth ceremony of Dhanna. If luck is the only yardstick, you should test all the four brothers for their luck. Whoever passes the test should be considered lucky.”

Such bitter expression of the ill feelings of his elder sons broke Dhansaar’s heart; he said, “Fools ! you are falsely blaming me of planting the gold-filled urn. Am I afraid of you that I will secretly do such a thing? If you want a test of luck, that will also be done. But know that these feelings of jealousy and aversion will destroy you.”

Just then Dhanya Kumar arrived there. He first of all paid due respect to his father and then to the three elder brothers one by one. This inspired Dhansaar once again to try to pacify his elder sons. He said, “Sons ! See, how humble and soft spoken your younger brother is. You should have a feeling of affection for him always. Why invite public ridicule by this ill-conceived idea of testing your luck?”

Dhandatt still insisted, “Father ! There is nothing wrong in it. Besides revealing to you and to the town of Pratishtanpur that who is lucky and pious and who is unlucky and sinful, this test will also disillusion us.”

At last hapless Dhansaar conceded and said, “Sons ! I am giving 30gms. of gold to each one of you. Use it as the seed money for some business of your liking and provide food for a day to the family one by one. Whoever provides the best food out of his earnings with this specific investment will be declared the luckiest.”

The four sons took the gold and proceeded to try their luck.



There is a saying in Sanskrit—It is luck that plays the most important role in every field of life, not knowledge or endeavour. In other words—success is achieved only by luck, knowledge and effort are only supporting factors.

Filled with enthusiasm, all the four brothers started work.

Dhandatt, the eldest brother, left home to find some source of income. But all his efforts to start some business failed and he returned home in the evening without any earnings. However, he kept his capital intact. He was worried about how to provide food to such a large family. He made the required but bare minimum contribution out of his capital. The other two brothers fared no better. They all could provide the family with cheap and unpalatable food like pulses, oil, and leafy vegetable. For three days the family had to eat this sickening food.

Dhansaar chided them, “This is what you call good luck? It is foolishness to depend on you for food. I would be happy if you return the 30 gram of gold I gave to each one of you.” The three brothers remained silent looking at the floor.

Elsewhere, Dhanya Kumar dressed himself elegantly and taking the 30 grams of gold reached the market place riding a horse. He ambled around looking at the merchandise trying to figure out what to buy. When he reached the shop of a merchant named Ishwardatt he stopped and got down from the horse. The merchant welcomed Dhanna and asked, “What do you want to buy?” Dhanna replied, “Nothing at the moment. I am first trying to decide what to buy and what not.”

Just then a man approached Ishwardatt with a note. The messenger also said, “Some ships loaded with merchandise and heading for Pratisthanpur are about to arrive at the docks. It is a good bargain, please come and inspect the goods.” Ishwardatt replied, “Please inform my

friend that I will come after my lunch.” The messenger returned.

Merchant Ishwardatt left for his residence and Dhanya Kumar rode his horse and started in the direction of the dock-yard. These are good examples of both diligence and lethargy. After his lunch Ishwardatt thought of taking some rest and lay down. Even a slight delay changes the course of events. As soon as Dhanya Kumar reached the dock-yard he got in touch with the seafarer merchant and inspected the goods. He closed the deal by paying an advance of 30 grams of gold.

A moment later Ishwardatt arrived and contacted his broker friend. They both went to the ship owner. There was no reason for them to expect that the goods would be sold so fast. The ship owner informed them, “The goods have already been sold. Merchant Dhanya Kumar has purchased the ship load.”

Ishwardatt and his broker were stunned. Ishwardatt said, “What is this? I am your old customer, you did not even wait a little for my offer. You ignored our long standing business relations. You seem to have forgotten that mutual confidence is the foundation of lasting business relationship.”

The ship owner replied, “You are right but no businessman would refuse a prospective customer at the beginning of the day, as it is a good omen. Moreover, to create new openings is a part of an astute business policy. However, looking at our old business relations I would like to give you a good advice; offer some profit to Dhanya Kumar and buy the lot.”

Ishwardatt immediately asked Dhanna, “What profit do you want on the lot you have just purchased?”

Dhanna, “Although I have no intention of selling the lot, I would not refuse the request of a visiting merchant. I will sell at whatever price he suggests.”

The ship owner got the goods released from Dhanna at a profit of one hundred thousand gold coins. Ishwardatt made the payment immediately. Dhanna also got back the 30 grams of gold he had advanced. He returned home and gave this gold to his father. He then organized a great feast for his family, relatives and friends.

After enjoying the sumptuous meal all the guests praised Dhanna. The food offered by Dhanya Kumar was not just rich, but it was offered with due regards, warmth, and love. All this enhanced the honour he was paying the guests. He bade them farewell by saying, "You have obliged me by your pious presence." Sweet words please and disarm everyone.

Dhanya Kumar purchased ornaments from the money left with him after spending on the feast. He gave these ornaments to his three Bhabhis (sisters-in-law, particularly the wives of elder brothers). The three ladies were overjoyed with this affectionate gesture of Dhanya Kumar. They showered words of praise on him, "Brother ! you are the true jewel of the family. Blessed are the ladies who have a Devar (brother-in-law, particularly the younger brother of husband) like you."

Mother Shilvati commented, "Son ! you have graced the mother's milk. Having a son like you has made my motherhood meaningful."

Bowing with humility Dhanya Kumar said, "I have with me the blessings of my god-like father and the support of three mother-like Bhabhis and father-like elder brothers. With such backing there is nothing that Dhanna cannot do. The credit of this success goes to the pious blessings of elders like you."

But the three elder brothers sizzled with envy at this unexpected success of Dhanna. The fire of envy is much more devastating than that of anxiety. Anxiety may drive an individual to action, but envy makes a man inactive and

lethargic. It is like a slow but deadly fire that singes and scorches, pushing one toward an agonizing death. Envy had pushed Dhanna's brothers into a similar situation. They had become incapable of any constructive activity. All their time and energy were wasted in their efforts to tarnish Dhanna's reputation and not to work for their own advancement.

One day their wives said to them, "You nurture envy for Dhanna unnecessarily. He treats his elder brothers like father and Bhabhis like mother. He is being praised all around for his virtues. You should be happy to have such an illustrious younger brother. During our married life you never brought such ornaments with your own business earnings. But Dhanna, just after his first business outing, has treated us to such an elaborate feast, given us dresses and ornaments, and repaid the gold to father. Even then you remain blind to the realities?"

Scorched with envy the three brothers reacted in unison, "We can see everything clearly. It is not possible for Dhanna to earn so much money in just a day. There must be some secret behind this success. It appears that this display of success was pre-planned. The test of luck was stage managed to insult us."

Everything appears to be of same colour when seen through a coloured glass. Dhandatt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra floated in the same boat of prejudice against Dhanya Kumar.

One day merchant Dhansaar, trying to instill virtues into his three sons, said, "Sons ! you ought to become appreciators of virtues. What would you gain by your fault-finding attitude. I will tell you a story, and try to draw some lesson from it—

"Once a scholarly saint, an observer of the five great vows, came to a rich merchant's house for breaking his month long fast. The merchant's wife, who was a Shravika

(lay follower of the Jain faith), came forward devotedly to offer food to the ascetic. However, he did not accept the alms and returned.

“After a while another ascetic arrived at her door. The lady asked this ascetic, ‘A few moments back another ascetic was here but he did not accept alms. I fail to understand him, please enlighten me. I am sure you will not disappoint me.’

“The ascetic replied, ‘Lady ! The ascetic who left without taking alms is an observer of five great vows, and a highly austere and great saint. If I am like a pebble he is like a glittering moon-stone bead. If I am like a crow, he is like a swan. If he is as lofty as the Himalayas, I am as tiny as a sesame seed.’ Thus he magnified the virtues of the former ascetic emphasizing his greatness. At the same time he magnified his own vices to show his own comparative insignificance. After this he accepted the alms and left.

“As soon as he left another ascetic arrived. The lady informed him about the two ascetics who had visited earlier. Detailing their behaviour she asked that which one of the two was better. The third ascetic replied—‘Innocent lady ! The first one was a cunning imposter. He was a hypocrite in the garb of an ascetic, just like a fish-hunting heron. The second one was a swindler. Armed with flattery and false praise of others he habitually deceives the simple Shravak-Shravikas. I cannot do that. To speak less and to eat less, that is all I know.’

“The intelligent Shravika analyzed the behaviour of all the three ascetics and drew her own conclusion—‘The first of the ascetics was a virtuous one. The second one was an appreciator and emulator of virtues. And the third one was nothing but an envious one. It is the envious one who speaks ill of others.’

“Therefore, sons ! you should also become appreciators and absorbers of virtues. Stop being envious. It is easy to



abandon wealth and women as compared to conceit, praise, and envy. Life becomes worthless if one does not rise above these vices. All these three vices are detrimental to the present life and that beyond.”

As he loses, a compulsive gambler craves betting more and more. All the three brothers were in a similar frame of mind. They insisted, “Father ! Please forget and forgive whatever happened this time. Kindly give us one more chance.”

The father thought, “What is lotted cannot be blotted. These fools are beyond teaching. Let them have further tests of luck. There are chances that they may learn after repeated experiences.” He called Dhanna also and, said to his four sons—

“This time I am giving you only eight grams of gold each. The rules of the test are the same as before. Invest the amount in some business, earn some profit, and arrange for food after returning the capital amount to me. The one who provides the best food will be declared the most successful and lucky.”



Dhandatt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra pooled their resources and purchased some merchandise in partnership. As luck would have it, the market crashed. The prices of their stock fell and they suffered a loss.

Dhanna thought carefully before investing his money. He decided to trade in livestock. When he left his residence he had good omens. He planned to go to the animal-fair and buy some animals. On reaching the animal-fair he saw a variety of animals displayed for sale. People were busy buying camels, oxen, horses, cows, etc. Dhanna saw a healthy ram with curved horns. He bargained and bought that ram for his five grams of gold. The traders around laughed and said, “What will this trader’s son do with this

ram. It would have been appropriate had some shepherd bought it." Dhanna was not in the least bothered about such comments. He took the ram along and walked away happily.

In a nearby garden there were numerous arenas where cock fights, bull fights and other such competitive events were taking place. At one of the arenas a larger crowd had gathered. They were enjoying a ram fight. King Jitshatru's son, Prince Shatrudaman, had also entered his ram in the competition. When Dhanna saw this ram-fight he stopped there and started enjoying the fight. Prince Shatrudaman had a wager of one lac gold coins on his ram. The fight ended with the prince's ram being the loser. The prince had to part with his purse of one lac gold coins. Dhanna approached the prince and said—

"O Son of the King ! Do not get dejected. Every one does not have the knowledge of the qualities and auspicious signs of animals. I have a ram with all the good qualities and auspicious signs. Please enter it in the competition and put your bets on it. I am sure this ram will win. I am even prepared to back my statement by a guarantee that if it loses I shall reimburse you the amount, and if it wins you take all the winnings."

Prince Shatrudaman agreed to Dhanna's proposal and entered the ram in the competition. He put a bet of two lac gold coins on this ram. After some time the tables turned. The arena was filled with cheers for the new winner. Dhanna's ram had won the two lac gold coin prize fight. The loser paid a bag full of gold coins to the prince.

The prince embraced Dhanna and said, "Since this moment you are my friend. This purse of two lac coins is now yours. Please accept it and give this ram to me. This ram will become the symbol of our friendship and keep on reminding me of your gesture of goodwill."

Dhanna, "Friend ! This ram already belongs to you. Please do not hesitate to keep it with you. But now that we

are friends how can I accept such a large sum in its exchange?"

Prince, "Dhanna ! I am not paying the cost of this ram. The amount is an insignificant gift to a friend. Sale and purchase are the activities of traders. But the exchange of gifts is a natural gesture between friends. Do not dishearten me. Please accept my gift."

Dhanna, "Prince ! I can accept your gift on one condition."

Prince, "Tell me the condition. I will be too pleased to accept it."

Dhanna, "Friend ! Please stop gambling right from this moment. To put bets on animal fights is gambling, not a sport. Moreover, you are the future king of Pratishthanpur. If you are a gambler the people you rule will also become gamblers. As the king is, so are his subjects."

Prince Shatrudaman accepted Dhanna's condition and took the ram. He resolved not to indulge in ram fights or any other type of gambling. Dhanna gladly took the purse of two lac gold coins. Both the friends departed for their respective homes.

Dhanna had fulfilled his duty as a friend. A friend should encourage virtues and discourage vices. He should steer a friend from a bad path toward a good path. On returning home Dhanna returned the eight grams of gold to his father. As before, he invited friends and relatives to a feast. After the feast the guests praised Dhanna. He gave all the remaining earnings to his three Bhabhis.

The ladies thought, "Our young Devar is the embodiment of modesty and love. To earn wealth is not as difficult as parting with it. He gives liberally to us, saving nothing for himself. Our husbands are still envious of his success. Why?"

Dhanna was also lost in his thoughts, "After my mother, in due course and one by one, these Bhabhis will become the ladies of the household. For me they are as respectable as my mother. If they are pleased with me, one day my brothers will also get rid of their anger and embrace me."

Dhanna's success was acclaimed everywhere and his virtues and pursuits became the talk of the town. Suddenly one day he got an invitation from the king; a vehicle was also sent to fetch him. Dhanna got ready and went to the assembly. King Jitshatru bestowed honours upon him.

This was the beginning of Dhanna's regular visits to the assembly. He became a confidante of King Jitshatru, who consulted him on various problems and disputes. Dhanna proved his ability by giving the right advice and showing his mature intelligence and impartial judgement. He received praise and acclaim from the members of the assembly as well.

His three brothers were still busy cooking up plans to discredit Dhanna somehow. One day they went to their father with their latest plan and said—

"Father ! We had warned you that excessive pampering and false praise spoils a child. You did not give any heed to it. Are you aware of the consequences? Dhanna has become a friend of the gambler prince, Shatrudaman. He visits the palace almost every day and gambles. Will this despicable deed of Dhanna tarnish the name and prestige of the family or add to its glory? This is now for you to evaluate."

Dhansaar could sense the driving force of envy in this statement of his elder sons. He replied, "Sons ! Besides you I have heard from no one about Dhanna being a compulsive gambler. Every single citizen of the town loves him for his virtues. Take my advice and start loving your humble and virtuous younger brother. Even your wives are extremely fond of him. It is only you who despise him so. It appears that some animosity from some earlier life plagues you and

you are being consumed by the fire of envy for no apparent reason. I will tell you a story to inspire you to be rid of your envy and save this household from destruction.”

The merchant then told the story—

“In the Kaushal state there once ruled a king named Kakusth. In the town lived a potter named Pankpriya and his large family. His was a well-to-do household and he led a happy life. However he had a terrible fault; he could not tolerate fame or praise of anyone. The virtues of others hurt him like thorns in his flesh. He loved to find fault in, and speak ill of others. His family was disturbed and saddened by this habit of Pankpriya.

“One day his sons said—‘Father ! This is the fag end of your life. It is time you took to a saintly life and retired to the jungle. You will have no worries, as we shall bring you food and water twice a day. You will also be free from hearing praise of others. Here you are forced to listen to such praise even when you don’t want.’

“Pankpriya realized that this advice of his sons would be good for him. He decided to retire to the jungle. Carrying his daily essentials he went into the jungle and started living comfortably.

“One day king Kakusth went into the same jungle with his retinue for a change. While wandering around, the king was separated from his company. He moved about alone looking for his men. It was summer season. By noon the oppressive midday heat made the king blunder about in search of water. His throat and mouth were parched with thirst. In this condition he came across Pankpriya who offered him food and water. When the king was relieved of his torment he asked Pankpriya about the reasons for his reclusive life.

“Pankpriya replied—‘O Provider for the masses ! I am your subject. I have a terrible shortcoming that I cannot digest the virtues or praise of others. That is the reason I

lead this recluse's life in the forest. When I do not hear the praise of others I will be free of the resultant sorrow.'

"The King, 'Pankpriya ! You have saved my life. You are sensitive to others' pain and are helpful to them. One who forgets obligations is considered a sinner. Although it is beyond me to repay your obligation, I invite you to come with me to the town and live happily with me. Under my protection no one will dare praise others before you. If some one does that he will be subject to harsh punishment from me.'

"Pankpriya returned to the town with king Kakusth and started living happily in the palace. Following the king's order everyone refrained from praising anyone before him.

"One day king Kakusth went for an excursion into the nearby forest. He saw an enchantingly beautiful lady wandering around alone in the jungle. She was picking up and eating berries to satisfy her hunger. The king asked her with surprise, 'Lady ! What makes you wander around aimless in this jungle? I am moved to see you in this pathetic condition. Please tell me what has caused this?'

"The young lady replied, 'Sire ! I am the daughter of king Niryamak of Anga state. I was on a sea cruise with my father. As luck would have it, our ship capsized and everyone else drowned. Somehow I reached the shore at the edge of this jungle and since then I am living here. I survive on the fruits and vegetables available here. The earth is my bed and the sky the cover.'

"The sad story of the beautiful damsel touched the king's sentiments. He said, 'Lady ! Please come with me and live in my palace as a queen. Your youth and beauty should not be wasted in this remote jungle.' The lady accepted the proposal and accompanied the king to his palace. The king formally married her and the couple commenced their marital life with all regal grandeur and pleasure.

“Later one day the king and the queen came to the same jungle with Pankpriya. When they stopped under the same tree the king asked the queen, ‘Darling ! Do you recognize this tree.’ The queen at once replied, ‘Sire ! How do I know? I have never seen this tree in the past.’

“The king thought, ‘Joys of the present make one forget the sorrows of the past. I found this lady while she was picking up berries under this tree, and now that she is the queen, she fails to recognize it.’ However, he did not utter a word.

“But Pankpriya could not contain himself. He spoke— ‘Till yesterday she was a tramp wandering in this jungle and eating the fruits of the very same tree. Today she refuses to recognize this tree. What a pity. When times change man forgets his true status.’

“The king commented, ‘Pankpriya ! Circumstances never remain the same. It hardly matters if the queen has forgotten about the tree after spending the luxurious life with me for a long period.’

“Due to the favours granted by the king Pankpriya had become outspoken. He said fretfully, ‘With due respect, Sire ! you appear to be henpecked. Obsessed by her beauty, you are being partial to her. A tramp from the past, she takes pride in posing as a queen.’

“This rude behaviour of Pankpriya vexed the king. He reacted sharply and chided Pankpriya, ‘Someone has aptly said—A scoundrel is always a scoundrel. No matter how high you raise water, in the end it falls down.’ And the king imprisoned Pankpriya in a hidden cave closing it with a large boulder. He was provided rations regularly. Once after heavy rains the cave was flooded and Pankpriya was sealed within forever.

“Thus children ! A slanderer comes to a pathetic end. Take my advice and close the chapter here. Consider whatever has happened to be a bad dream and forget it.”



All the efforts of Dhansaar failed to move his sons. On an oily surface even one drop of water does not stay . In a renewed attempt to persuade their father Dhandatt said—

“Father ! You will never tire of praising Dhanna or hearing imaginary tales of his exploits. He indulges in gambling with the prince and you still find him virtuous.”

The merchant objected, “I find it difficult to believe that the person who influenced the prince to leave his habit of gambling, will himself start gambling. In both the tests he has come out with flying colours and you have embraced defeat. You still find faults with Dhanna, why?”

The sons replied, “It is just a matter of chance that he has been successful twice. We would request you to conduct one more test. This time we will show you how successful we can be.”

Merchant Dhansaar once again accepted the challenge. This time he gave 100 grams of gold to each one of his sons and said, “The rules are the same this time also. Do business with this gold and feed the family.” They took the gold and set out to test their luck.



The three elder brother followed the same pattern as before and purchased cloth in the wholesale market. They planned to sell the cloth in retail to earn a good profit. They selected a spot in the retail market and sat down with their bales of cloth. While the sale was going on, one of them thought that two were enough to look after the sale and he went away to roam around in the market place. The remaining two continued to conduct the sale.

The one who was aimlessly moving around came across a Bhang (cannabis, a popular intoxicating drug) vendor and took a dose. By the time he returned to his brothers, he was intoxicated. He sat down dazed near the bale. Now another of the brothers saw that a street play was going on at some

distance. He left the merchandise in care of his brothers and joined the throng of people gathered around the street performer.

The merchandise now remained in care of the remaining two brothers one of whom was intoxicated. The normal one got up and said to the dazed one, "Brother ! I am going to relieve myself and shall be back soon. In the meantime please take care of the bale."

A few moments after he left, a thief, who was looking for such an opportunity, picked up the bale and escaped. When the other two brothers returned after some time they saw the intoxicated one sitting without the bale. They got angry and rebuked the intoxicated one. He also lost his temper and they started quarrelling and blaming each other. The partnership business proved to be a losing proposition.

Losing their capital they returned to Dhansaar dejected. When they stood looking down without uttering a word he grasped the story of their failure. He felt sorry for them and said, "Go on putting everything you have at stake again and again. Maybe one day you will win. What an irony ! Time and again you are proved wrong, but you are still adamant on not getting rid of your misconception."

At the other end Dhanna considered various parameters and concluded that dealing in timber or things made of wood would be profitable that day. He set out to purchase things made of wood. He reached at the cremation ground and saw that the caretaker was auctioning a wooden bed. It was a beautifully carved and attractive piece and appeared to belong to some rich person. People were looking at it with greed, but no one dared bid for it as a dead man's bed was considered to be inauspicious.

There was a mystery about this unique bed. In the town lived a stingy billionaire. In the process of collecting

wealth, as a bee collects honey, he deprived himself even of good food and clothing. He had got this bed specially made with concealed drawers and used it to store all his wealth in the form of gems and other valuables into these drawers. He did not reveal his secret even to his wife and sons. On the death bed he conveyed his last wish, "Sons ! When I am dead put me on the funeral pyre along with this bed. This bed should also be turned to ashes along with me."

When the billionaire died his sons took the body to the cremation ground along with the bed. However, the moment they tried to put the body with the bed on the funeral pyre the caretaker opposed vehemently, "Why are you setting a new precedent? This bed is mine by right. I shall not allow it to be burnt. It is an unwritten law that whatever comes along with a dead body at the cremation ground belongs to the caretaker." All who came with the funeral procession supported the demand of the caretaker and the bed was given to the caretaker.

The caretaker was trying to sell the very same bed. Strangely enough, some men get premonitions of the things they are fated to face. Dhanna had a strong inspiration to buy that bed. The moment he started bargaining with the seller his acquaintances and other townspeople tried to stop him—"Mister Dhanya Kumar, what are you doing? Would you take this bed from the cremation ground to your home? It is a bad omen. No one would accept this evil thing for free, and you intend to pay a price for it. You are the son of a rich man. There should be no dearth of such beds in your house."

Dhanna replied, "You all are my well wishers. I thank you very much for the warning. But I do not see any harm in buying the bed."

"As you please. Our duty was to warn you and we have done so."

Dhanna closed the bargain for three grams of gold and arranged for porters to carry it home. As soon as the bed

was unloaded at his house his three envious elder brothers remarked mockingly—

“Look father ! your favourite son is trying to turn our home into a funeral ground. He has brought a dead man’s bed today, and tomorrow he will bring home a shroud. Lo ! ladies of the house, you should also appreciate what your lovable Devar has done. You enjoyed advertising his virtues. Mother ! you should also welcome your son by burning incense. He has done a commendable deed.”

When the fracas died down Dhanna started dissembling the bed. He separated the beams, legs, and other parts. Looking for some concealed joints, he also opened the hidden drawers. The moment these drawers were opened heaps of gems and other valuables fell on the ground and the courtyard glittered with the reflected light from these gems. The three elder brothers were dumb-struck. However, a faultfinder always fabricates a shortcoming. They commented—

“Dhanna has no right to this wealth. This rightfully belongs either to the heirs of the deceased billionaire or to the caretaker of the cremation ground from whom Dhanna has purchased the bed. If Dhanna takes it this would be ill-earned wealth.”

The matter was referred to the town elders. The worldly wise elders explained to the complaining brothers—“The ill-fated ones who abandon gold, considering it to be a lump of sand, have no right over it. It rightfully belongs to the person who has the courage and foresight to pick an abandoned and seemingly worthless lump of sand, and the will to extract gold out of it. Fortune has smiled on Dhanna and thus he has all rights to this wealth.”

Dhanna followed the norms he had set earlier. He gave a feast and after returning the capital provided by his father distributed all the wealth to his Bhabhis.

This incident added to the fame and glory of Dhanna. As Dhanna's glory increased, so increased the envy of his brothers. Sometimes we are drawn to a person and become fond of him for no apparent reason and at others we have intense dislike for some other person, once again for no plausible reason. All this happens due to the influence of Karmas accrued due to intense feelings of attachment and aversion in one's past life. That seems to be the explanation for the feeling of envy of the three brothers and feelings of love and devotion of the majority of townsfolk.

Once there was a family partition in a rich and famous family of the town. All of the movable and immovable property was assessed and equitably distributed among the heirs. While the assessment was being made, a room full of auric-sand was found. The heirs were surprised that this sand had been collected and stored by their ancestors. Considering it to be a heap of worthless sand it was thrown on the street outside the house and useful living space was cleared.

It is an irony of fate that ill-fated persons throw away their own wealth taking it to be garbage. How could they know that the auric-sand contains particles of recoverable gold. Those who deal in this sand turn wealthy in no time at all.

The same day Dhanna happened to pass through that street. When he saw the heap of sand he immediately recognized for what it was and was surprised. To common man a gem is just like a piece of glass, but a jeweller knows the difference. Dhanna contacted the head of the house and said, "Why have you thrown away such a large heap of sand on the main road of the town? It has become an eyesore."

The owner of the house replied, "Mr. Dhanna ! we were preoccupied with our family partition and as such could not find time to shift this sand outside the town. We assure you that as soon as we are free, in about a week's time, we shall arrange to transport it to the jungle."

Dhanna, "If this is of no use to you I can buy it for my use. Please ask a price for it."

"This is hardly worth a price. I shall be too pleased if you take it for free."

"How can I take anything without paying right price for it?"

"Please do not misunderstand me. I am not giving it as a gift to you. You shall certainly pay a price. If we arrange to clear the street and shift this sand we shall certainly incur expenses on account of the labour for loading and unloading as well as transportation. You are agreeing to incur that expenditure and this sand is hardly worth more. We shall consider the labour charges you incur as the payment for sale of this sand."

At the persuasion of the owner of that house Dhanna finally agreed and arranged to transport that heap of sand to his own house. Although this act of Dhanna appeared to be a comic one to his elder brothers, they did not utter a word. They knew that their father would take Dhanna's side in any case.

Some days later a trader of auric-sand arrived in the town and approached the king, "Sire ! I am doing experiments on extraction of gold from this type of sand. I have visited many famous and important cities in search of auric-sand but in vain. In absence of the sand I am unable to conduct the experiment. I have come to Pratishtanpur with great hope. I have heard that there are many ancestrally rich families here. I am sure at least one of them should certainly be able to provide me with the sand I require."

King Jitshatru replied, "I am hearing this name for the first time. However, to facilitate your work I shall arrange to make an announcement in the town." Accordingly it was announced in the town that whoever has the auric-sand

should contact the said trader and sell it to him at a reasonable price.

Three days passed without any response. King Jitshatru was even more dejected than the trader because the prestige of his town was at stake. At last Dhanna arrived in the court and addressed the trader in presence of the king—"I can offer you the sand you require but only on the condition that you will clear all my stock." The trader accepted the condition and Dhanna cleared all his stock. He got a reasonable price.

The deal was to the entire satisfaction of both the dealing parties as well as the king because the wishes of all the three were fulfilled. The king was happy as the deal had enhanced the prestige of his town; the sand which could not be found in any other town was found in Pratishtanpur. The trader was happy that his search was at last over and he got what he wanted. Dhanna was happy because as the sand was difficult to find, so was it to find a customer for it. He did not have to keep his investment blocked for long.

King Jitshatru thought that the position of Nagar Seth (a title and position of honour conferred upon the most prominent and able merchant of the town, and all of whose expenditures are met by the exchequer) of my town is lying vacant. Why not honour Dhanna with it. He has not only protected but enhanced the prestige of this town. This visiting trader will spread this news far and wide that he could get in Pratishtanpur what he did not get anywhere else. Even otherwise, Dhanna is able enough to get this honour.

The king announced accordingly and, calling Dhanna to the court, conferred the honour on him at a suitable ceremony. After the ceremony a procession was taken out on the important streets of the town with all pomp and show and with Dhanna riding an elephant. The town had many richer and more able merchants, but Dhanna was

chosen by the king due to his recent exploits. It was a combination of wit, wisdom and good fortune. The precipitation of past karmas leads to such success.

Members of the family and others in the town were proud of this honour bestowed on Dhanna. But all the three elder brothers, Dhandatt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra became extremely envious. They complained to their father, "Father ! The sand belonged to some other person and the buyer came from outside the town. The real owner of the sand got no credit and Dhanna became the Nagar Seth without any contribution. While you are living, it is against social norms for Dhanna to accept this honour. It is an insult to you."

Dhansaar replied, "Sons ! Someone has rightly said that no matter how much one tills a barren stretch of land and sows seeds, it hardly yields a sprout. Even if god himself teaches, a fool's mind does not absorb even a trace of knowledge. Flowers or fruits never grow on a cane even if the clouds shower ambrosia on it. I accept my defeat in my effort to instill good sense into you. Now I will desist from telling you anything. You may do whatever you wish, but from now on you should also refrain from saying anything about Dhanna before me. But mind you, you shall reap as you sow. The fire of aversion, hate, and envy will one day consume you."

The three brothers were pleased to hear this from their father, as if their wish had been granted. They became free of all restrictions from their father's side. Thus they decided that now it was either Dhanna or them.

One day they conspired to murder Dhanna, "Enough is enough. Now he should be sent to his heavenly abode within a couple of days." Knowing about the evil intent of their husbands, Dhanna's three Bhabhis shivered with fright. They deliberated among themselves and decided—



“For no apparent reason our husbands nurture a feeling of enmity for Dhanna. It has now grown to the extent that they are planning to take his life. We should somehow save Dhanna. If our husbands succeed in carrying out their plan the lamp of the family will be extinguished. And then the king’s outrage will deal a death penalty and make us widows. The only way to avoid this situation is to inform Dhanna about the evil conspiracy.”

Consequently they called Dhanna in absolute privacy and said, “Brother ! All your three elder brothers are bent upon taking your life. The plan has already been cooked up and there is very little time left. Please save your life. Please do not have even an inkling of doubt about our information.”

Dhanna knew this much, that his brothers were jealous of him. But it was bewildering that they conspired to kill him. Dhanna thought, “I can save my life only by leaving the house. The true test of a man’s fortune and endeavour is in unexplored areas. Thus, I should go away from the family, house, and the town as soon as possible. After I leave, my mother will weep herself to death. The affectionate Bhabhis will also suffer no less pain. My father will be shocked and his torment will be even worse. How sad my friend Prince Shatrudaman will be when he hears of my departure. However, success can only be embraced when one breaks these shackles of fondness.” Dhanna made an unwavering resolve to abandon the household.



It was a moonlit night. The whole town was asleep but Dhanna’s eyes were devoid of sleep. Around midnight he got up from his bed and carefully looked around. When he found no one, he proceeded to the gate of the house, taking soft and careful steps. At the gate he turned around and silently offered his respect and bade goodbye to all the members of the family. He then sneaked out of the house.

His only possession was the dress covering his body. He had even put away the ornaments usually embellishing his body.

Dhanna came out of the town and took a trail through the jungle. He walked all night and did not stop even at the dawn. After covering many miles he felt tired. Around midday he stopped and sat down to rest under a tree.

Under the same tree a farmer was also sitting and preparing to eat his lunch. His oxen were tied to a branch and standing nearby. A plough was also lying there. He was impressed by the unassuming but attractive and impressive personality of Dhanna. He thought—"It is a sin to eat as long as the neighbour is hungry. This person is a traveller from far away and appears to be from a good family. How can I eat alone without offering something to him." And he said to Dhanna, "Brother ! Come and share my humble food."

Dhanna, "Brother ! Love and hospitality add to the richness of the food and hunger makes it tasty. I am hungry and want to eat but how can I eat without earning the food by working for it? Please allow me to do some labour for you and in return give me food."

The farmer, "Brother ! Do you think I am so ill-mannered and primitive as to take work from a guest? You are my guest and I invite you to take lunch with me."

Dhanna, "Brother ! This world is nothing but a field of work, and to work is the natural duty of all beings. Moreover, you too are here on duty. You are preparing to take your meal only after putting in labour at your farm. Had I been at your house I certainly would have gladly accepted your invitation. But here, at the farm, the arena of labour, I should eat only after contributing my labour exactly as you are doing."

Convinced by Dhanna's sound logic the farmer agreed, "Take this plough and the oxen and go into the farm. Till

four lengths from the unworked area and come back. I will wait for you; we shall eat together."

Dhanna went into the farm and started ploughing. When fortune smiles, gold drops from the sky. When he was tilling the third length, the edge of the plough got stuck to something hard in the ground. When Dhanna explored he found an urn buried in the ground. Dhanna took out the urn. It was very large and filled with gold coins. The farmer was astonished; he thought—"This farm has belonged to my family for seven generations. I have been working on it throughout my life. I never found even a piece of copper. Indeed this man is lucky."

Later, they both took lunch together, sitting in the shade of the tree. They drank cold water and lay down to rest. After the siesta they got up and prepared to resume their duties. One had to work on the farm and the other to resume his journey. When Dhanna got ready to leave, the farmer said, "Why are you leaving your urn behind? Please take it along."

Dhanna replied, "What right have I to this urn? It belongs to the person who owns the farm." And without waiting for a reply Dhanna commenced his journey. The farmer was dumb-struck. He continued to stare at this strangely detached person. He was thinking—"How detached is this man. He has hardly any desire for wealth. Even I do not have any right over this gold. This has come out of the land and its rightful owner is the King, the owner of all the land." The farmer carried the urn to the king. The king also refused to accept the urn. Appreciating his honesty and lack of greed the king said to the upright farmer, "As it has been found in your farm you are the true owner of this gold filled urn."

How strange such things appear these days, when every other person is busy trying to swindle those around him. In this instance, from different points of view all the three persons involved, Dhanna, the farmer, and the king, had

rights over the wealth. But none of the three was ready to take it. Finally the king used the gold for constructing a village on that farm-land and named it Dhanpur.

Driven by his wanderlust Dhanna was moving toward north without any specific destination in mind. One day he reached the shores of river Narmada. Dhanna was lured by the beauty of the lush green forest on the banks of the river. The silence of the night was broken by the heavenly music of the rippling sound of the flowing river. Occasionally this hypnotizing sonorous monotone was broken by a variety of animal sounds coming from the thick forest. An eerie beat was provided by the sound of fluttering wings of birds perched high on the branches of giant trees. Dhanna was dead tired. He lay down under a tree. Resting his head on the pillow of his arms he slept.

He opened his eyes at the break of the dawn. This is the usual hour of waking for a disciplined person. A jackal was howling. Dhanna could understand the animal sounds. He interpreted the jackal as saying—"A corpse floating in the river is coming this way. If there was a human being here he could have brought it to the shore and, cutting its thighs, taken out five priceless gems, thereby leaving the corpse for me to eat."

Dhanna rushed to the bank and saw a corpse floating in the river and drifting in his direction. When the corpse arrived near he dived into the river and dragged it ashore. On inspection he found stitch marks on the right thigh. He cut open the marked spot and took out the gems. After this he dragged the corpse to a nearby thicket. The jackal had his fill.

The sun had sprinkled gold on the earth. Dhanna washed in cool clean river water and had a breakfast of fruits from nearby trees. After these morning chores he broke camp.

At the end of this leg of his travel Dhanna reached the outskirts of the city of Ujjaini. King Chandpradyot ruled

over this area. His chief queen was beautiful Shiva Devi. The post of the prime minister of the state was lying vacant. A fortunate individual suitable for the important post could not be found. The king had formulated a tough test for aspirants to this post.

Just outside the town there was a large pond. The king got a large pillar fixed right in the middle of the pond. He had made an announcement that whoever ties a rope between a tree on the bank and the pillar in the middle of the pond without entering the pond and touching the pillar will be selected for the post of the prime minister of the state. Many desirous of the most powerful post in the state tried their luck but failed. The king had almost lost all hopes.

In dejection he would continue to brood, "Every state has to have a king and a prime minister. It is sad that my state has a king and still the chair of the prime minister is unoccupied. Is there no person on this earth who is destined to become the prime minister of Ujjaini. I can not appoint any Tom, Dick, or Harry to this important post. How could a person who is not intelligent enough to tie a rope around the pillar in the pond possibly manage the affairs of the state and give me sound advice?"

When Dhanna heard this story he found the test to be a child's play. He went to the king's court and said to king Chandpradyot, "O benevolent king ! Please let me have a very long rope. I will attempt the test."

The king replied satirically, "Sure ! Try your luck. A lot of capable and intelligent individuals have tried before you and failed. Why not you too?"

Dhanna took a very long rope and came to the pond. A crowd of people, including those who had attempted the test and failed, gathered around. Dhanna tied one end of the rope around the marked tree. He took the looped rope in his hand and started walking along the edge of the pond releasing a little at every step. This way he circled the pond

with rope in his hand. The rope encircled the pole in the middle of the pond. When Dhanna arrived back at the tree he cut off the required length and tied the loose end again with the tree. Thus he tied a double strand of rope between the tree and the pole in the middle of the pond.

The king beamed with joy. In excitement King Chandpradyot of Ujjaini got up and embraced Dhanna. His long pending search for a wise and able prime minister had ended. Those who had failed earlier protested, "What is so special about this. This way we too could have tied the rope". The king admonished them by saying that who had stopped them from doing so; why did they not come out with the solution before. It is natural for those who fail, to resent the success of others.

Dhanna was installed as the prime minister of the state following due procedures and formalities. After the installation he was taken out in a procession around the city. The masses welcomed their prime minister with showers of flower petals. Dhanna shifted to the official residence of the prime minister and lived happily. He helped the king solve all the complex problems of the state with his sharp wit and profound intelligence. In his spare time he moved around the town and met common people to hear of their problems and tried earnestly to solve them. The king and the masses, the old and the young, everyone loved and talked of Dhanya Kumar.



The morning after Dhanna left Pratishtanpur Dhansaar's house was filled with gloom. "Oh god ! why our beloved Dhanna has left us? Where has he gone?" Sounds of wailing of the family members drew the attention of the neighbours. They all came to share the sorrow. The elders tried to console Dhansaar and his wife—"Please face the predicament bravely and stop crying. Dhanna is your able son, wherever he goes he will add to your prestige and

honour. You should be happy that he is capable enough to turn pain into pleasure.”

Dhanna’s Bhabhis were cursing their husbands—“What have you gained. The kid brother who respected you like father was a thorn in your flesh. Now that he has gone you should drown yourself in celebrations.”

The conspiring brothers secretly shared their happiness—“Fate has done what we wanted to do. Our hurdle has been removed without our involvement. Fortune has smiled on us. Now we shall show our father what we truly are.”

Time is a great healer. The pain of separation from Dhanna gradually subsided. Normalcy returned to the family. The three elder brothers of Dhanna jointly opened a shop and they started doing good business.

One day there was a theft of ornaments in the palace. Some maids did the act and they came and sold the stolen goods at the shop of Dhanna’s brothers. The brothers were very happy that they got the priceless ornaments dirt cheap. They schemed—“We shall earn a lot of money by remaking and, selling these ornaments at very high price. We shall collect heaps of wealth and our father will be pleased. He will at last forget Dhanna.”

It so happens that those deprived of real happiness derive vicarious pleasure by daydreaming. The three sons of Dhansaar—Dhandatt, Dhandev, and Dhanchandra—got lost in their state of euphoria.

In due course the maids who had stolen the ornaments were apprehended. When third degree measures were resorted to, they pleaded guilty and revealed the information about the sale of the stolen goods. The king ordered a search of the shop and the brothers were caught red handed. The king was already annoyed with them because of their jealousy for Dhanna. The recent criminal

act added fuel to the fire, and he ordered the complete confiscation of the stock of the shop.

One who cares for his prestige can not tolerate even a shadow of dishonour. The goodwill that Dhansaar had earned with years of hard work and honesty was turned into ashes by these worthless sons. Dhansaar put his views before his wife and three daughters-in-law—

“Now it is not possible for us to live in Pratishtanpur. How shall we show our faces in the town? How would we earn our living. We cannot do any business here now. We shall always be haunted by the king’s displeasure and the loss of goodwill in the society. The best alternative is that we should leave this town tonight and proceed to some other town to earn our living. If fortune favours us we may earn enough and become rich at the new place. If not, we shall at least be able to earn our living by doing manual labour.”

Every one accepted this proposal of Dhansaar. The three sons also remained silent in affirmation. Accordingly the family left the town during the night and commenced their journey for some unknown destination.

In the jungle they would collect fruits and berries to satisfy their hunger. When in some village, they would do manual labour to earn their living. Thus stopping here and there, one day they arrived near the city of Ujjaini.

Prime minister Dhanya Kumar was coming out of the town for an excursion in the jungle. He was adorned with ornaments and a crown and was riding a horse. When he saw from a distance a group of eight walking toward the city, he stopped his horse and thought, “Four men and four women, a family of eight, and every one of them appears to be exhausted with hunger and hardship of a long tiresome travel. . . .”

And they arrived near Dhanna. He immediately recognized the family. He got down from the horse and fell



at the feet of his father. Plagued by sorrows Dhansaar was not his normal self. Besides this, Dhanna was in his regal attire, how could he recognize his lost son. He said—"Noble man ! Why are you giving us this uncalled for honour?"

Dhanna, "Father ! Don't you recognize me? I am your son Dhanna."

The Bhabhis exclaimed, "Our darling Devar, Dhanna !"

The mother complained, "Son Dhanna ! Why did you leave your ill-fated mother alone?"

Dhanna paid them due respect, greeted them, and said, "I will tell you everything when we reach home. Please sit down here and let me make arrangements to take you home with due honour."

Dhanna returned to the town and bought dresses and ornaments for every member of his family. He instructed his subordinates—"My family has come from out-station to meet me. I will go and wait with them just outside the town. In the meantime you should make arrangements to receive them with state honour and come there with guards, elephants, horses and palanquins."

Dhanna rushed back and before the reception committee could arrive asked his parents and others to change their attires. With all state honour and pomp and show the family of prime minister Dhanya Kumar entered the city. They all stayed with Dhanna in his palace and lived happily.

When a man starts talking about his miseries lightly it becomes evident that he is happy. Dhansaar and Dhanna now discussed the past incidents. Dhansaar told all that happened to the family after he left. Dhanna also related his own experiences.

Dhanna showed his father the five gems he had recovered from the thigh of the corpse. Dhansaar was an old and experienced merchant of Pratishtanpur and he

knew about such priceless gems. He took the gems in his hands and said, "Son ! These gems are so costly, they are worth more than five times the wealth King Jitshatru has taken from us. Dhanna ! you are very lucky." Dhanna humbly replied, "Father ! This is nothing but the fruit of your blessings."

Dhanna's brothers also came to know about the story of the five gems. Before this they felt a little ashamed by seeing the honour and grandeur commanded by Dhanna as well as by the treatment he gave them in spite of their evil doings. They also got no chance to comment about Dhanna, because they would not discuss his virtues and they had no opportunity to find any shortcomings. Now they got the chance. They all complained to their father—

"So, this is why your beloved son eloped in the night. Is it possible to find such gems in the thigh of a corpse? This is an unbelievable fabrication. The truth is that we three worked hard all our life and you purchased these gems out of our earnings. Dhanna absconded with these gems. These are not his property but our family wealth. We want our share. If you do not give us willingly we shall make the matter public. You will lose your respect and Dhanna will lose his ministerial post."

Dhansaar panicked. Although there was no use trying to change their mind, he could at least say this much, "He left the urn full of gold found by him while tilling. Impressed by his charitable feelings the farmer and the king too did not touch the wealth. As a result it was spent in founding a village that was named Dhanpur. How can you believe that such a charitable and detached Dhanna could steal the family jewels. I have nothing to say about your evil thoughts. Beware that as you sow so shall you reap."

The Bhabhis told Dhanna about the impending dispute for division of the gems.

Dhanna resolved, "Why just the division of the gems. I will give all the five gems as well as the wealth I have earned as a minister. As I left the post of Nagar Seth and Pratishtanpur so shall I leave the prime ministership and the Ujjaini city. I will be happy to give all the wealth to my brothers. If I have performed some pious karmas in my past life I will again earn wealth and grandeur." With these thoughts Dhanna left Ujjaini exactly as he had left Pratishtanpur. He started covering distance without deciding about a destination.

After a long and hard trip Dhanna arrived in Varanasi. He thought of spending a few days in this religious town. A place and its atmosphere also influence human attitude. This town situated on the banks of the holy Ganges was a center of a variety of religious activities including penance and meditation. Dhanna also was inspired to sit on the banks of the Ganges and do penance and meditation.

Finding a suitable and peaceful spot on the bank Dhanna sat down to meditate. He focussed all his attention on the image of the Tirthankar and started chanting the Namokar Mahamantra. Impressed by the devotion and concentration of Dhanna goddess Ganges appeared in the form of a beautiful young damsel. This attractive young lady said to Dhanna—

"O Ascetic ! Open your eyes and look at me. Attracted by your handsome and youthful personality a divine beauty like me, who is even beyond the reach of gods, is waiting here to marry you. Why are you wasting your divinely handsome body and youth in these ascetic practices?"

Dhanna opened his eyes and replied, "Mother ! It is a sin for me even to hear the words you have uttered. All women other than my spouse are like mother or sister to me. If there is any thing you want me to do, this humble son of yours is ready."

The goddess was pleased at this upright conduct of Dhanna. She was testing Dhanna and he had passed with

flying colours. The goddess said, "Son ! This bank of mine is honoured with the presence of pious souls like you. Blessed is your family and blessed is your Guru. Son ! Take this wish-fulfilling gem (Chintamani) as a reward from me. Any and all of your wishes will be fulfilled by this gem at once, no matter how simple, complex, easy, or hard they are." The goddess disappeared. Dhanna kept the gem safe with him and resumed his journey.



( 2 )

In Bharatkhand there was a state named Magadh (modern Bihar). During that period King Shrenik was the ruler of this state and his capital was Rajagriha. Shrenik was a religious and benevolent king and was respected by many other rulers. The fame of his grandeur and valour had spread far and wide. His palace was divinely resplendent with the scintillating presence of his numerous beautiful queens including Nanda, Chelna, and Dharini. His assembly hall was like the assembly hall of Indra, the king of gods.

Among his many sons, Abhay Kumar was the abode of virtues and an ocean of wisdom. Abhay Kumar was not simply his son, he was also the glorious prime minister of the state. Both the king and the public took pride in having such an illustrious and able prime minister. In fact, Abhay Kumar was the embodiment of the glory of the city of Rajagriha, the state of Magadh, and the kingdom of Shrenik.

Rajagriha was a town of merchants. Great and respected millionaires and billionaires lived there. Famous merchants like Kusumpal and Gobhadra were the symbols of affluence of Rajagriha. The name of the wife of Nagar Seth Kusumpal was Kusum Mala. The couple had an enchantingly beautiful daughter named Kusumshri.

Kusumpal owned a garden just outside Rajagriha. This garden had numerous ponds and pools and was filled with a variety of trees, creepers, and thickets. However, it was lifeless like a corpse. It had trees, but they were dry and without leaves. It had creepers, but they were devoid of the green and looked like strands of rope. It had ponds and pools, but without even a drop of water. The noise of birds and bumbling of bees were things of the past. A deathly silence had replaced the soothing peace of that garden.

Camping at many a places, Dhanna finally arrived near Rajagriha. When he was near the aforementioned garden he decided to spend the night there and enter the town only in the morning. He entered Kusumpal's garden and sat down under a tree. Looking at the miserable condition of the garden he thought—"How nice it would be if this garden was green and lively, if the branches of the trees were heavy with leaves, flowers and fruits, if birds were chirping, and if the ponds and pools were full of water. What a beautiful garden, but there is hardly any greenery to be seen." With these thoughts Dhanna went to sleep.

Dhanna's thoughts activated the Chintamani and that in turn had its effect on the garden. During the night the garden was transformed. The trees and creepers turned green and lively with colourful flowers. Bumble-bees hovered over flowers. The pale lawns turned green with carpets of grass. At the dawn the musical noise of chirping birds awoke Dhanna. The garden looked as if it was ready to welcome the rising sun.

As soon as Dhanna opened his eyes he was surprised to see the pleasant change. He looked all around and thought—"Is it a dream or some magical illusion?" But slowly it dawned on him that nothing was impossible for the resident power of the Chintamani he had.

Kusumpal's garden was along the main highway. People going away from the city used this road. Those who went for a morning walk also used this road. In the morning

when these pedestrians saw the transformed garden they were surprised and thought that they had lost their way. They came near and looked carefully to ascertain that it was the same Kusumpal's garden.

The moment they stepped in to satisfy their curiosity they saw Dhanna sitting in meditation under a tree. They thought that the transformation of the garden must have been caused by the divine influence of this pious soul who presumably had stayed for the night in this garden. And they send the news to Kusumpal.

The moment Kusumpal heard of the news he boarded his chariot and rushed to the garden. He warmly welcomed Dhanna, "Some pious karmas earned during my earlier births seem to have come into action and that has resulted in your arrival in this garden. O religious and pious soul ! I am at a loss to find words to welcome you. Now be kind enough to come with me and bless my cottage with your presence."

With all humility Dhanna replied, "Sir ! It is the influence of Dharma, I have no hand in transformation of this garden. Dharma begets everything."

One of the onlookers commented, "A religious person never claims credit for a good deed. This shows the humility of great souls that they always do good to people but give the credit to others."

Dhanna joined Kusumpal on the chariot and went to his palace. The merchant offered all hospitality to Dhanna with respect and affection. The host and the guest both spent the days happily. One day the merchant's wife told him, "You have been searching far and near for a suitable match for our daughter, Kusumshri, but in vain. It appears that our luck has directed a suitable boy to come to our household of his own accord. Where shall we find one better than he?"

The Merchant, "Darling ! you have stolen words from my mouth. You have uttered the words I was just thinking about. It is true that we cannot find such suitable, handsome, healthy, and virtuous match for Kusumshri even if we search. Find out about the views of our daughter in this regard. In the mean time I shall consult some friends and relatives."

As is said, marriages are made in heaven, Kusumshri was also thinking that how happy she would be if her father married her to this young man. When her mother asked, she looked down shyly. Modesty is the priceless embellishment of Indian women. By remaining silent, Kusumshri gave her consent.

Everyone whom Kusumpal consulted happily supported him in his decision. At last the merchant gave his proposal to Dhanna. The young man replied, "You do not know anything about my family and clan. Without having complete knowledge about me how can you consider me suitable for your daughter?"

Kusumpal, "The behavior and conduct of a person automatically reveals the identity of his clan and family. It is unthinkable that my daughter would encounter any misery with the youth who has the capacity to turn a forest into an abode of joy."

Dhanna gave his consent and the merchant fixed the date and time of marriage. Preparation for the marriage ceremony started. Finding an opportune moment Dhanna asked the merchant, "Sir ! I would beg your leave now. I have also to make arrangements to decorate my house as also those required for the marriage procession."

The merchant was surprised. However, he contained his feeling and asked, "Why do you have to do anything? I will make all the necessary arrangements for both the sides. Please clarify what you want to say."

Dhanna, "I will do all of the functions that are my responsibility at my palace. By your grace I have all I need. However, if I still need anything I shall certainly seek your favour. After marriage the bride has to live with her husband in his house. It is not that the bridegroom goes and lives at the bride's place."

The merchant agreed, "Sure, son ! do as you deem fit. Why should I have any objection?"

Dhanna went outside the town and selected a suitable expanse of land having good surroundings. He sat down there and wished—"I should have a divinely beautiful palace, fully furnished and with lawns. I should also have servants, chariots, elephants, horses, weapons, wardrobes full of clothing and ornaments and all that is required in a rich man's household." The Chintamani was activated and all that Dhanna wished for, immediately materialized.

This became the only palace of its kind in Rajagriha. The whinnying of horses and trumpeting of elephants in the stable revealed the prosperity of Dhanna. A row of chariots were parked on one side. Servants were running around doing various household errands. Maids were singing auspicious songs.

On the date of the marriage, Dhanna's marriage procession started from his palace with all the grandeur befitting a rich merchant. King Shrenik and prince Abhay Kumar also joined the procession. Dressed as a bridegroom, Dhanna was riding a beautiful horse. When the procession reached merchant Kusumpal's palace he came out with his relatives to welcome the marriage party. After a hearty welcome the marriage ceremony was conducted with a great display of joy and festivities. According to his status Kusumpal presented heaps of gifts to the new couple and gave them a touching send off. Dhanna returned to his palace with his newly wedded wife and after all necessary ceremonies commenced his married life with Kusumshri happily.



One day Dhanna thought, "I have enough wealth to lead a happy and luxurious life, but still one should follow the ways of the world. A man does not enjoy goodwill and prestige without a business or other commercial activity." And he decided to start some business in Rajagriha. But man proposes and God disposes. Dhanna was no exception to the well known rule of the fate that what is lotted cannot be blotted.



Chandpradyot, the king of Ujjaini, one day attacked Rajagriha. He lay a siege around Rajagriha with his four pronged army of elephant, horse, chariot, and foot soldier battalions. In times of need war becomes the duty of the state. As a matter of honour no country or king surrenders to, or compromises with, the attacking army. King Shrenik was a warrior. He could not remain silent to a challenge. He ordered his warriors to prepare for the war thrust upon him. But at the same time he also asked his able son and prime minister—

"No matter who comes out victorious, the consequences of a war, violence, destruction, and bloodshed, are a blot on humanity. Abhay ! If Chandpradyot returns without a war it would benefit both sides as well as the human race. Is there no way that the snake can be killed with the stick remaining intact?"

Abhay Kumar, "Sire ! Chandpradyot has a large and experienced army. Still, he could be defeated by intrigue. An army is not what is required to defeat a vain and lusty person. Kindly leave this job to me and rest assured."

Abhay Kumar made a plan and accordingly arranged, stealthily, through his spies, to bury gold, gems and jewels around the camps of various commanders of Chandpradyot's army. After this he arranged to get a secret letter, presumably from a well wisher, delivered to Chandpradyot. The letter carried the following message—

"Great and glorious king of Ujjaini ! All the commanders of your army have joined hands with King Shrenik. King Shrenik has bought their allegiance by paying enough wealth to each one of them. When the war starts most of your army will not fight for you. It is not surprising, because we all know that greed makes foes out of friends. If you want proof of this statement you may send your spies to dig secretly outside their camps. The advance payment these commanders have taken has been buried out and around their respective camps. The balance amount will be paid to them after they do as they are told. Kindly keep this message secret as otherwise they will remove the evidence against them."

When Chandpradyot read this letter he lost his temper. Without doing much thinking he sent his spies to confirm about the buried wealth around the camps of his commanders. No doubt remained in his mind about the treachery of his commanders. He thought that it would be best for him to return to his capital secretly as he did not dare take any action against the commanders here on the battlefield. Accordingly he secretly returned to Ujjaini the same night.

In the morning the commanders were surprised not to find their king. They searched for him in vain and then waited for his return for a little while. When he still did not return they decided that without the king they could hardly fight a war? They failed to understand why the king declared the war and brought the army all the way to Rajagriha. They broke camp and started for Ujjaini.

When the army reached Ujjaini the confused commander-in-chief complained to the king, "Sire ! When you did not want to fight the war, what was the need to march such a large army all the way to Rajagriha. Kindly tell us what made you return all of a sudden and that too without informing us?"

The king, "I did not want to be a prisoner of my own soldiers and get insulted before King Shrenik. In your greed for wealth you had joined hands with King Shrenik. What a treachery."

Now the general understood everything. He explained, "Sire ! It is not as you have been made to believe. It appears to be the work of that crafty prince Abhay Kumar. His clever stratagem is commendable. He won the war without shedding even a drop of blood. Believe me sire, each one of us is still ready to die for our land and our king."

The king, "Is it so? Was I duped? Was it a trick? Then let us avenge it by trick only. Think of some plan to capture Abhay Kumar and bring him to Ujjaini as a prisoner."

The general, "Sire ! Abhay's wisdom surprises even Vrihaspati, the guru of the gods. He can never be captured by cunning. However, he is a devout Shravak and, as such, *he can be captured by some conspiracy in the name of religion.* You should announce a reward for his capture. Someone in the city is sure to accept the challenge."

King Chandpradyot declared, "A prize of one lac gold coins will be awarded to the person who brings prince Abhay Kumar of Rajagriha here as a prisoner."

A courtesan from Ujjaini took up the challenge. When she presented her plan she was given enough cash from the king's treasury to cover her expenses. She took along a few other women of mixed ages. They all were dressed as Shravikas. The courtesan herself assumed the role of their leader. She reached Rajagriha with her group.

This group started regularly visiting religious places and attending to discourses of ascetics. In due course the news that an ideal Shravika was in town with her group reached Abhay Kumar also. One day he met her at one of the discourses and had religious discussions with her.

When Abhay Kumar asked for her introduction she informed that her name was Kusumlata, that she hailed from Champapur city, and was following the path shown by the Jina for spiritual uplift.

Abhay Kumar invited her for lunch and she reluctantly accepted. Next day she went to Abhay Kumar's place for lunch with her group. After the meal she invited Abhay Kumar, "We follow the same religion and the same path. As a co-religionist I invite you to lunch at my place of stay. It is beyond me to offer such rich food as has been served by you. However, if you will take the humble meal I can provide, it would give me intense pleasure and satisfaction."

How could Abhay Kumar refuse this affectionate invitation? Next day he came to the Shravika's place. They all took their meal together. There was nothing to be cautious about. But the cold-drink that was offered to Abhay Kumar, afterwards, was drugged. As soon as Abhay Kumar drank it he became unconscious.

As already planned, Abhay Kumar was immediately carried to a chariot. The courtesan brought the victim to Ujjaini. Prisoner Abhay Kumar was produced before King Chandpradyot. The king ridiculed, "That day I was taken for a ride, and today you, Abhay Kumar. Tides turn, sometimes the boat is on the cart and at others the cart on the boat."

Abhay Kumar, "According to the protocol I should offer you my respects. But I will never do that now. You have made fun of religion; you have insulted religion; I have been deceived employing religion as a ruse. Were you left with no other alternative? I will live happily with my aunt here (King Chandpradyot's wife was a sister of Abhay Kumar's mother). For me Ujjaini is the same as Rajagriha. A king is known as the protector-of-religion, but you have debased this term."

King Chandpradyot was silent. He had no answer to Abhay's accusation. However, at the moment Abhay Kumar was under his control.



For King Shrenik, kidnapping of Abhay was a great shock. It was as if he had lost one of his arms. Indeed, the prime minister is a king's arm. He was worried about how the state would be run efficiently. However, he had great faith in Abhay's wisdom. He was confident that wherever he was he would perform miracles.

One day King Shrenik's favourite elephant, Sechanak, went out of control. It started running wild. With fearful trumpeting it would hit a tree and fell it. It picked up whoever or whatever was in its way and tossed it in the sky. The town was panic stricken. King Shrenik was worried—"If this mad elephant is not brought under control soon, it will create havoc. How can one kill such a beautiful elephant. Had Abhay Kumar been here he could certainly have done something." At last the king declared that whoever subdues this mad elephant will be amply rewarded and honoured.

Dhanna also heard this announcement. Dhanna was a master of the art of bringing elephants under control. He decided to display his proficiency that day. He approached the elephant and attracted its attention. From a safe distance he further irritated it so that it rushed toward him. Taking evasive steps with great agility Dhanna ran ahead and the elephant followed. He changed his straight sprint to a circular wiggle and after a distance quickly switched back to a straight run.

After some time the elephant started getting tired. Its speed and movements became slow. Gradually it calmed down and the intoxication of the seasonal heat was reduced to controllable limits. It stopped near a large tree and started rubbing its flanks with the tree trunk. Seeing the

opportunity Dhanna climbed that tree with an elephant-lance in his hand and dropped down on the shoulders of the elephant. The giant animal started running but the fatigue and absence of maddening excitement became evident in its staggering movements. Dhanna used the lance and removed any remaining trace of madness.

Later he rode the elephant to its yard and asked the attendants to chain it without any fear. Everyone was surprised. It became talk of the town that Dhanya Kumar, the son-in-law of merchant Kusumpal, had subdued mad Sechanak single handed. How brave is the son of a merchant."

King Shrenik embraced Dhanna and thought, "I have found a second Abhay Kumar, as a son and also as a minister. Why not marry my daughter Soma to the brave, valourous, religious, and intelligent young man and make him my son-in-law?"

The king honoured Dhanya Kumar with heaps of wealth and awarded him a land grant of one thousand villages. He also appointed him as a minister in his court. After all this he called Dhanna in his chamber and expressed his desire, "Son Dhanya Kumar ! Since you have joined my court you have almost filled the void created by the absence of Abhay. As did Abhay, you have given ample evidence of your wisdom and expertise of state craft by solving many complex problems of the state. I want to make you a member of the family by marrying my daughter to you. My queens, other members of my family, all my minister and my daughter Soma have given their consent to this proposal. I only wait for your consent now."

Dhanna replied, "Sire ! It is my good luck that you love me like prince Abhay Kumar. I am greatly honoured. However, I am already married. Your Nagar Seth Kusumpal is my father-in-law."

The king, "I am aware that Kusumpal's daughter Kusumshri is your wife. But a brave and wealthy

individual like you can have many wives. Soma will live with Kusumshri as her younger sister.”

Dhanna accepted the proposal. With regal pomp and show Dhanna became the son-in-law of the king. Besides the already awarded land grant, the king also gave numerous chariots, horses, elephants, slaves, maids, and wealth to Dhanna on this occasion.

With Kusumshri and Soma, Dhanna led a happy and luxurious life. However, in spite of having a wish-fulfilling gem he did not just vegetate. He sincerely attended to his duties of giving advice to the king and other people facing any problems. After this he utilized his free time in studies and religious practices. To remain busy is the first quality of a pioneer.

Dhanna was living happily with his two wives. Nobody knows what is in store for him in the future. How could Dhanna know that he was yet to marry six more times. Of these, his third marriage was going to be the source of the most revolutionary turn of his life. It was to be with Subhadra the daughter of merchant Gobhadra and sister of Shalibhadra of Rajagriha. So the story of Shalibhadra makes an essential part of the later life of Dhanna.

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### ( 3 )

In Rajagriha lived a devout merchant named Gobhadra. The name of his beautiful and virtuous wife was Bhadra. She gave birth to a son. When pregnant she saw in her dream a farm with standing and ripe crop of paddy grain (Shali) and thus the new born was named Shalibhadra.

The merchant was affluent by all standards and so child Shalibhadra was brought up in all luxury and comfort. In due course he was sent to a Guru and there he acquired knowledge of all subjects, arts and crafts. When

he came of age he was married to thirty two beautiful girls from merchant families. He lead a life full of luxuries and comforts.

Shalibhadra had a younger sister named Subhadra. Even after all efforts a suitable match for her could not be found. This was the only worry merchant Gobhadra had.



A one-eyed con-man thought that as prince Abhay Kumar is not in Rajagriha he could have a field day in the town filled with rich merchants. With his expertise in the art of swindling it was possible to make a getaway with millions of rupees. Accordingly he planned and made his first attempt. He took five of his accomplices and went to merchant Gobhadra. The merchant was sitting in his office. The swindler warmly approached Gobhadra as if he was an old acquaintance, and after niceties came to business. He took out a bag full of coins and said, "Friend ! Here is the amount, one lac gold coins, that I took from you. Please accept this and return my eyeball that I had left with you as security."

Gobhadra was stunned to hear this strange demand of the swindler, he said, "There is no pawn broker in Rajagriha who takes eyeballs as security. I have yet to hear of pawning of eyeballs anywhere in this world. Go away and find some other place for your con-game."

The one-eyed swindler displayed his anger, "I have with me these five witnesses. You had taken my eyeball as security in their presence and given me one lac golds. You will have to return my eyeball otherwise I will claim compensation."

The matter finally reached the king's court. Hearing the case and evidences the king was also at a loss to come to some conclusion. He thought that in absence of Abhay Kumar such cheats are having a field day. Dhanna was also



present there. He intervened, "Please do not be disheartened. If you had given your eyeball you will certainly get it back. Let me check the account books of merchant Gobhadra. Please come back tomorrow."

Next day the swindler came to the court punctually with his five witnesses. Everyone including the king was eager to hear what Dhanna had to say. When Gobhadra also arrived the proceedings started. Dhanna addressed the swindler—

"I have checked the account books as well as the stocks of pawned goods lying with merchant Gobhadra. Your eyeball must be there according to the books but there is a little problem and only you can solve it. There are many pawned eyeballs there and your eyeball has been mixed with the lot. I have ordered Gobhadra to compare the lot of eyeballs lying with him with your eyeball and find the matching one to return to you. Now to help the king do justice you have to take out the one eyeball you have and give it to me to facilitate this matching. I know there is a little inconvenience involved for a short period, but for you it should be a child's play as you have already done it in the past. Come on, give me your other eyeball, I will personally supervise the matching."

The swindler was stunned. He was caught in his own web. When he thought of the consequences of becoming blind he went on his knees and pleaded to be pardoned.

Dhanna's presence of mind and wisdom impressed everyone in the court including Gobhadra. He thought, "Where would I get a better match for Subhadra." He called Dhanna to his house. Bhadra and Subhadra also gave their consent. In due course Subhadra was married to Dhanna. Now Dhanna was sharing his comforts and pleasures with three wives.

One day Dhanya Kumar was coming out of the town for an excursion in the jungle. As had happened in Ujjaini, here too he saw from a distance a group of eight people

walking toward the city. He reined his horse and thought—“Four men and four women, a family of eight, and every one of them appears to be exhausted due to hunger and hardships of a long travel....”

And just then they arrived near Dhanna. He immediately recognized the family. He got down from the horse and fell at the feet of his father. After facing so many hardships Dhansaar was not his normal self. He did not recognize his lost son. When Dhanna introduced himself the old man could no more contain himself and started crying. His Bhabhis and mother too broke down. This time his evil brothers also embraced him.

Dhanna paid them due respect, greeted them, and with due honour took them home. His three wives, Kusumshri, Soma, and Subhadra touched the feet of all elders and got their blessings. The pleasures and comforts of the present made them forget the sorrows of the past. Dhanna's wives came to know about the past from their parents-in-law.

One day Dhanna asked his father, “Father ! You had no problems in Ujjaini. I had left all my wealth and the five gems with you. How come you reached this desperate condition?”

Dhansaar, “Son ! the ways of fate are strange and all-powerful. When one is out of luck, the gold in hand turns to dust and trickles out even through closed fingers. When you left Ujjaini everyone asked us where and why had you gone. I tried to conceal the facts but with passage of time every one came to know that Dhanna had left town because of the aversion of his three brothers. All the king's courtiers as well as the common people started hating us and looking down upon us.

“Filled with shame, we could not even show our faces. Therefore, one night we collected all our movable wealth including the five gems and left Ujjaini. On the way we were robbed of every thing we had. Earning our living by

doing manual labour on our way, we somehow reached the outskirts of Rajagriha. Fortune smiled on us here and you found us.”

Dhanna gave one hundred villages each to his three brothers and they lived happily with their respective wives in separate houses. They had to do nothing to earn their living. The villages given by Dhanna provided them with enough income. Dhansaar and Shilvati lived with Dhanna and his three wives looked after them with all devotion and respect.

Those with jealous and distorted attitude always wish to harm others without even thinking about the harm that comes to them as a consequence. Vibhishan and Mandodari tried their best to dissuade Ravan but his perversion destroyed him in the end. Shrikrishna pleaded for peace but roguish Duryodhan did not agree and was destroyed with all his ninety-nine brothers.

The thoughts of Dhanna's brothers were also contaminated with the poison of jealousy. Day and night they were tormented by the fire of envy burning inside them. A rogue always repays favours by evil doings. A snake turns milk into venom.

In trying to harm Dhanna his jealous brothers always ended up in harming themselves. They heard that Dhanna had transformed a dry and dilapidated garden into a beautiful green one. He had also become wealthy overnight and got palace, horses, elephants, slaves and what not. What was the secret of Dhanna's wealth?—this question haunted them.

One day they approached their father and asked, “Father ! Without any apparent effort how does Dhanna get all the things that are hard to get for gods too? We are sure you know the secret. Please tell us so that we can also be benefitted. After all we are also your sons.”

Dhansaar, "I do not know anything. I never even tried to find out. We are concerned with the benefits, not how he avails them."

"Then father ! please ask Dhanna and let us know."

Dhanna revealed the secret of the Chintamani to his father and simple minded Dhansaar, in turn, told it to his three other sons. He never anticipated that they would turn the information into venom. They blamed their father—

"We are sure that it was you who had given this Chintamani to your favourite son. He became successful in Pratishthanpur solely due to the influence of this gem. He then fled with this and the other five gems. In Ujjaini he cunningly left the five gems but again fled with the most valuable of the gifts given by you. Please ask him to give the Chintamani to us otherwise we will use some other means to get it. Please know that you have always favoured Dhanna."

Dhansaar, "Idiots ! I never had any gems nor the Chintamani. Dhanna has got everything due to his luck and efforts. You have lost the gems you had taken from him. You will lose the Chintamani also if you get it. Know that divine things never remain with the evil. Do you again want to become destitute? I fail to understand how can you forget the obligations of Dhanna who has changed your life by giving you one hundred villages each. Never think of harming those who have favoured you."

"We are dependent on the favours of Dhanna. Even birds are better than us; they are free and not dependent on anyone. Since the Chintamani has left our home we have become poor. Why should we remain dependant on Dhanna when we can have our ancestral Chintamani."

Their wives also reproached them. When Dhanna heard of this he thought, "This time also I should leave. But things have changed. Then I was alone, but now I have

three wives dependant on me. However, all my three fathers-in-law are wealthy and powerful. Even king Shrenik's daughter is my wife. I should not worry. Their respective fathers will look after my wives. If I still have some pious karmas from earlier life left I will regain everything." And during the night Dhanna once again moved on.



Stopping at many places on the way Dhanna finally reached Kaushambi, the capital city of Kacch. Shatanik, the son of Sahasranik, was the king there. King Shatanik's wife, queen Mrigavati, was the daughter of king Chetak of Vaishali. She was not only beautiful but also the abode of virtues and qualities. The royal couple had an able son Udayan and a beautiful daughter Saubhagyamanjari. Udayan was a famous and accomplished Veena (a musical instrument like Sitar) player. Even gods of music, Gandharvas, loved the music he played.

The royal family of Kaushambi was upright, religious, benevolent and cultured. The king had a treasury with a special vault full of gems. Among these gems was a priceless piece known as Sahasrakiran. For many generations this unique gem was treasured and worshipped by Shatanik's family. The name and true value of this unique and rare gem were still unknown.

One day king Shatanik invited all the jewellers and gemmologists in the city and showed the gem to them. Every one of them was impressed by the divine glow, clarity, brilliance and other properties, but no one could do its valuation, nor could they describe its hidden properties and effects. They could not even tell its name. After detailed examination and mutual consultation they all came to a unanimous conclusion—"We have never seen such a gem. It seems to be of divine origin. Only someone with divine eyes can tell about all its properties and estimate its value."

This answer disappointed Shatanik and he made an announcement—"Whoever will tell me everything about this gem will be awarded five hundred villages, five hundred elephants, horses, and chariots each. Besides this I will marry my daughter Saubhagyamanjari to him."

When Dhanna left all his wealth and departed from Rajagriha he only took the Chintamani with him. The reason for this was that it was a divine gift and to give it or abandon it was an insult to the giving deity. Such gifts always remain with the pious awardee. The moment they come in possession of an evil person who is not the rightful owner, they immediately return to the deity.

Dhanna was living in Kaushambi and thanks to the power of the Chintamani, he had everything he needed including a beautiful house with servants and all. When he came to know of the announcement by king Shatanik he went to the king's court. He had learned all the seventy two subjects. He had also studied a voluminous and exhaustive book on gemmology, "*Ratna Pariksha*", in detail, and learned all about gems mentioned in that book. He was confident of his knowledge on the subject.

When he reached the court he asked the king, "Please show me that unique gem. I would like to examine it." All the courtiers were surprised. The king looked doubtfully at Dhanna. Nobody could believe that this young foreigner could know about such a rare gem.

The king asked Dhanna, "Young man ! Do you really know something about gems and have experience enough to examine such a rare gem? Many famous and big jewelers, who have been in this trade for generations, could not tell anything about this divine gem. I am sure you are aware of this fact."

Dhanna replied, "Sire ! All the physical and other properties of all the gems available on this earth are mentioned in the scriptures. Thus, for me it is very easy to

tell everything about your gem. Irrespective of his family being in the trade for many generations, a jeweller who has not studied the book *Ratna Pariksha* will fail to test or to tell anything about divine gems.”

Shatanik, “Then tell me something about gems, because I would like to show the gem only to the qualified and deserving. I have been uselessly wasting my time showing it to everyone who approached me.”

Dhanna, “Revered king ! Diamond, blue sapphire, pearl, ruby, and emerald are the five primary gems. Yellow sapphire, cats-eye, coral, and cinnamon are the four secondary gems. These nine gems are related to nine astrological planets. The planets and their gems are—the sun - ruby, the moon - pearl, Mars - coral, Neptune - emerald, Jupiter - yellow sapphire, Venus - diamond, Saturn - blue sapphire, Rahu - cinnamon, and Ketu - cats-eye. Besides these there are four classes of decorative gems—Suryakant, Shashikant, Kantjal, and Hansagarbh. In the scriptures there is mention of sixty categories and sub-categories of gems.”

This little display of classic knowledge about gems by Dhanna captivated king Shatanik. He now turned curious. At every opportunity knowledge should be taken from the wise. Thinking thus he asked, “Tell me something about the Chintamani.”

Dhanna, “The weight of the Chintamani is approximately 51 grams. Brilliant as diamond this gem has three distinct lines. All miseries and problems of the person who possesses it are solved with its influence. I would now request you to show your gem. I will examine it and tell its name, properties and effects, to your entire satisfaction.”

The king took out the gem and gave it to Dhanna. He examined it carefully. After looking for and checking all the signs of this gem as mentioned in the ancient book he was satisfied that it was the Sahasrakiran Mani. Then only he said to the king—

“Sire ! Now I will tell you all about this gem. As mentioned in the classical literature the name of this gem is Sahasrakiran Mani. It has many similarities to the Chintamani.”

After detailing the properties of the gem Dhanna said, “Now I will tell you about its effects. The king who possesses this gem cannot be conquered in war. Wherever this gem is, it does not allow ghosts, evil spirits or lower gods to create any torments or hallucinations. The water in which it is washed acts as medicine and cures all diseases. When kept near a pregnant woman it removes all problems and pains of child-birth. This Sahasrakiran Mani, the provider of happiness, peace, fame, and wealth, is priceless; it is impossible for anyone to do its valuation.”

Impressed by the information provided by Dhanna the king said, “Can you give some demonstration which may help us believe all what you have said about this gem?”

Dhanna, “Please arrange to get a large tray filled with rice grains. Put this gem in the tray at one end and keep it in the courtyard. As they usually do, pigeons and other birds will flock around the tray and try to pick the grains. But you will see that due to effect of this gem the birds will not be able to pick even one single grain of rice from this tray. If this happens you may believe all what I have said about the gem.”

King Shatanik arranged as he was told. A lot of birds arrived and they flocked around the tray; some of them even landed in the tray. They lowered their beaks but none of them could pick up a single grain. They just kept on moving around or standing. After some time the gem was picked up by the king. And, as by some magic, the birds started feeding at once. The king, made curious by this strange display, once again put down the gem in the tray. The birds immediately stopped feeding as if they became afraid of something.



Everyone present was astonished by this demonstration as well as by the profound knowledge and wisdom of Dhanna. After the demonstration Dhanna said, "Sire ! As these birds were afraid to approach the grains in presence of this gem so are the enemies of the person who possesses this gem, irrespective of whether they are humans or ghosts. You are uniquely fortunate that you possess this gem."

As a token of respect the king gave Dhanna a seat adjacent to his own. The king gave a land grant of five hundred villages and all other things according to his announcement. He also married his daughter, Saubhagyamanjari, to Dhanna.

This was the fourth marriage of Dhanna. He had left his other three wives in Rajagriha. In Kaushambi he lived happily with his fourth wife and enjoyed all regal grandeur and comforts.

Near Kaushambi Dhanna founded a beautiful village and named it Dhanpur. Attracted by the peaceful natural environment of the village, many a family migrated there. Everyone was happy and satisfied under the just rule of Dhanna. In the middle of the village Dhanna started the construction of a large pond. Its main purpose was to provide necessary facilities to the inhabitants as well as the beautification of the village. As a side benefit, the construction work also provided employment to many people.

Hearing the news of the construction of this large pond people from far and near started arriving there to seek employment. All who came, men or women, were put at such work as digging, transporting, laying, etc. The daily wage for male workers was two coins and that for female workers was one coin. Besides this they were also provided meals twice a day. The children of these workers were not allowed to work. However, they were provided facilities to study, play and eat.

This was the second Dhanpur. The first was founded when Dhanna had refused to take the urn filled with gold coins he found buried in a farm. This second one was founded by Dhanna himself out of his own earnings. Such pious persons as Dhanna earn wealth with their own efforts and spend it for social welfare. There are numerous villages and towns founded by such benevolent individuals in this world.



( 4 )

In Rajagriha, the morning after Dhanna left, when the three wives of Dhanna went to his bed chamber to say good morning they found that Dhanna was not there and the bed was not slept in. They called his name and searched around in the bedroom as well as other adjacent rooms.

When they did not find him anywhere in the house they informed Dhansaar. Dhanna's parents were shocked. They started crying with anguish and uttered—"Son ! This is the third time you have left us. How would we live without you. To us you were like a stick to the blind." Everyone in the family was shedding tears.

The news also reached the three brothers in their respective palaces. The three Bhabhis also started crying. How could they forget the favours Dhanna showered on them. When Dhansaar reproached his three sons they countered, "Why do you blame us, father. We did not say a word to Dhanna; we have been living away from him. We certainly put forward our rightful claim to the Chintamani but that too before you and not Dhanna. As before, he has again eloped with that priceless gem. You are blaming us for no reason at all."

Dhansaar, "Your baseless claim was what forced him to leave the house. He wanted to avoid strife in the family which would have made our family a laughing stock. And

how could he leave the gem that was gifted to him by a deity? You have always been ungrateful. Every time he did some favour, you forgot. Now enjoy what he has left for you here. I will search for him and rest only when I find him."

The news of Dhanna's departure from Rajagriha spread like wild fire in the town. Every one knew all about his jealous brothers. King Shrenik was very sad. He was lost in his thoughts, "What a pity, the son-in-law who fulfilled the place of Abhay Kumar has also left me. How would I manage the affairs of the state single handed?" Kusumpal and Gaubhadra also shared the sorrow of their daughters.

The inhabitants of Rajagriha started hating Dhansaar's family, and so he decided to leave the town. He called all the three wives of Dhanna and said, "Daughters ! I am going away in search of Dhanna. In the absence of her husband a woman finds protection at her father's house only. The fathers of each one of you are wealthy and capable of looking after you. Therefore, until I return with Dhanna you should live with your respective fathers."

Kusumshri and Soma took Dhansaar's advise as command and said, "Father ! We will do as you say and live at our parents' homes devoting our time to religious activities. We shall await the arrival of our husband with you. May you succeed in your mission."

Gaubhadra's daughter, Subhadra, who was silent till now came forward and said, "Father ! I am accompanying you in your search for my husband. Serving the in-laws is my duty, my religion, and also my good fortune. Did Sita not have her parental home? She still went with her husband in exile. I will look after you and also search for my husband along with you."

Dhansaar could not refuse persistent Subhadra. Envisaging the problems of carrying large amounts of cash Dhansaar took only a bare minimum of wealth with him. He left Rajagriha with eight other members of his family—

his wife, his three sons and their wives, and Subhadra. He started in the western direction and the males of the group worked whenever they came to some inhabited place.

They covered a long distance thus. One day when they were passing through a dense forest they were robbed of all their possessions. Dejected Dhansaar commented, "What a bad luck. Every time I move out on a long journey I am robbed and I lose all I have. What will we do now?"

Subhadra consoled him, "Father ! Please do not lose hope. We have the wealth of patience in plenty. We will win over all our hurdles with the help of this."

On day they heard that at some distance there is a village named Dhanpur. A large pond is being constructed there and the owner provides all facilities to the labourers. The group moved towards Dhanpur. When they reached the village they stopped under a tree to rest.

Subhadra went ahead to the site of work. She approached the manager to seek employment. The manager looked at her and thought, "She appears to be from an upper class family ravaged by time. Circumstances seem have forced her to seek manual labour." He asked, "Sister ! From where have you come? Who else is with you?"

Subhadra, "I have eight others with me. We are a family of four gents and five ladies. We are all looking for employment."

Manager, "You all will get work. The owner of this site has instructed us to give priority to people who come here from distant areas. Please get your names registered."

Subhadra gave fictitious names of all members of her family. The males were put to digging work and the females were employed in shifting the sand. All together they earned thirteen coins and ate their food at the mess provided by the management.

Subhadra took all the care of her mother-in-law and elder sisters-in-law with all sincerity and devotion.

The construction work was proceeding fast with the help of a hard working and efficient labour force and honest and sincere supervisors. All involved worked so hard that it appeared as if the pond will be filled with their sweat and no water would be needed. In spite of such efficient working staff Dhanna visited the site for inspection once in a while.

On one such visit when he was inspecting the site he suddenly saw his family working with the labour force. A wave of anguish hit him, "Every time I leave them, my old parents as well as my brothers and Bhabhis end up destitute and in such pitiable condition. Subhadra, the daughter of one of the richest merchants of Rajagriha, has also come with them. Kusumshri and Soma must have gone to live with their parents. But she has rejected all comfort and embraced all this suffering for me."

Dhanna thought further, "However, this time I shall not reveal my identity. This is a good opportunity to test Subhadra. Let me see how devoted she is?"

Next morning Dhanna formulated a plan so that without revealing his relations with this group he could relieve his father and mother from manual labour. He went to the site manager's temporary office and sat down. He asked the manager to call the head of this new group.

When Dhansaar came, without raising his head Dhanna gave instructions to the manager, "This old man and his wife can hardly do manual labour. Put them on supervisory duty. Let the old man be the leader of the male labourers, and the old lady that of the females."

Dhansaar could not recognize Dhanna. The manager allotted them supervisory work as instructed. The old couple praised Dhanna, "How considerate the merchant is. He has relieved us of the hard manual labour."

Next day Dhanna distributed cloths to the workers. He gave liberally to some and among them was this group. The manager seeing the opportunity said, "Sir ! This group has come from out-station. They have no place to live. Even during the night they sleep in the open."

Dhanna made arrangements for their living quarters and also told them to visit his residence without any hesitation if they needed something. He also told his wife to give what they needed with due respect. The guards and other servants were also instructed to allow them into the house whenever they came.

Dhansaar's family was happy to get all the facilities provided by Dhanna. Whatever they earned was their net saving. The three brothers of Dhanna commenced their day dreaming—Even in this new land we shall now be able to save a lot of money. We shall then start our own business and become respected merchants when we earn a lot of wealth.

One day Dhansaar sent his eldest daughter-in-law to Dhanna's place to get some butter-milk. She went and got plenty of good quality butter-milk. After that, every day by turn each daughter-in-law went to fetch butter-milk. Whenever she took her turn, Subhadra returned with curd and fresh butter instead of just butter-milk.

Saubhagyamanjari had natural affinity for Subhadra. She was unaware of the fact that Subhadra was one of the wives of her own husband and the favourite one. She treated Subhadra with great respect and affection, and often offered meals. Subhadra invariably refused saying, "You are a great merchant's wife and I am an ordinary labourer. Whenever I come, you give me curd and fresh butter. This favour is more than I deserve. It is my good fortune that you are so affectionate to me."

Observing this Dhansaar commented, "Subhadra is virtuous as well as lucky. Whenever she goes to the

merchant's house his wife gives her curd and fresh butter. The other ones simply get butter-milk."

This comment hurt the feelings of the three elder ones. With common female envy they remarked, "Subhadra is not as simple as you think. You should control her lest she gets out of hand and you lose a daughter-in-law as you have already lost a son."

These biting remarks from the three Bhabhis hurt Subhadra to the core. An upright and faithful woman cannot tolerate such slanderous comments on her character. She did not sleep a wink throughout that night. It was as if the words became sources of throbbing pain like thorns in the flesh.

Next morning it was Subhadra's turn to go for butter-milk. When Saubhagyamanjari saw Subhadra's haggard face she asked sympathetically, "Sister ! What is the matter, you look very sad today? Consider me your sister and tell me everything. By sharing, sorrow loses its edge and becomes tolerable."

Subhadra narrated the whole story, revealing her true identity and how she left Rajagriha and came here in search of her husband.

Saubhagyamanjari, "Sister ! Don't worry. Your unwavering faith and deep love for your husband will certainly lead you to him."

Dhanna was sitting in the adjacent room and hearing the conversation. In order to test Subhadra's fidelity he commented from behind the curtain, "Beautiful lady ! How can you be so sure that you will find your husband. Why are you letting your youth melt like a piece of ice? Come and live with me. I will fulfill all your desires."

For a moment Subhadra was taken aback by this unexpected behaviour of the man she considered to be the saviour of her family. The next moment she raised her

eyebrows and started trembling with anger. However, she controlled her bursting anger and said, "Merchant ! I never even dreamt that you could be such a debased hypocrite. If you feel you have obliged us by giving employment you may take back the wages you have paid. I do not need such job. You should be ashamed of uttering such words before a married woman." And Subhadra turned to leave.

Dhanna came out of his room and stood blocking her path. A faithful wife does not even look at strangers. Subhadra stopped and stood looking at her own toes. Dhanna softly said, "Darling Subhadra ! Look up, here is your lost husband. And this is my fourth wife Saubhagyamanjari."

Subhadra thought, "He sounds like my husband. He has called me by my real name, whereas I am registered in the roll call under an assumed name. However, I should make absolutely sure before taking a step further." She said, "If you are my husband tell the full story of your past."

Dhanna told the whole story without any hesitation. Having found her husband, Subhadra was overwhelmed with joy. She fell at the feet of her husband. Dhanna drew her into his embrace. Saubhagyamanjari saw all this and her eyes brimmed with tears of joy.

Saubhagyamanjari said, "You never told me that you have three more wives. Subhadra is not my rival, she is like my elder sister. What an auspicious day; a wife got her lost husband and I got an elder sister."

Dhanna said to Subhadra, "Darling ! By passing the test of your fidelity you have honoured me as well. Now you stay here. I will test my parents as well as my brothers and Bhabhis. After that I will bring them here. Like day and night, happiness and sorrow are also cyclic. The night of sorrows is over and the day of happiness has dawned."

Dhanna thought, "Now let me see how the other members of my family react to such a long absence of



Subhadra. It would be a test of the sincerity of their efforts to find Subhadra. Then only the separated members of the family will come together.”

At the camp Shilvati said to her husband, “Subhadra had gone to get butter-milk. She has not yet returned. Never before she took so much time. Please go and see what is the matter.”

Dhansaar, “You are unnecessarily getting worried. There may be so many reasons for a delay. It is possible that the churning of the curd was delayed and the merchant’s wife asked her to sit down with her and wait. She will come back. There is no harm in waiting a little longer.”

With further delay everyone got worried. Dhansaar and Shilvati were thinking, “Subhadra never ever looks into the eyes of an unknown man. Why has she not returned home today?” Dhansaar called his three other daughters-in-law and said, “You go regularly to the merchant’s house to fetch butter-milk. Please go and get Subhadra from there.”

They reacted sharply, “We warned you earlier that Subhadra is not as simple as she seems. When she brought curd and fresh butter from the merchant’s house you loved it. You never paid heed to our warning. We have no hesitation in saying that Subhadra has fallen from her grace.”

Dhansaar, “Even to think that about Subhadra is a sin. Her behaviour and conduct has been faultless. She has never given anyone an opportunity to think otherwise. You just go and bring her back with you.”

They left unwillingly and reached at the merchant’s residence. Dhanna was expecting someone from the family to come in search of Subhadra. He asked, “Please tell me what brings you here?”

“Sir ! Why act innocent? Why have you detained our sister-in-law at your house? Please allow her to go with us.”

"She has come back to whom she belongs. Now Subhadra will not go out of this mansion."

The three ladies were disconcerted at this reply from Dhanna. However they persisted, "Please give us an opportunity to talk to her at least. We just want to ensure if she is staying with you of her own accord and that you have not forced her to do so."

Dhanna, "Think as you may. She is going to stay here no matter what happens."

The three ladies returned disappointed. Before their in-laws and husbands they grudgingly presented their view, "Subhadra has now left us. The merchant has made her his concubine. It is almost impossible for her to come out of his clutches now."

The news was a blow to Dhansaar. In choked voice he said, "In this city I have lost everything. What will I tell Gobhadra and Shalibhadra now? How will I show my face to Dhanna? I could not even protect my beloved daughter-in-law. Who could expect that such a religious and upright merchant could do such misdeed?"

The three elder sons tried to console their father, "Father ! There is no use crying over spilt milk. We will not take it lying down and allow that villain to hold back the wife of our younger brother just like that. Goodness and justice have not vanished from the face of this earth. We will appeal to the elders of the village. We will call the people of the village to interfere. We have come here to earn our living and not to be robbed of our honour."

All the eight members of the family left for Dhanna's place. On the way they started speaking loudly, "Village folks ! save us; your merchant has robbed our honour." A crowd gathered around them and the villagers asked, "What is the matter. Please tell us everything." Dhansaar related the story in choked voice.

The leading citizens reassured them, "Please do not worry. The merchant in question enjoys high esteem. He will never do such an injustice. However, if he has indeed done something wrong, we shall not allow him to go scot free. He is not beyond the reach of our justice just because he is the son-in-law of king Shatanik. We also have young ladies in our families. What has happened to you today may tomorrow happen to anyone in the village. We will call the village elders and come with you immediately."

The village elders accompanied by other leading citizens and the family of Dhansaar arrived at the gate of Dhanna's mansion. Hearing of the commotion Dhanna came out and asked, "What has brought the village elders to my doorstep? And why has such a large crowd gathered here?"

The elders, "Sir ! We cannot even dream that a person like you could indulge in such a despicable act. There are hundreds of women working at the pond. It seems that now none of them is safe from your evil designs. You could call any one of them and satisfy your desires."

Dhanna covered both his ears with his palms in the gesture of hearing no evil and said, "Elders ! Please do not entertain this idea that I could engage in some wrong doings. The union of the moon with moon-light can never be wrong. Lightening can never be away from clouds. Please return to your homes and rest assured that whatever I do is right and just. With these words Dhanna also conveyed some message to the elders with a furtive gesture. Dhansaar and his family were unaware of this. One by one the crowd dispersed and the aggrieved family was left alone.

Dhanna also went inside. He then sent his guard to bring Dhansaar in. The moment Dhansaar entered his room, Dhanna fell at his feet and said, "Pardon me, father ! I am your son Dhanna. Please make yourself at home and comfortable." Dhansaar was stunned. After some time

when he regained his composure he said, "Why, son ! you have changed your appearance completely. Even I, your father, could not recognize you. Otherwise, why would I continue to do manual labour and get paid for it by my son."

When Dhansaar did not come out for some time his wife Sheelvati started wailing, "O Hypocrite ! Why have you detained my husband? What will you get out of him? Please return him to me."

Dhanna also called his mother in and touched her feet. He complained, "Mother ! How could you forget the face of your son. See, I am Dhanna." The old lady embraced Dhanna and said in choked voice, "Why did you resort to this deception? You could have revealed your identity much earlier."

Dhanna, "Mother ! I did it out of curiosity, just to know the depth of the love of my family members for me. You have suffered a lot because of me. Kindly pardon me for that." Dhanna made his parents comfortable and waited for the reaction from outside the house.

The three elder brothers and their wives started shouting angrily, "The villain has imprisoned our old parents. This is a blatant act of oppression. He is using force for his personal whims, and that, too, openly."

This time Dhanna sent his servant and called his three brothers. He explained everything to them and put them in a separate room. After some time when the three ladies, the only remaining members of the family outside the house, started creating a ruckus, Dhanna again sent his guard with specific instructions.

The guard approached the ladies and ordered in a commanding voice, "Ladies ! Stop creating this nuisance here. None of the six individuals who have gone inside the house is going to come out. You are free to take whatever action you deem fit but move away from here. I will not

allow you to remain here. If you do not move willingly I will be forced to take stringent measures.”

The reprimand from the guard made them look at each other questioningly. However, they considered it best to move away from that spot. When they were away and alone they reviewed the situation, “This merchant is no less than a gangster. First he takes our sister-in-law in his fold and then all the other members of the family. We are left alone without any support or protection. What else can we do but to go to the king and seek justice.”

The three ladies proceeded to Kaushambi and appeared before King Shatanik. They narrated their pathetic story and prayed for justice. King Shatanik was a religious, benevolent, and justice-loving ruler. His immediate reaction to the serious complaint against his son-in-law was of surprise, but gradually it turned into anger. He sent an emissary to Dhanna with instructions to immediately release the six foreigners he had reportedly detained. If he failed to follow the king’s order, punitive action would be taken against him. A crime cannot go unpunished irrespective of the high or low status of the criminal.

The emissary went to Dhanna and gave the king’s message. Dhanna reacted sharply, “Go back and tell the king that this is a personal matter and the king has no right to interfere. I will do as I like. If the king is proud of his powers let him come and settle the matter on the battle field. I will give him a fitting reply.”

The king lost his temper the moment the emissary gave Dhanna’s message. He ordered his army to march. Dhanna also arranged for a large army by activating the Chintamani. In the open land between Kaushambi and Dhanpur the rival armies fought each other. Shatanik’s army was defeated in the first encounter. He reorganized his army, but before he could launch his attack, his minister approached him and said, “Sire ! No matter who wins this war, you will be the ultimate loser. You are

fighting your own son-in-law. Even if you win would you be able to face your widowed daughter. A family feud brings no gain to any of the parties.”

The king, “A king has his own duties and responsibilities. I cannot tolerate injustice. It hardly matters if the offender is my own son-in-law. I will fight till my last breath.”

The minister, “Sire ! I do not want to force you to leave the righteous path. You may certainly fight. But give me an opportunity to investigate. Justice cannot be done if matters are decided unilaterally. Let me find about the views of the accused party because only then can we come to the right conclusion. I have my doubts about this complaint. To me it seems that it is a personal matter of Dhanya Kumar. In that case your interference may be uncalled for.”

When the king relented, the minister went to the three ladies and asked them, “Who are you and from where have you come? Please give your story in detail to me.”

The ladies gave all details about their family, starting from Pratishtanpur. After telling everything about their miseries they added, “We stopped at Dhanpur to earn some money. After this we would have continued our search for Dhanna, our beloved Devar. But the charlatan posing as merchant has spoiled everything.”

The minister, “What all you have said and what all I know about this merchant points to a strange fact. And that is that he is none else but Dhanna himself. He has not detained anyone. He has just extended hearty welcome to his family members at his new establishment.”

The ladies, “Why would he have behaved so rudely with us had he been Dhanna? He could just introduce himself and take us home. We have been working at the pond for quite some time.”

The minister, "Can you tell me about some identification mark of Dhanna or some other such information that can help me identify him?"

The ladies, "Why not? He has thirty two auspicious signs in his palms and the lotus-line on his feet. Our beloved brother-in-law is an extremely pious and upright individual."

"Please wait here. I will go and solve this puzzle. I have an inkling that you are going to find your lost Devar today."

The minister went to Dhanna's camp and said to Dhanna, "It is a revelation to me that even a merchant can be so brave and valourous. But tell me Dhanya Kumar, how can it be right to make a display of one's bravery by defeating one's own father-in-law?"

Dhanna, "Every human being ought to show bravery in face of torment, sin, and injustice. Where is the question of belonging to a warrior clan or a trading clan?"

The minister, "I could surmise that you must certainly be fighting for justice. The three complainants must be your Bhabhis. The persons reportedly detained by you must be your parents, brothers, and your wife. If my deduction is correct please stop this unnecessary bloodshed and welcome your Bhabhis to end their torment."

Dhanna smiled and said, "You will get the credit for bringing my family together. Had the king enquired at the outset the situation would never have taken this grim turn. I also wanted to discover who would come to the rescue of the downtrodden and weak. The king has proved his mettle. He loves justice so much that he did not hesitate even when the demand of justice was to make his own daughter a widow."

The minister returned to the king and explained everything. Shatanik was overwhelmed with joy. He said, "It was a good instance of leg-pulling by a son-in-law."

Anyway, all is well that ends well. Now escort the three ladies to Dhanna's mansion in palanquins."

When the Bhabhis reached home they complained in good humour, "Brother ! We never knew that you are so accomplished an actor. You successfully disguised yourself and hooked Subhadra with the bait of curd and fresh butter. And then teased us all to the extent that the wise and all-powerful king was also swept away by your play acting."

Dhanna, "Harmless humour and Bhabhi-teasing is an essential part of our traditional relationship. I did what was my right. Of course, the favour of curd and fresh butter was granted to my beloved wife, but you too must have gotten a share from her."

"Now that we are home we shall avenge all what you have done to us. We will take the curd and fresh butter and give only butter-milk to your darling wife. You just wait and see."

When there are no ill feelings such humorous teasing adds to the joy. Everyone in the family enjoyed this exchange heartily. The family was engulfed by waves of joy. The joy after sufferings always gives an enhanced contentment.



Dhansaar sent the news of finding Dhanna to Rajagriha. King Shrenik, Kusumpal, Gobhadra, and Shalibhadra all became very happy. Soma and Kusumshri were overwhelmed with joy. Natural female shyness restrained them from expressing their craving to meet their husband. They just said, "Subhadra is extremely lucky that she found our husband and has joined him. We have found him but are unable to join him."

Kusumshri said, "Soma ! I hear that he has married the daughter of king Shatanik and has a fourth wife now."



Soma, "The sky has four cardinal directions. Our husband had only three and now the fourth one is added. He has got the missing one. Now he is the sky and we four are his cardinal directions." Both of them were thus enjoying their moments of happiness.

The three fathers-in-law of Dhanna decided to call him back to Rajagriha. Accordingly king Shrenik send his emissaries with a letter to Dhanna. He also instructed them not to return without Dhanna.

When king Shatanik came to know that emissaries had come from Rajagriha to take Dhanna back, he was acutely disturbed just by the thought of his separating from Dhanna. Thus, when Dhanna came to him to beg his leave he said, "Do you have any problem or inconvenience here that you want to go to Rajagriha? Why don't you call Kusuma and Soma and live happily here?"

Dhanna, "Sire ! Man never wants to shift from one place to other. It is the call of his duty that makes him move. My parents, brothers, Bhabhis, and wife came here only to perform their duty. I am leaving them back here. I am only taking Saubhagyamanjari and Subhadra along. Please grant me permission to leave."

The king yielded, because everyone has to submit to the call of duty. He made elaborate arrangements for Dhanna's travel and made enough chariots, horses, and personal guards available.

While taking leave of his parents Dhanna said, "Please make your life comfortable here; I have made all necessary arrangements so that you will have no inconvenience here."

The thoughts of the evil always remain perverse. The three brothers were still nurturing their grudge, "Father gave the Chintamani to Dhanna. Using it, he turns every adversity into advantage. And we are permanently wedded to misery."

In the past Dhanna left his family three times but that was stealthily and during the night. This time he was leaving in broad day light. In the past he left alone but this time he was taking his wives and a caravan of attendants along. In the past he left abruptly and without a thought about the people left behind. But this time he was leaving only after making all necessary arrangements for the care of his elderly parents and other members of the family.



( 5 )

On the road to Rajagriha from Kaushambi there was a town named Lakshmipur. The ruler of this town was king Jitari. The name of his queen was Gunavali. The royal couple had a beautiful daughter named Geetkala. This daughter of the king was an accomplished singer and musician. She had no match in playing the Veena.

One day Geetkala went to the nearby jungle for an excursion with her friends. Selecting a clean spot with beautiful surroundings she sat down surrounded by her friends and started playing the Veena. Attracted by the sweet melody of her accomplished performance, birds flocked around her. Snakes, deer, and other animals also gathered around. As if in a trance, a doe approached and stopped almost touching her; closing its eyes, it was lost in the sweet melodies stirred by the deft fingers of Geetkala.

Even when the recital was over the doe still stood in a trance. Geetkala took out the pearl necklace from her neck and put it on the neck of the entranced doe. This touch broke the trance and it ran away into the jungle. The loss of necklace disturbed Geetkala. She cried for some time and then took a vow that she would marry only that young man who could call the doe by playing a Veena and get her necklace back."

King Jitari and queen Gunavali were worried, "Where would we get such an accomplished and young Veena

player who could fulfill the condition laid down by our daughter? If we do not find one she will remain unmarried.”

On way to Rajagriha, Dhanna stopped for rest at Laxmipur. He was a guest of king Jitari, and his two wives were given accommodation in the inner section of the palace. Dhanna was taken to the king’s assembly. After formal introductions Dhanna was given a seat near the king.

After some time, during general discussions when the topic of music came up, the king said, “My daughter has no match in playing Veena.” He narrated the incident of putting the necklace in the neck of a doe and the vow of the princess. He then added, “It is a matter of great concern for me that there is no such musician on the face of this earth who can get the necklace back as the princess wants.”

Dhanna, “Sire ! There is no monopoly in the fields of art. The earth is very large and filled with a multitude of art masters. Please do not take it to be my conceit but arrange for a Veena and come with me to the forest. I will call that doe to prove my statement.”

This was all King Jitari desired. He took Dhanna and all his ministers as well as the princess with him and went into the forest. Dhanna started playing the instrument. The whole surroundings resonated with sweet music. Attracted by the enchanting melody, all types of creatures started gathering around. After some time the doe with the pearl necklace also arrived. As before it stood entranced while Dhanna played the Veena. When the recital came to an end Dhanna took out the pearl necklace from the doe’s neck.

A wave of joy swept over the audience. Jitari said, “How true is the statement that when a daughter is born, a husband for her already exists somewhere. How could I know that I would encounter a young man who could

accept the challenge of Geetkala without even the slightest effort. Great man ! Now accept the hand of my daughter and free us of our worries.”

Dhanna, “Sire ! You are well aware that I am a married man. Two of my wives are in the guest rooms of the inner sanctum of your palace. Two others are waiting for me at Rajagriha. How can I marry your daughter when I already have four wives? Besides, I played the Veena just to prove to you that there is no dearth of artists on this earth. The recital was not for the purpose of marrying your daughter.”

Jitari, “What you say is right. But if you do not agree to marry my daughter she will remain unmarried all her life. She became betrothed to you the moment her vow was fulfilled by your successful recital. I agree that you have four wives. But did you not marry the second one when you already had one at home? Did you not marry the third wife when you already had two at home? Similarly three became four and I do not see anything against the four becoming five.”

Unable to refute the king’s argument Dhanna agreed for the marriage. Geetkala put a garland on Dhanna’s neck and Dhanna put the retrieved necklace of pearls on her neck in formal acceptance. Later the marriage ceremony was performed with all joy and regal grandeur.

Dhanna was provided a separate palace by the king. He started living happily in the new palace with his three wives, Subhadra, Saubhagyamanjari, and Geetkala. He also started attending the assembly and impressed the king and his ministers by his sharp wit and profound knowledge.

King Jitari had a very intelligent minister named Subuddhi. He had a daughter named Saraswati. She was very beautiful and intelligent. In wisdom she was said to be the incarnation of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom. She also had resolved that she would marry the man who would

defeat her in a quiz competition. Many intelligent young men came and accepted her challenge but until then no one could defeat her.

When Dhanna came to know about this strange young lady he became curious and wanted to hear to the puzzles Saraswati presented. He said so to minister Subuddhi. Subuddhi was glad to hear about Dhanna's curiosity. He called Saraswati in the assembly. In the presence of the king and all his ministers the competition was started. Saraswati presented a question—

“In the river Ganges a charity is made. The beneficiary dies at once. The benefactor goes to hell and repents for the deed.”

Dhanna thought, “What a strange quiz. Normally when a charity is done the beneficiary begets happiness and the benefactor gets contentment and spiritual reward.” Dhanna ruminated for some time and in the end came out with the solution. He said, “It is the act of angling. The angler throws the hook with the bait; this is his charity. The fish bites it and dies. The sin of killing a living being causes the fisherman to go to hell and repent.”

The audience applauded Dhanna. Now it was Dhanna's turn to ask a question. He said, “What is it that remains apart in nose, cheeks, eyes and throat but comes together in thumb, palm, arm and limbs?”

All present in the audience looked at each other with questioning eyes. Saraswati became tense. She applied all her wisdom and the knowledge of riddles but failed to solve this one. She accepted her defeat and asked Dhanna to explain the riddle. Dhanna replied, “It is a very simple riddle. The answer is our lips. When we pronounce nose, cheeks, eyes, and throat the lips remain apart but they come together when we pronounce thumb, palm, arm and limbs.”

Saraswati's condition was fulfilled and Dhanna married his sixth wife. For Dhanna good times prevailed. The pious deeds of his past lives were bearing fruit. At every step he was getting fame, wealth, and respect, and of course, the wives. He was, at the same time, leading a disciplined life as a Shravak trying to stop the inflow of, and shed the already accumulated, karmic dust. As in other towns, he soon became famous in Laxmipur.

In Laxmipur lived a billionaire named Patramalak. He had four sons—Ram, Kam, Gunadham, and Shyam, and a beautiful daughter named Laxmi. Every member of the family was religiously inclined and they spent their wealth only in religious and charitable works.

One day the merchant fell ill. Realizing that his end was near, he called his sons and said, "Sons ! My end is near. It is my earnest desire that even after my death you should continue to live together with love and affection. The day you feel that it is no longer possible to do so for any reason, immediately go for partition. You will have no problem in dividing the wealth as I have already divided it into four parts and sealed it in four separate urns. The urns have been buried in the four corners of this room and each bears the name of one of you. When you want to live apart each one of you should take the urn bearing his name." And the merchant died after giving his last testament.

For some time the four brothers lived together as before. However, one day they decided that they should start living independently with their respective families. They thought, "It is better to separate before conflicts crop up with growing families. Even if we brothers have no dispute our wives or children may provide the cause for one. It is better to separate amicably now rather than to wait for some dispute to arise and then become the laughing stock of the town."

Deciding thus they went into their late father's room and dug up the four urns. Each urn had the name of one

brother written on it. As they wanted to ensure that the distribution done by their father was equitable they opened the urns one after the other in the same room.

When the first urn was opened, to their utter surprise they found nothing but a pen and a piece of paper. Their curiosity increased and they immediately opened the remaining three urns. The second son had sand and pebbles in his urn, the third one had leather and bones, and the fourth one had eighty million gold coins.

All the brothers were extremely surprised, "What a strange distribution of his wealth by our father whose estimated worth was three hundred and twenty million gold pieces. How can this be called an equitable distribution when the youngest of us has been given eighty million coins and we have been given worthless garbage? It is difficult to believe that such a pious and just soul could distribute his wealth so inequitably. Did he lose his mental poise during his last days?"

One of the three elder brothers said, "We would never have protested had our father given something extra to the youngest one. But here he has completely deprived us. We shall divide this eighty million equally among us and rectify our father's fault."

The youngest, Shyam, reacted unfavourably to this, "I will neither give a penny out of my share nor take anything from the share of others. If you had no faith in our father why did you agree to this arrangement? Now everyone will get what is given to him."

"We shall certainly take our reasonable share. If you do not agree to share it we shall go to the king for justice. We are three and you are alone. We will never accept this injustice without protest."

The four brothers arrived at the king's assembly. The three elder brothers lodged their complaint giving all relevant details. The youngest said, "Sire ! This division of

property was done by our late father and we all agreed to what he said. Had their urns been filled with gold, would they have shared it with me? Then why should I share my wealth with them?"

The king said to his ministers, "That a justice loving man like Patramalak could so inequitably divide his property is something beyond comprehension. But why did he do what he did?" When the king and his ministers failed to solve the problem the matter was referred to Dhanna. Dhanna thought, "When the merchant was so religious there simply must be some justification to his decision. The division ought to be equitable. It seems that the boys have not been able to understand what the deceased wanted to convey." And he inspected all the urns. He immediately understood what the merchant had conveyed.

Dhanna returned to the assembly and, before the king and the ministers, addressed the brothers, "Your father has given a wealth amounting to eighty million gold pieces to each one of you. You have in fact failed to understand what he did. By giving paper and pen to the eldest one he has indicated that the eldest son should take charge of the account books and recover the amount from the debtors. He has been given the trading part of the merchants business. Similarly the second son has been given the farm lands, he has to earn his living by farming. The third one has been given the livestock. The fourth, who has not yet attained proficiency in any business, gets the cash and earns his living by way of interest till he is competent enough to launch his own business."

King Jitari was astounded to hear the judgement. Dhanna could understand the secret message of the late merchant and bring about an equitable distribution as the deceased had desired. All the four brothers were happy. They thought, "For no reason at all we doubted the decision of our father. Had Dhanna not been present, the king and all his ministers could not extinguish the fire of impending



family feud. It is hard to find such sagacious person. Our sister Laxmi is unmarried. Why not marry her to Dhanna. Where would we find a better match for her?"

They approached Dhanna with their proposal. In spite of Dhanna's refusal they insisted, "You have saved us from one disaster. Now you must save us from the other as well. An unmarried sister or one married to an unsuitable match is indeed a disaster for her brothers. In you we find a suitable match for her. Please do not disappoint us."

As destined, Dhanna's seventh marriage was with Laxmi, the daughter of merchant Patramalak. The ceremonies were performed with great festivities.

In Laxmipur also lived a stingy merchant named Dhanpal. He too had a beautiful daughter, Gunamala. The merchant was so miserly that he never gave anything to any beggar knocking his door. He would make one or other excuse and send the beggar empty handed. Once a clever beggar pleased him by doing some work for him. Instead of giving something to the beggar the merchant just promised him to give. Whenever the beggar approached him to get what was due, the merchant gave a standard reply, "Not today. I will give it tomorrow." One day the beggar came and sat down at the gate and refused to budge unless the merchant gave him a specific date and told what he was going to get.

To get rid of this thorn in his flesh the merchant gave him a specific date and told that on that day whatever thing in the house he touches first will be given to him.

The clever beggar got what he wanted. He decided to swindle the merchant on the specified day. When the beggar went away the merchant repented, "On the spur of the moment I have made a promise to a cunning beggar. You never know what thing he would touch. I thought that all the wealth is in the strong room. There are hardly any valuables in the other rooms. But if he touches my

daughter it would be a disaster for me. This beggar appears to be a crafty swindler. He certainly has some ulterior motive; that is why he has been pestering me for months."

This apprehension drove him to go to the beggar two days before the specified date. He requested the beggar to accept gold and gems and relieve him from the promise.

The beggar replied, "You have been avoiding my payment for months. Now why do you suddenly want to make the payment before the agreed date? Don't try to sneak out of your promise. I am not going to accept anything today. I shall come on the allotted date and touch whatever thing I like best. And that is what I shall take."

The dejected merchant took the beggar to Dhanna and sought his help. Dhanna also tried his best to dissuade the beggar from holding the merchant to his promise, but in vain. He was very confident of his plan to swindle the merchant. At last Dhanna said to him, "All right, what you say will be done. You come at the allotted time and the merchant will abide by his promise." The beggar left contented. But Dhanpal was still very disturbed. He said, "What will I do if he touches something that I cannot possibly part with?"

Dhanna reassured him, "Stop worrying now. The matter is in my hands. This crafty swindler is sure to burn his fingers and get what he deserves."

Next day Dhanna went to Dhanpal's house early and made some clever arrangements anticipating the move of the beggar who was to come the following morning. Dhanna stayed at the merchant's residence during that night.

The beggar arrived promptly the next morning. As soon as he entered the house and stepped in the courtyard he saw that the merchant's daughter was sitting on the roof and drying her hair. The beggar looked around. On one side of the wall rested a wooden ladder presumably to go up to

the roof. On the other side he saw Dhanna and Dhanpal approaching casually to welcome him.

He saw nothing out of place or unusual that could indicate that some precaution had been taken to prevent him from acquiring what he desired. However, he was so infatuated with the idea of possessing the beautiful daughter of the merchant, who was right within his reach, that he did not even wait for the formal exchange of greetings with the host. With an expression of triumph on his face he rushed towards the wooden ladder and caught hold of its beam with his right hand.

Dhanna also rushed there, and before the swindler could put his foot on the first rung Dhanna caught hold of his hand. The beggar looked at Dhanna questioningly. Dhanna said with a meaningful smile, "Dhanpal abides by his promise. You desired the ladder and that is why it was the first thing you touched. You may take it and go away." Dhanna's words hit the beggar like a stunning blow. But he realized that he was defeated. He left without another word taking the ladder along.

This led to Dhanna's eighth marriage. He could not refuse Dhanpal's request of marrying his daughter Gunamala. Now Dhanna had six wives with him. Four from Laxmipur, one from Kaushambi, and one from Rajagriha. Two more were waiting for him at Rajagriha. Of his wives, three were daughters of kings, one that of a minister, and remaining four those of merchants. With eight beautiful and virtuous wives Dhanna was like a god with eight different divine powers.

A long duration had passed since Dhanna arrived in Laxmipur. He now approached his four fathers-in-law and sought their permission to leave for Rajagriha. The four prominent citizens of Laxmipur ceremoniously bid farewell to their daughters and son-in-law with heaps of gifts. Dhanna finally left Laxmipur for Rajagriha.

When he reached Rajagriha he was given a grand state welcome by king Shrenik. Kusumpal and Gobhadra were also among those who warmly welcomed Dhanna and his wives. When the ceremonies were over and Dhanna reached his palace Kusumshri and Soma received him shyly with feelings of guilt. Dhanna immediately understood what was going on in their minds. He said affectionately—

“Darlings ! Don’t burden yourselves with the guilt of not accompanying Subhadra in her mission to search and find me. You have done nothing wrong by staying back and waiting for me. It is not right that every member of the family plunges into the uncharted sea of the unknown. You have sincerely and devotedly waited for me here, embracing the pleasant memories of our love. Indeed, your love for me is no less.”

This display of grace and magnanimity by Dhanna washed away the feelings of guilt tormenting Kusuma and Soma and they became content. Normality returned to Dhanna’s happy and disciplined life in Rajagriha.

One day Kusuma and Soma made a proposal to the other co-wives, “Although we live happily sharing the love of our husband and the duties of the household equally, Subhadra deserves more. She has made much greater sacrifice than all of us put together. Therefore, we propose that she should be made our leader.” All the others heartily welcomed the idea.

When Dhanna came to know of this he praised the considerate magnanimity of Kusuma and Soma. Subhadra declined with humility, “Kusuma and Soma are senior to me, and therefore it is not befitting of me to accept this honour. In fact it is better to be equal and enjoy the pleasures of life as we are doing. The animosity between co-wives is a common thing but we are a happy exception. Let us remain like that only.”

Dhanna said, "Darling Subhadra ! This is in fact a gift from me. All your seven sisters are overjoyed in supporting me. You should not refuse this affection filled request." Subhadra could do nothing but accept. A function was organized and many guests were invited. In their presence Subhadra was seated on a sandal-wood stool and anointed with perfumed water. In a grand ceremony she was formally made the chief wife.

All the wealth, honour, and the love of eight beautiful, virtuous and devoted wives made Dhanna a happy and contented man. In spite of having all the wealth and resources he was a simple and pious soul. With all the comforts, luxury, and grandeur available to him, he still devoted time to religious and spiritual pursuits in order to improve the life beyond.



( 6 )

Although the void created in king Shrenik's assembly by absence of Abhay Kumar had been filled by Dhanna, the king was still worried about Abhay Kumar's return. In Ujjaini King Chandpradyot started depending on Abhay Kumar who advised the king in matters of state and solved all his complex problems. Abhay Kumar did not allow king Chandpradyot to feel the absence of Dhanna in any way.

One day Lohajangh, the famous strongman and trouble-shooter of king Chandpradyot, was sent to Bharuch on some state mission. When he was returning, the ruler of Bharuch gave him some poisoned sweets in his food packet in order to bring his illustrious career to an end.

Lohajangh was unaware of the conspiracy against him. On the way, when he wanted to eat that sweet he had an intuition of something evil and he stopped. This happened every time he wanted to eat, and so he brought the packet

to Ujjaini and told Chandpradyot everything. The king immediately called Abhay Kumar and asked him to try to explain the incident. Abhay Kumar picked up a piece of sweet from the packet and sniffed it. After that he reported that the sweets were poisoned.

Surprised Chandpradyot said, "Abhay Kumar ! Are you sure? How can we ascertain this?"

Abhay Kumar, "Put this packet in sun and sprinkle a little water over it and you will get the proof of my statement."

When Abhay Kumar's instructions were followed every one present there was dumb struck. Small snakes slithered out from those pieces of sweet. King Chandpradyot was pleased. He told Abhay Kumar to ask for some favour and it would be granted. Abhay Kumar said, "Sire ! I do not need anything immediately. However, I cannot insult you by refusing to accept your favour. So please keep it pending. I shall ask whenever I have a need." The king happily agreed.

*Chandpradyot had a daughter named Vasavdatta. She was divinely beautiful. She was very fond of music and had learnt everything the local musicians could teach her. But she wanted to excel in the field by learning from some great master. Chandpradyot could not find one for her. He asked Abhay Kumar and was informed that King Udayan of the Vatsa state was a great master. He had no parallel in playing Veena on this earth, and so he could be the most suitable teacher of music for the princess. When Chandpradyot invited Udayan he straightaway declined. Chandpradyot took this as an insult and was annoyed.*

When the matter was referred to Abhay Kumar he formulated a plan. He advised the king to get a hollow wooden elephant made. It should be an exact look-alike. Some chosen commandos should be put inside this hollow elephant. The elephant should be transported and left in

the forest at the outskirts of Kaushambi. King Udayan is proud of his ability to captivate animals by his music. When he knows that an elephant has come near his capital he will certainly come to the forest with his Veena, and that too alone. When he comes near the elephant and sits down to play the Veena, the commandos should sneak out of the hollow elephant and capture him.

Chandpradyot followed Abhay Kumar's instructions and was successful in capturing Udayan. When the captive was brought to him he gave him all the honour and respect due to a monarch, and after begging his pardon for the inconvenience, Chandpradyot said, "Your highness ! I had no bad intention in capturing you. I was driven by my love for my daughter and my desire to honour your art. You see, I have a one-eyed daughter. She is an accomplished Veena player and desires to further her art under the guidance of a great master like you. As she is shy of her disfigured appearance she would sit behind a curtain and learn from you if you would kindly agree to be her guru." Udayan was considerate enough to agree.

Chandpradyot then told his daughter that a great master had been found and she could learn music from him. But there was one little problem. The teacher was a leper and was very shy of his disfigured appearance. Therefore , he wants a curtain' between him and his student so that he does not have to suffer the torment of the loathing glances of his student. Vasavdatta agreed to the arrangement and the teaching sessions started.

One day, during a teaching session, Vasavdatta did not understand a particular point. Udayan explained again and again but Vasavdatta could not perform as told. When the princess still could not correct her mistake after a number of attempts Udayan got irritated and commented, "One-eyed damsel ! You are a dud."

The princess lost her temper at this objectionable comment from her teacher. She reacted sharply, "Obnoxious

leper ! How dare you call a spotless beauty like me a one-eyed damsel?" and she removed the curtain. When their eyes met they both were wonder struck at each other's charm and beauty. If Udayan was like Adonis, Vasavdatta was no less than Venus. It was love at first sight. They performed the Gandharva-vivah (a marriage in evidence of gods or a secret marriage) ceremony then and there.

Once Analgiri, a large and favourite elephant of Chandpradyot, ran away into the forest. All efforts of the king to bring it back failed. When Abhay Kumar was consulted he said, "Sire ! If Udayan and Vasavdatta both play Veena jointly (a duet performance) the sweet melody will captivate the elephant and it will return." Accordingly Udayan and Vasavdatta rode a she elephant, Bhadravanti, into the forest and played Veena. Analgiri was drawn by the sweet melody, was caught and brought back to Ujjaini. The king was very much pleased with Abhay Kumar and granted him one more favour.

Once a great fire broke out in Ujjaini. It appeared that the whole town would be consumed in the conflagration. Abhay Kumar saved the town by advising the king to do non-stop chanting of the name of Tirthankar Shantinath till the fire was extinguished. This brought Abhay Kumar the third favour from the king.

Once there was an epidemic in Ujjaini and every day ten to twenty persons died. The solution to this great problem was also provided by Abhay Kumar. He said, "If some pious lady and the king look into each others eyes without blinking and it is the king who tires first and blinks, the town would become free of the epidemic."

On Abhay Kumar's further advice this staring match was done between the King and his queen Shivadevi. At last it was the king who got tired of staring into the unblinking eyes of the queen and he blinked. The town got rid of the epidemic. The king was pleased with Abhay Kumar. Granting him the fourth favour he said, "This is



the fourth favour but I don't want you to leave Ujjaini. So please do not use any of these favours for that purpose."

Abhay Kumar accepted the king's advice. But he was eager to get free and return to Rajagriha. So he demanded that the king fulfill one of the favours he had granted, "Sire! Grant me the favour of embracing death in Ujjaini in the form I desire. And that is—A funeral pyre should be prepared with the wood from the Agnibhiru chariot. Let me sit in the lap of mother Shiva perched besides you on the back of the Analgiri elephant. And let me embrace death by entering the already-lit funeral pyre like this."

The king laughed and said, "You win, Abhay. You have asked for something that can only be fulfilled through my own destruction. I appreciate what you desire. Yes, you may proceed to Rajagriha. Although reluctantly, I grant you permission."

When Chandpradyot freed Abhay Kumar the fury suppressed within him for so long exploded, "Sire! Now that I am free I would like to warn you in advance that I will take revenge for the dastardly act of deception performed by you under guise of religion. I will come back and capture you by pure guile and cunning. Do whatever you may to prevent yourself from being taken to Rajagriha as a prisoner."

Abhay Kumar took leave of his aunt and returned to Rajagriha. King Shrenik received him with great festivities. The town of Rajagriha saw an unprecedented tide of joy. All the princes including Nandishen and Megh Kumar extended a warm welcome to their brother. When the festivities were over Abhay Kumar sought permission from his father to once again return to Ujjaini. He said, "I have got to go back to Ujjaini. I have taken an oath to capture king Chandpradyot and bring him to Rajagriha. He used religion to capture me. I shall use only my intelligence to take my revenge." Shrenik granted him permission.

Abhay Kumar disguised himself as a Gypsy and assumed the name of Vimal. He took a Gypsy caravan along with a herd of horses and camels. He camped just outside Ujjaini and started selling camels and horses very cheaply. He hardly had any intention of earning wealth. He had an accomplice who acted like a madman and called himself Pradyot. He also had two beautiful courtesans in his group.

Abhay Kumar knew Chandpradyot's weakness for women. He arranged to deliver a message from the two beautiful and lusty women to Chandpradyot by the mad Pradyot. It read, "We invite you to our company and pleasures. But take care to come when Vimal and others are away from the camp."

Chandpradyot was excited to get this invitation. During the late hours of night he stealthily arrived at the camp of the two women. Abhay Kumar caught him and tied his limbs with a rope. Putting the prisoner in a chariot, Abhay Kumar broke camp and the caravan started for Rajagriha. The king shouted loudly, "I am Pradyot. I am being kidnapped. Somebody save me." Whoever heard these shouts thought that the mad Gypsy Pradyot is shouting. Nobody including the guards stopped or investigated. Abhay Kumar brought his prisoner to Rajagriha.

He was brought before king Shrenik. Abhay Kumar made him promise that he would never again, driven by intoxication of his power, offend any of the neighbouring kings, never declare war on them, and never use religion to deceive anyone. After this Chandpradyot was released to return to Ujjaini.

King Shrenik introduced Dhanna to Abhay Kumar, "Abhay! This is your sister's husband Dhanya Kumar. In your absence he became my advisor and never allowed me to feel your absence." And the king related all the incidents of the past.

Soon Dhanna and Abhay Kumar became intimate. They both helped the king with their profoundly intelligent advice in matters of state. The Magadh empire flourished under the rule of king Shrenik and able administration of Dhanna and Abhay Kumar.



( 7 )

Dhanna's parents and brothers lived in Kaushambi. Besides Dhanpur they had five hundred other villages also under their rule. Due to the mismanagement of the three brothers they lost everything. They imposed exorbitant levies on the farmers. Nature also never favours the oppressors. There was a drought and the farmers abandoned the villages. Every source of income dried up. Whatever was left with them was stolen by thieves.

The three brothers left their families at Kaushambi and went to Malava. There they started farming themselves, but he who is born in misfortune stumbles as he goes. Their oxen died and all their labour was wasted. They left Malava and drifted to Rajagriha. While they were sitting at a crossing Dhanna saw them. He immediately rushed to them and took them home with his usual courtesy. After hearing their sad story he gave them a lot of wealth and send them back to Kaushambi. However, they were once again looted on the way and returned back to Dhanna.

All the hardships and continued good treatment by Dhanna, in spite of their offending activities, brought about a change of heart in the three brothers. The dirt of aversion was washed away by their sufferings. They approached Dhanna and said—

“Brother! We are sorry for all the ill treatment we have meted out to you for so long a period. It appears that we are destined to live with you only. Whenever we push you away

from us we come to harm. We will now never separate from you. With our detestable attitude we have caused pain to our parents as well as our wives. O embodiment of righteousness! Be kind enough to forget our crimes and forgive us. Now the whole family will once again come under one roof and we four brothers will look after our aging parents.”

Dhanna was overwhelmed with joy. He thought, “Basically every human being is good by nature. It is the dirt of past Karmas that covers his true self and overpowers him. When this dirt is removed the soul gets its sparkle back like a de-greased utensil. Today my brothers have regained their natural purity and piety.” He then touched the feet of his elder brothers and said, “You all are my elder brothers and like father to me. Please do not humiliate me. Indeed, there is nothing better than all of us living together under one roof.”

Dhanna called back his parents and Bhabhis from Kaushambi. Dhansaar and his wife became happy and contented being served by four sons and eleven daughters-in-law. It was a very happy family now.



Once an omniscient ascetic arrived in Rajagriha. Throngs of people came to behold the ascetic and listen to his discourse. The ascetic explained the ephemeral nature of the material world and the immortality of the soul. When the crowds dispersed Dhanna approached the ascetic and asked about the chain of his previous births. The ascetic narrated brief details of the earlier births of Dhanna and his family members. He stressed that every being has to suffer the consequences of every act he performs. No activity is without its consequences.

About Dhanna he said—

“Dhanya Kumar! Once upon a time an old widow named Katyan lived in Paitthan village. She had a son

whose name was Datt. Datt worked as a cowherd. In the morning he would collect cows and calves from every house in the village and take the herd into the meadows. In the evening he would take them back to their owners. He and his mother were living on whatever he earned every day as a cowherd.

“On a festival day Kheer (a sweet dish made by cooking rice in milk) was being cooked in every house in the village. Little Datt also wanted to eat Kheer. He told his mother to cook the sweet dish. When the boy insisted, the widow explained, ‘We hardly get two square meals a day, how can I cook such a rich dish for you?’

“Other women in the village came to know of Datt’s craving for Kheer and they wanted to help the poor widow and her charming little son. Four women collected all the required material, including milk, rice, sugar, and dry fruits. Four others came and persuaded the widow to accept the gift. The widow cooked Kheer and gave a bowl full to Datt. She then went out on some errand.

“Before Datt started eating, an ascetic entered the house to beg alms for breaking his fast. The child was happy to see the ascetic. He greeted the ascetic with all respect and devotion and poured all the Kheer in the ascetic’s bowl. The ascetic blessed the child and left. When the widow returned she saw her son licking the bowl. Thinking that he was still hungry she gave the remaining Kheer also to him.

“That night Datt had a terrible stomach ache and he died thinking of the ascetic. This boy reincarnated as Dhanna. The eight women who helped him get Kheer reincarnated as eight wives of Dhanna.”

After this interesting story the ascetic told about the three brothers of Dhanna and his wife Subhadra—

“In a village called Sugram, there lived three woodcutters. One day, in the jungle, when they stopped

their work to eat food, some ascetics arrived. They gave all their food to the ascetics. When they reached home in the evening after selling the pieces of wood they did not get anything to eat. They cursed their act of benevolence, 'What is the use of giving such charity that begets you hunger that very day? How such a charity can bear fruits in the future?' This way they cursed four times. After death these woodcutters reincarnated as your three brothers. As the result of their cursing a good deed four times they had to suffer grave consequences four times in their life. One should never indulge in charitable acts by force or unwillingly.

"Similar is the story of your favourite wife Subhadra. In her previous birth she was very proud of her wealth. One day she demeaned one of her poor friends by saying that as she had no wealth she ought to carry sand on her head to earn her living. This resulted in her doing manual labour to earn her living. One should never allow one's ego to dominate one's behaviour."

The discourse of the great ascetic brought about a sea-change in the attitudes of merchant Dhansaar, his wife, and his three elder sons and their wives. All these eight members of Dhanna's family accepted Diksha from the omniscient ascetic and left Rajagriha with him for spiritual pursuits.



( 8 )

Merchant Gobhadra had married his son Shalibhadra to thirty two beautiful girls. Shalibhadra was enjoying his marital life thoroughly. Subhadra, the merchant's daughter, was married to Dhanna and was happy as the senior and favourite wife of illustrious Dhanna. Gobhadra was free of all worldly responsibilities. Once when Shraman Bhagavan Mahavir came to Rajagriha, Gobhadra accepted Diksha from him and became an ascetic.

Following a disciplined life of right conduct and penance, Gobhadra at last took the vow of fasting and meditating till his last breath. After his death he reincarnated as a god. As a gesture of his love and concern for his family in his earlier birth he started sending regularly three chests each, full of cloths, ornaments, and food, for Shalibhadra and his thirty two wives. These ninety-nine divine chests were delivered to Bhadra, and the merchant's widow in turn gave everything to her daughters-in-law. This unending source of wealth made these ladies lavish in their habits. They would never wear any dress or ornament twice. No matter how valuable a thing was, for them it was just use-and-throw.

One day some merchants from Nepal arrived in Rajagriha with the famous gem-inlaid shawls. They had sixteen pieces and each piece was priced at one hundred and twenty five thousand gold pieces. The total value of these shawls added up to two million gold pieces. The merchants went to king Shrenik with their unique merchandise. The king never spent public money for his personal luxuries. Thus, he declined to purchase these costly shawls. The merchants returned disappointed. On the way back they were commenting, "When the king is not able purchase our shawls who else in Rajagriha will be able to?" Bhadra heard of this and called the merchants to her palace. She saw the shawls and purchased the whole lot.

When queen Chelna came to know of this she goaded Shrenik, "Bhadra, a mere merchant's wife has purchased sixteen gem-shawls. Can't you buy even one for me?" The king summoned the merchants and asked them for one shawl. The merchants informed him that they had only sixteen shawls and the whole lot was bought by Bhadra. They regretted that they were unable to provide one for the queen.

The king now sent a servant to Bhadra with a purse of gold coins to pay the price and get one shawl for the queen.

The king's representative went to Bhadra and conveyed his message. Bhadra explained, "I am sorry, but none of those shawls is left with me now. I had cut each of those shawls into two and gave one piece each to my thirty two daughters-in-law. They did not like these shawls much and so they just wiped their feet and threw away all the pieces. You know, they are in a habit of using a thing only once."

The servant returned and repeated Bhadra's statement before the king verbatim. Hearing about the unimaginable wealth of the merchant, Shrenik thought, "I never knew that such immensely wealthy people live in my city. I should meet Shalibhadra who is so wealthy that his wives throw away such costly gem-shawls after wiping their feet just once." He sent a formal invitation to Shalibhadra to visit the palace and see the king.

Bhadra immediately sent a courteous reply, "My son Shalibhadra is extremely delicate and so he has never stepped out of our residence. I cordially extend an invitation to the king to bless my humble abode with his presence and also bring along the royal family and ministers."

The king accepted the invitation and conveyed that he would be visiting the merchant's house next morning. When god Gobhadra came to know about the forthcoming visit of the king he arranged for a divine decoration of the house and the avenue leading to the house. The road was paved with crystal slabs. On the sides golden pillars with buntings made of pearls were raised. Perfumes and fragrant flowers were sprinkled all around.

Next morning King Shrenik came to Shalibhadra's house accompanied by queen Chelna, prince Abhay Kumar, and some of his ministers. Bhadra received the royal guests with due respect and honour, and took them to the fourth floor. There she offered suitable thrones to the king and his party. After making the guests comfortable she excused herself and went to the seventh floor, the living quarters of Shalibhadra, to fetch her son.



When Bhadra asked Shalibhadra to come down to the fourth floor and meet the royal guests, he said, "Mother! I have nothing to do with the king? Why should I meet him?" The mother explained, "Son! Don't be uncourteous. King Shrenik is your lord. He is the ruler of the land we live on. He is the master and we are his subjects. The king never frequents the house of a commoner. We are fortunate that our master has graced our humble residence with his presence."

These words of his mother jolted Shalibhadra out of his slumber. He thought, "How is the king different from me? My wealth and grandeur is such that the king himself has come to visit me. But he still is my master? What an irony that I also have a master; I am a slave. Indeed, I have some shortcomings. In spite of all my achievements I still lack some pious karmas. That is the reason that I am not my own master."

Thinking thus he accompanied his mother to the fourth floor and greeted the king. The king called him near and affectionately pulled Shalibhadra in his lap. As long as he was with the king he was disturbed and felt as if he had been confined to some prison. When the king released him he immediately rushed back to his bedroom.

King Shrenik accepted Bhadra's request to stay back for lunch. Before lunch the royal party was taken to the large pool in the beautiful garden in the backyard of the mansion. While taking his bath the king dropped his ring in the pool. When Bhadra came to know of it she at once ordered the pool to be drained. When the pool was empty of water the king saw that the bottom of the large pool was littered with all varieties of ornaments and his own ring looked faded as compared to the glittering ornaments already in the pool.

When the king asked the maid she explained, "Sire! The thirty two wives of Shalibhadra take their bath here everyday. At that time they take out all the ornaments they

are wearing and throw them in this pool. They never use anything twice and as such, for them these ornaments are useless."

Shrenik was astounded. After his bath he ate the sumptuous lunch that had been prepared for him. He returned to his palace highly impressed by the wealth and grandeur of Shalibhadra. He realized that Shalibhadra was the embodiment of the glory of his empire.

When the king left, Shalibhadra was still pondering over his own state of dependence. He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he stopped speaking to anyone.

One day Acharya Dharmaghosh arrived in Rajagriha. Shalibhadra went to hear his discourse. After the discourse Shalibhadra asked the Acharya, "Revered one! How can I gain my freedom from slavery? I am governed by a master. How do I become my own master?"

The Acharya, "Shalibhadra! You can become the master of the world only when you turn ascetic and indulge in spiritual pursuits. An ascetic is the only one who is his own master. Not only that, he also is the master of the king and his subjects, the rich and the poor, and the wise and the fool."

The dialogue with the Acharya gave rise to the feeling of detachment in Shalibhadra. He returned and told his mother, "I want to embrace the disciplined life of an ascetic. Please allow me to accept Diksha."

Bhadra, "Son! You have been brought up in immense luxuries and wealth. It is not possible for you to follow the harsh discipline of the ascetic life. Moreover, you are not old enough to become an ascetic."

Shalibhadra, "Mother! Only he can follow the discipline of great vows who has experienced the pleasures of life. He who can enjoy the pleasures of life and cannot face the hardships of ascetic life is a coward. Please allow me."

Bhadra, "Son! I will not stop you from proceeding on the path of discipline, because your father too accepted Diksha at the feet of Bhagavan Mahavir. You should certainly follow the same trail. What I desire is that don't do it abruptly. Start practicing the disciplines one by one and proceed gradually. Once you find yourself competent enough to follow the harsh discipline of great vows, go and accept Diksha."

Shalibhadra accepted his mother's advice. He now decided to abandon one wife and one bed chamber every day. This way he decided to become an ascetic after thirty two days.



( 9 )

One day Dhanna was sitting in his large bath chamber and all his eight wives were helping him cleanse his body. One was applying some paste on his hands, one was giving a massage to his legs, and one was applying oil to his hair. Subhadra was cleaning his back with some cleansing paste. All of a sudden a drop of something hot fell on Dhanna's back. Dhanna turned back in surprise and saw Subhadra's tear filled eyes. He asked affectionately, "What makes you cry, Subhadra?"

When she remained silent Dhanna said, "Darling! You are concealing something from me. You are concerned that it would add to my worries. Please don't do that. Seeing you in tears is a great source of pain for me. Don't think that I will not be able to solve your problem. Tell me darling! why are your eyes wet? Please do not hesitate to talk to your own husband about your problem."

Subhadra, "The memories of my brother are haunting me. I am soon going to lose my brother. He is renouncing the mundane life and will become an ascetic. He has

started abandoning one wife every day. The day he abandons all his thirty two wives he will formally accept Diksha.”

. This statement of Subhadra tickled Dhanna and he could not control his laughter. After a few moments he said, “Darling! Your brother is a cowardly procrastinator. What he is doing is not renunciation, it is hypocrisy. If he really wants to renounce the mundane life he should abandon all his thirty two wives at once. This act of abandoning one a day is nothing but hypocrisy.”

These abrasive comments by Dhanna hit Subhadra hard. She felt as if her husband was rubbing salt into her wound. She said sarcastically, “You are speaking as if renouncing is a child’s play. It is easier said than done.”

These biting words jolted Dhanna out of his lethargy. He at once stood up as if his valour was stirred. He looked at Subhadra and said, “Subhadra! From this moment on you are no more my wife. You are my sister now and I am indebted to you for waking me up from the slumber of mundane pleasures. Like you, my other seven wives are now my sisters. My life will find purpose only at the feet of Bhagavan Mahavir. Know that I have already renounced the mundane life.”

Subhadra was shocked. She started crying and wailing. She fell at the feet of her husband and said, “I was just pulling your leg. You have taken my mocking comment to your heart. I beg your pardon, but please do not abandon us. Without you there is no charm left in our life.”

Dhanna’s resolve was unshakable. He had taken a step ahead and had no desire to look back. When the combined effort of all his eight wives failed to budge Dhanna an inch, they also decided to accept Diksha with him.

Just about that time Bhagavan Mahavir arrived in Rajagriha with his disciples and stayed in the Gunashilak garden. Dhanna was eager to behold the serene and

compassionate Tirthankar. He left his house with his wives and started moving toward the garden. On the way, when he arrived at the gate of Shalibhadra's house he thought, "Why not take Shalibhadra along?" And he entered the house.

When she saw Dhanna, Bhadra was surprised, "For the first time Dhanna has come here without an invitation. He seems to have come to persuade Shalibhadra to refrain from becoming an ascetic. God bless him if he is able to convince my son."

As soon as Dhanna saw his mother-in-law he asked, "Where is Shalibhadra." Bhadra was pleased that what she thought was correct, he was eager to meet Shalibhadra only. She said, "He is sitting in his room. Please go upstairs."

When Dhanna went to Shalibhadra and stood before him, Shalibhadra offered him a seat, "Please take your seat."

Dhanna, "Shalibhadra! I have not come to sit here. I have come to inspire you to stand up. What is this sanctimonious display of renunciation in steps, this abandoning of one wife everyday? If you really want to renounce the world, do it at once. Get up, abandon everything, and join me. I am on my way to accept Diksha from Bhagavan Mahavir who is stationed at Gunashilak garden. If not, at least stop this play acting and enjoy your family life fully. As for me, I have already renounced the world and need no company."

Shalibhadra got up at once. He instantly abandoned everything and accompanied Dhanna. The news of this great renunciation spread like wildfire. When king Shrenik heard of it he rushed his men to Shalibhadra's house to request the two would-be-ascetics to allow the king and the people of Rajagriha to take the two illustrious sons of Magadh in a ceremonious procession to the Gunashilak garden.

A grand procession befitting the glory of Magadh was taken out. The streets of Rajagriha were filled with applauding crowds. Here someone was praising Dhanna, there someone was praising Shalibhadra, and others were praising Bhadra because her son and son-in-law both were renouncing the world.

When the grand procession reached the garden everyone got down from chariots and palanquins and walked to Bhagavan Mahavir. With tear-filled eyes and in a choked voice Bhadra submitted before the Tirthankar, "Prabhu! I am offering two invaluable gems, my son and my son-in-law to you as disciple-donations. Kindly accept them and bless them in their pursuit of ultimate bliss." And everyone, the family and the townsfolk returned with wet eyes.

Bhagavan Mahavir left Rajagriha after a few days stay. Dhanna and Shalibhadra started their disciplined ascetic life and the study of the canons.



( 10 )

Twelve years later Bhagavan Mahavir once again came to Rajagriha. Ascetics Dhanna and Shalibhadra were also among his disciples. As a result of harsh penance and unrelenting spiritual practices their bodies were reduced to skeletons.

One day when these two ascetics sought permission to go to collect alms for their breakfast after a long period of fasting, the omniscient Bhagavan Mahavir said, "Beloved of gods! To day you will break your fast with the alms given by Shalibhadra's mother."

When Bhadra came to know that Bhagavan Mahavir had arrived in Rajagriha with his disciples including Dhanna and Shalibhadra, she became eager to behold

them. She called all her thirty two daughters-in-law and said, "Get ready soon. We are going today for the Darshan of ascetics among whom are also ascetics Dhanna and Shalibhadra." And she also went to get ready to go out.

Dhanna and Shalibhadra were moving around in the town to collect alms. They stopped at the gate of Bhadra's house. She was in a hurry to go out, and also the two ascetics had become so frail and decrepit that she failed to recognize her own son and son-in-law. Proper food suitable for ascetics was not available in the house, and therefore the ascetics proceeded ahead.

When they went a little distance they came across an old milkmaid who was carrying a large bowl full of curd. When she saw these ascetics she put down the bowl of curd and greeted them bowing at their feet. After this formal greeting she offered them curd as alms. Dhanna and Shalibhadra extended their alms-pots and took the curd. They broke their fast with this curd.

On the way back to their camp both the ascetics were thinking about this incident. Shalibhadra said, "Ascetic Dhanna! Bhagavan Mahavir's words are never false. But today we did not get alms from my mother. We broke our fast with the curd given by this old milkmaid. I fail to understand."

Dhanna, "Shalibhadra! There must be some reason for this. We shall go and ask Bhagavan Mahavir himself."

When they arrived before Bhagavan Mahavir, Shalibhadra asked, "Prabhu! My own mother did not recognize me. We broke our month long fast with the curd given by an old milkmaid. How so, Bhante?"

The all-knowing Tirthankar said, "Shalibhadra! That old milkmaid, whose name is Dhanya was your mother in your last birth. In that life you were a cowherd's son and your name was Sangam. You had given Kheer as alms to an ascetic when he was seeking alms to break his month long

fast. As a result of those pure feelings of compassion and devotion and that act of religious charity you obtained so much wealth, comfort and grandeur during this life that even a great king feels belittled." This stirred the curiosity of Shalibhadra instead of satisfying it. He said, "Prabhu! Kindly tell me more about my earlier birth."

Bhagavan Mahavir said, "Once upon a time there lived a rich cowherd in the village Shali in Magadh state. He had a large herd of cattle and so his household over flowed with milk products. The name of his wife was Dhanya. The couple had a son named Sangam.

"The evil shadow of bad times fell on the family. All of a sudden the cowherd died. The herd was consumed by an epidemic. All their wealth was gone. Widow Dhanya and her fatherless son hardly got even two square meals each day. Dhanya migrated with her son to Rajagriha.

"Dhanya took up household jobs with the rich families of Rajagriha to earn her living. To contribute to the meagre family earnings Sangam also started working as a cowherd. In the morning he would collect cows and calves from the houses of his clients and take the herd to the meadows. In the evening he would take them back to their owners.

"Once on a festival day Kheer was being cooked in every house in the village. Little Sangam also wanted to eat Kheer. He told his mother to cook the sweet dish. When the boy insisted, the widow explained, 'We hardly get two square meals each day, so how can I cook a rich dish for you?'

"The women of the households where Dhanya worked came to know of Sangam's craving for Kheer and they wanted to help the poor widow and her charming little son. They collected all the required material including milk, rice, sugar, and dry fruits. The widow cooked Kheer and gave a bowl full to Sangam. The Kheer was hot and Sangam waited eagerly for it to cool down. Dhanya had to go out to collect water from the well. She instructed



Sangam to eat the Kheer when it became lukewarm and went out on her errand.

“Before Sangam started eating an ascetic entered the house to beg alms for breaking his month long fast. Sangam had seen ascetics coming for alms at the houses of his rich clients. He was aware of the importance of giving alms to such pious people. He was happy to see the ascetic and thought, ‘How lucky I am that I am getting this opportunity to give alms to a great and pious ascetic.’

“Eyes brimming with tears of joy, he greeted the ascetic with all respect and devotion and poured all the Kheer in the ascetic’s bowl. The ascetic blessed the child and left. When the widow returned she saw her son licking the bowl. Thinking that he was still hungry she gave the remaining Kheer also to him. In his happy mental state Sangam ate all the Kheer given to him by his mother.

“The mother looked happily at her son thinking that her hungry son had eaten two full bowls. The loving stare of the mother turned out to be evil-eye. That night Sangam had a terrible stomach ache and he died thinking of the ascetic and the pious ascetic way of life. This boy Sangam reincarnated as Shalibhadra, the son of merchant Gobhadra and his wife Bhadra.”

Dhanna already knew the story of his earlier birth. There was an uncanny resemblance in the earlier births of both these ascetics who had enjoyed the fruits of great charity done during their previous births.

Dhanna and Shalibhadra sought permission from Bhagavan Mahavir to go to Vaibhar mountains for their ultimate penance. On the peak of the mountain they sat down on two large flat rocks and taking their final vow commenced the ultimate penance and meditation till the last moment of their life. They were in fact in the final stage of weakening the residual karmas.



Bhadra arrived for Darshan with her thirty-two daughters-in-law. King Shrenik also came. They all bowed before Bhagavan Mahavir. Later, Bhadra asked, "Prabhu! Where are ascetics Dhanna and Shalibhadra? I am eager to behold them. Bhagavan Mahavir replied, "Both the ascetics went to your house this morning to beg alms. But in your eagerness to come here you did not recognize them." Bhadra became disappointed and started repenting, "How unfortunate I am, that I could not recognize the two ascetics and pay homage to them. The ascetics returned from my door steps empty handed. What do I do now? Prabhu! How can I see them now?"

Bhagavan Mahavir, "Now they have gone to Vaibhar mountain with my permission. They have taken the ultimate vow and shall not return now. Their life is coming to an end."

Bhadra at once left for Vaibhar mountain. Shrenik was also with her. Seeing the two ascetics sitting in deep meditation she could not contain herself and started crying, "Ascetics! I am the most unfortunate one. I could not give you alms. My life is worthless." The continuous flow of tears displayed the deep affection of a mother.

When king Shrenik saw Bhadra being carried away by overwhelming fondness for her son, he tried to pacify her, "Bhadra! You are the mother-in-law of the courageous Dhanna and the mother of the great ascetic Shalibhadra. Please overcome this excessive fondness. Praise your luck that these ascetics are heading towards ultimate purity. Come, let us leave. We should not be the cause of disturbance to these meditating ascetics."

Bowing before the practicing ascetics, Bhadra and king Shrenik turned back and proceeded for Rajagriha. They both were happy now. Dhanna had not only followed the right path himself but also inspired Shalibhadra to go along. His eight wives had also followed him on the path.



After a month long fast Dhanna got liberated. Shalibhadra reincarnated as a god in the Sarvarth-siddh dimension of gods as he was just seven micro units of time short of shedding all his karmas. Subhadra and the other seven wives of Dhanna also reincarnated as goddesses. Subhadra also did spiritual practices and penance. She also reincarnated as a goddess.

Shalibhadra's name is at the head of the list of the affluent and wealthy. As a human he enjoyed all the pleasures of a divine life. For him the most priceless of the gems became worthless. He rejected the honour bestowed by the king and dulled the king's glamour and glory in comparison.

Dhanya Kumar heads the list of the wise and the lucky. He always looked after his worthless brothers. He was a storehouse of wisdom. He was successful in every venture he attempted. He was accomplished in all the seventy two known subjects. Although a brave man, he always did good even to those who harmed him. He was the embodiment of compassion and public service. The life of Dhanna is worth emulating by everyone.



## WOMEN : BETTER THAN MEN

*(Sati Sur-sundari)*

( 1 )

In Champa, the capital city of Anga state, there ruled a king named Aridaman. The name suited his virtues. Aridaman (subjugator of enemies) was a king who defeated and subjugated his enemies. He was a valourous warrior and just and benevolent ruler. His queen was Rati Sundari who excelled Venus in beauty.

King Aridaman had no offspring. The royal couple was deeply disturbed by this shortcoming. The king used to think, "In the absence of a son who will be the heir to my throne? Will I be the last branch of my family tree?" On the other hand, the queen's worry was, "If I do not give birth to a child I will be called a barren woman. Forget about a son!—even if I give birth to a daughter at least my name will not be slandered as 'a barren woman'. Moreover, What difference is there between a son and a daughter? At least my lap will not be empty."

At last the wish of the royal couple was fulfilled. They got a daughter. The birth ceremony of the daughter was performed with a grandeur befitting a son's. As the new born daughter was divinely beautiful she was named Sur-sundari (beautiful like the gods). When she grew, the king sent her to a school. Precocious Sur-sundari started her studies under an able Acharya. The gold and gem-like combination of beauty and virtues in Sur-sundari was a rare phenomenon. It conformed to the proverb—of what use is a flower that has no fragrance and of what use is beauty that has no virtue.

In Champa city lived a merchant named Dhanpal. His trading activities covered far away cities and he was extremely wealthy. His wife Dhanavati gave birth to a son who was named Amar Kumar. When Amar Kumar grew old he was also admitted to the same school in which princess Sur-sundari studied. Both these also studied under the same Acharya.

One day during the recess the Acharya was not in the school. Some of the students were playing around and the others were gossiping. Sur-sundari was sitting under a tree and whiling away the recess time. The mild and cool afternoon wind made her sleepy. She stretched on the velvet like green grass and slept.

Drifting around, Amar Kumar also came there. He saw that Sur-sundari was asleep and completely lost to her surroundings. One end of her scarf was tied into a knot over something. With a feeling of curiosity and benign mischief he undid the knot and found seven Kaudis ( a specific type of shell used as lowest denomination of Indian currency in the past). Amar Kumar took all the seven Kaudis, went to the market, and purchased some sweets.

When the bell for end of recess was sounded all the students gathered and started to go to their classes. Amar Kumar started distributing sweets to all. When he gave the sweets to Sur-sundari she asked, "Amar Kumar! What is the joyous occasion for which you are distributing sweets?"

On hearing this question all the students around laughed heartily. Sur-sundari found this insulting. She raised her voice and said, "What is so funny? Have I asked something wrong?" One of the students replied, "Sur-sundari! Of course it is a funny question. The sweets are being distributed at your expense and you are asking Amar Kumar about the reason for this."

Sur-sundari asked, with curiosity as well as irritation in her voice, "Tell me Amar! What is the secret. I shall eat

the sweets only when you tell me.” Amar Kumar explained, “These sweets were purchased from the seven Kaudis tied to the end of your scarf, thus the sweets are being distributed on your behalf.”

Princess Sur-sundari exploded with anger, “Amar Kumar! You are the son of a reputed merchant. Your father is famous for his integrity and honesty and you, his son, commit theft. You should be ashamed of this act of purchasing sweets with stolen money. How scandalous it is that the son of a merchant commits theft.”

This insult in presence of all the colleagues hurt Amar Kumar, and he also got angry and responded, “Sundari! Your reaction is misplaced. You are acting as if I have looted all your treasury. You are losing your balance for mere seven Kaudis. Can you purchase a kingdom with seven Kaudis? What could you do with just seven Kaudis?”

Sur-sundari could not be subdued. She growled like a lioness, “Here, here Amar! You are acting like an insolent thief. I could have bought everything including a kingdom with the seven Kaudis. For you the seven Kaudis were insignificant because you do not know their value. I could certainly buy a kingdom in exchange.”

While this wordy duel was going on, the Acharya arrived. A calm descended and every student was silent. The Acharya said, “Dear Sur-sundari! Do not lose your poise. He was playing a friendly and playful trick when he took your Kaudis, and that is why he just distributed sweets on your behalf. His intention was not to steal. And Amar! You should not stretch playful mischief to that extent. To steal playfully is not a theft in reality, but in principle it still is theft.”

Everyone was pacified. Their studies continued. The incident was forgotten. Amar Kumar and Sur-sundari also resumed their normal friendly behaviour as if nothing had happened. But the remark of Sur-sundari—I could have

bought everything including a kingdom with the seven Kaudis—remained imprinted in some remote corner of Amar Kumar's memory. A seed lies dormant in ground and sprouts when its time and season comes.

During her studies Sur-sundari acquired all the knowledge and expertise of all subjects and arts suitable for women. After this, she got interested in religion. She understood the value and importance of the Namokar Mahamantra. She acquired the knowledge of the nine fundamentals and Jain metaphysics and philosophy. After acquiring all this knowledge Sur-sundari concluded her studies and returned to her normal royal life in the palace. Amar Kumar also completed his studies of all scriptures and the seventy two subjects and arts including commerce. He took leave of his Acharya and returned home.

When Sur-sundari reached marriageable age her father, the king, got worried about finding a suitable match for her. He looked for matching princes from various states, far and near, but could not find anyone suitable for princess Sur-sundari. One day King Aridaman conveyed his problem to the Acharya, "Revered Acharya! I am not able to find a suitable match for Sur-sundari. Please help me find one." The Acharya smiled and said, "Sire! To be a prince is not the only criterion for being a suitable and proper match for a princess. The only suitable match for Sur-sundari would be one who matches her in virtues, education, beauty, talent, conduct, character, valour, and personality. It does not matter if he is not a prince. Sire! I have taught Sur-sundari as well as Amar Kumar, the merchant's son. I am certain that they are suitable for each other. O best among men! You may test the virtues and abilities of these two in your court one day. I am sure you would like to make Amar Kumar your son-in-law."

The king told queen Ratisundari about the Acharya's advice and she also gave her consent to the Acharya's plan. At an opportune moment the special court was called.

Besides the regular members including the king, queen, and ministers, merchant Dhanpal, Amar Kumar, Sur-sundari, the Acharya, and some students were also present. Everyone had taken his allotted seat and the visitors' galleries all around were also packed. The king started the proceedings, "First Amar Kumar will ask a question and Sur-sundari will reply."

Amar Kumar got up and after saluting the Acharya, his father, and the king, he put forth his question, "Who is known as brave, who is called an accomplished person, and who should be called charitable and an orator?"

Sur-sundari gave her reply after duly greeting those present, "One who has won over his senses is called brave. He who is without conceit is called accomplished. The provider of amnesty or assurance of safety may be called charitable and he who benefits others, even by his speech, may be called an orator."

The assembly reverberated with thunderous applause. Every one uttered words of praise.

Now Sur-sundari asked a question, "What are the definitions of scholar, sage, smuggler, and strong?"

When Sur-sundari sat down after asking the question, Amar Kumar got up and replied, "He who delights an assembly of the wise is a scholar. One who is moved by the misery of others is called a sage. One who can twist another's mind is called a smuggler, and he who favours death to retreat is truly strong."

Sur-sundari debated, "This is not true. According to scriptures those who have knowledge of the fundamentals are called scholars. He who has an equanimous attitude towards friend and foe both is called a sage. The god of love, Manmath, is the biggest smuggler, and he who wins over lust is the strongest of all."



The Acharya intervened, "Both the sets of definitions are correct according to their context. But know that the purpose of this assembly is not to conduct a debate and declare a winner. It is the test of the ability of independent thinking of the candidates. Every one reads scriptures and remembers them. But to be a creative thinker is something else. Now Amar Kumar will ask another question."

Amar Kumar, "Which is a pond without an embankment? Which is the tree without a branch? Which is the bird without wings? and What is death without dying?"

Sur-sundari, "Eyes are ponds without embankments. Religion is a tree without any branch. Life is the bird without wings, and sleep is death without dying."

There was a loud applause all around. The king congratulated and greeted the Acharya, "Revered one! It is the fruit of your blessing. An able teacher produces able graduates." Some even more intelligent questions were exchanged. Both the candidates answered every question asked. Neither of them failed at any question.

The wishes of the king and the queen were fulfilled right at their home. The boy and the girl had spent their childhood and formative years together. It was as if this union was pre-ordained. The king sent the proposal of marrying his daughter to merchant Dhanpal's son. What objection could Dhanpal have? Nobody refuses wealth and good fortune when they are offered.

At an auspicious time and moment Princess Sur-sundari was married to Amar Kumar, the merchant's son. The king's daughter became a bride and entered her new home. The newly wedded couple lived happily.

( 2 )

One day Dhanpal got a message that twelve of his ships filled with a cargo of textiles had returned from far away countries and arrived at the port. The merchant got the cargo unloaded and filled his godowns. Amar Kumar checked the documents and the goods. The ships started being loaded with fresh export cargo. The young man had started taking interest in his ancestral business. One day he thought that he should no longer depend on his father. It was time he took hold of all business activities and relieved his father from the responsibilities of business. He approached his father and said, "I want to take charge of these twelve ships and go to foreign markets to trade. When I sell all the goods I will reload the ships with merchandise to be sold in local market and return."

Dhanpal replied, "Amar! I do not have many sons for whom I need to earn in excess. It is too early for you to start worrying about business. This is your age to enjoy. If you go away how would your mother feel? For no reason should your wife also suffer separation? Moreover, you have no experience of business travels. How would you be able to cope with the scores of problems common to foreign travel?"

Amar Kumar replied with all humility, "Father! You are right but the first day at work is same for everyone. Intelligence, luck, strength, and patience are tested properly only in unknown lands. He who remains standing on the shore does not learn to swim. An unused sword gets rusted fast. Neglect in business leads to squandering of all the accrued wealth. Please give me your permission. With your blessings I shall return safe and successful."

At so much insistence from Amar Kumar, Dhanpal relented and gave him permission to go. When Sur-sundari came to know of Amar Kumar's plans she said with tear filled eyes, "Darling! I shall not allow you to go alone. I too shall accompany you."

Amar Kumar, "No Sundari! You should stay here only, as it is beyond you to tolerate the hardships of a business voyage. You should look after my parents. I will try to return soon."

Sur-sundari, "Dear husband! Even before our marriage we have spent a lot of time together. We have studied together as well. Today you want to separate from me. Would I be an obstacle in your work during this voyage? If you don't take me along I shall die weeping."

Amar had to submit to this affection-filled insistence of Sur-sundari. The couple took formal permission from the parents and left.

All the twelve ships left for Simhal island. Cutting the leaping waves on the sea the ships moved ahead. The sea was filled with filth as well as gems, just as the mind is filled with knowledge and passions.

A few days later the ships arrived at Yaksh island. The ships were anchored there as rest was essential after such a long voyage. Amar Kumar instructed the captains of ships to collect fresh water from the island and refill the holds. He himself landed and went for an outing with Sur-sundari into the island.

Amar and Sur-sundari wandered around the coastal forest of the Yaksh island. The natural beauty of the land and the sea was enchanting. "See how that creeper has entwined the tree." "Look! that tree has turned into a stump as if the life-fluid has been sucked out from it." Talking thus they enjoyed the natural beauty of the forest. Time flew away. A cool and mild wind was blowing, and appeared to be carrying the message that movement is life and to stop is the cessation of life. But no one heard the silent message of the wind. The couple stopped under a tree. Tired Sur-sundari lay down on the surface of a rock and at once dozed.

A seed lying dormant in the earth sprouts in a favourable climate and grows into a plant. 'I could have

bought everything including a kingdom with the seven Kaudis.' This biting remark of Sur-sundari was lying dormant in some remote corner of Amar Kumar's memory. Today he recalled that incident. Time passes but such remarks remain in the memory. Looking at the sleeping Sur-sundari he thought, "That day also she was sleeping like this when I had taken the seven Kaudis tied into the end of her scarf. That day also she was unaware as she is today. That day I had taken seven Kaudis, but today I shall give seven Kaudies. I would like to see how she gets a kingdom in return of these seven Kaudis. Curse her bloated ego."

The dormant irritation made him blind towards his beloved wife. To him Sur-sundari was now an adversary. He was burning with the fire of vengeance and the lake of love had dried up. With malevolence Amar took out a slip of paper from his pocket and wrote—"I caused a hindrance in your desire to buy a kingdom by taking away your seven Kaudis. Now you fulfill your ambition with these I return."

Amar Kumar carefully took off all the ornaments she was wearing and tied seven Kaudis with the note at the end of her Sari. Although all this activity of Amar was apparently a result of cunning and depravity, in fact he was doing it under the influence of the past Karmas.

When he approached the ships Amar Kumar started crying and uttering pathetically, "O God! What shall I do now. The Yaksh (demigod) has devoured my darling Sur-sundari. I have nothing to live for now." All the members of the crews of his ships never doubted this performance and they sincerely offered him condolences and said words of courage. Soon his crocodile tears dried and he ordered, "Weigh the anchors at once and depart for Simhal Island."

Then Sur-sundari turned. It was like a turn of her luck. She opened her eyes and found herself alone. She looked around and shouted, "Amar Kumar! Where are you?" But the sound just echoed in the jungle. She ran towards the

beach and found that the ships had departed. She could see the masts of the ships disappearing on the horizon. Sur-sundari returned back to the same rock under the tree, sat down and started crying. There was no one even to wipe her tears. As she tried to wipe her tears with the corner of her Sari she found that something was tied there. Curiosity made her open the knot hurriedly. She found seven Kaudis and a note. She read, "I caused a hindrance in your desire to buy a kingdom by taking away your seven Kaudis. Now you fulfill your ambition with these I return."

Sur-sundari understood everything. A scene from long back shot up from the memory and danced before her eyes, "Whom should I blame for this? My husband? No, he is not at fault. I must have certainly acquired some evil Karmas during my last birth and only their fruition has brought all these pleasures and pains. How much more pain is to come in future is difficult to know?"

The person who believes in Karma takes refuge with religion. To follow a religious life may not counter the effect of the Karmas but it certainly gives the strength to tolerate them. A lamp does not turn night into day but it certainly allows one to see in the darkness and helps passing the night. The day dawns only with the rising of the sun. This human life is not as straight and smooth as a highway; it is more like a twisting and turning trail crossing an uneven terrain. Life is filled with ups and downs of happiness and sorrow.

The natural valour of the martial race awakened within Sur-sundari. If man snatches, woman's duty is to be charitable and submit all she has. Woman is always one step ahead of man. Sita had also undergone the test of fire. Sur-sundari started chanting Namokar Maha-mantra peacefully. All of a sudden with a terrifying laughter a Yaksh appeared there. He saw meditating Sur-sundari and asked in his harsh voice, "Who are you and why have you come here?"

Sur-sundari replied with wet eyes, "O divine one! I am a destitute and my miserable fate has brought me here." The cruel Yaksh was moved and his voice became soft and normal. On his further questioning she narrated the whole story to him. The Yaksh gave his assurance, "Daughter this place is not meant for human beings. Still you may live happily under my protection. Stop worrying about anything."

Sur-sundari took shelter in a cave and spent her time chanting Namokar Maha-mantra all the time and subsisting on the vegetable produce of that area and fresh water from the nearby streams.

A few years passed. One day a merchant named Kamaldatt arrived at Yaksh Island with his ships and anchored there. Yaksh Island was a water refilling stop for Simhal Island bound ships. Kamaldatt saw Sur-sundari. He approached her and greeted her courteously. When he asked, Sur-sundari told him her story. Kamaldatt said, "I accept you as my sister. Please come with me to my ship. I am going to Simhal Island where you shall meet Amar Kumar certainly." Simple hearted Sur-sundari believed Kamaldatt and boarded his ship.

The ships of Kamaldatt were proceeding towards Simhal Island through the tormenting waves of the sea. For two or three days Kamaldatt continued to wear his mask of piety but after that his lust overpowered his restraint. He thought, "Now she cannot escape my trap. If she agrees to my designs well and good, if not, I shall have to use force." How mean was Kamaldatt! He came and sat besides Sur-sundari. He threw away the veil of deceit and said, "Today you look more beautiful than the goddess of beauty herself. Look at me and smile. How long would you wait for Amar Kumar? Your worries are over now. Accept me and live like a wealthy woman."

Sur-sundari was aware of her helpless condition. She swallowed her pride and looking down at her feet said,

"Have you forgotten about your duty so soon? You had accepted me as your sister. Please forget about your evil designs; otherwise I shall leap in the sea and commit suicide."

When the devil of lust overpowers one he loses his reason. He becomes deaf to right advice. Kamaldatt hardly gave any heed to Sur-sundari's plea. He said harshly, "Your threat of committing suicide is meaningless for me. If you do not submit willingly I can use force also. It will be to your benefit not to be adamant."

This stirred Sur-sundari's womanhood as if a dog had challenged a disabled lioness. She got up roaring and said, "O devil in the garb of man! Don't utter even one word more. You are not aware of the consequences of irking a Sati (a chaste and virtuous woman). You have awakened a sleeping lioness." And she took out her concealed dagger. Sur-sundari belonged to a martial race and Kamaldatt was a merchant. He panicked when confronted with this ferocious appearance of a Sati and rushed towards the gate. He went out and closed the door. Locking it from outside he shouted, "Now I will see who saves you from my trap."

In the room Sur-sundari calmed down and started chanting the Namokar Maha-mantra and worshiping the Arihant (Jain Tirthankar). She thought, "This devil will try to violate my chastity. I shall die but not allow his evil design to succeed. Now I shall not be able to behold my husband nor shall I be able to purchase a kingdom in seven Kaudis and give it to him. I shall die without fulfilling this wish. Now that it matters no more, it is best to seek refuge in the lap of the sea." With these thoughts and still chanting Namokar Maha-mantra Sur-sundari reached at the window and jumped into the sea.

Just then Kamaldatt opened the door and entered the room with some of his crew. When he did not find Sur-sundari there and saw the window open he understood everything. But what could he do now?

The insult of a Sati invites grave consequences. There was storm in the sea and Kamaldatt's ship capsized. Sinful persons embrace such a pathetic end.

Sur-sundari caught hold of a wooden plank from the broken ship and started floating. There was no sign of land anywhere around, just endless expanse of water. After some time, tired by her efforts at swimming, Sur-sundari fainted. Some time later a ship arrived at that spot. The owner of the ship saw this woman floating and he lifted her into his ship. When Sur-sundari regained consciousness after some time she thought, "Alas! I have been saved. It seems that the bad Karmas from my past birth have not seen their end. I don't know how much more I have to suffer?"

When the owner of this ship asked her introduction Sur-sundari told him the tale of her miseries. When at dusk she wanted to do Pratikraman (the Jain ritual of reviewing the activities of the day and atoning for misdeeds) the ship-owner said, "Why do you need to do Pratikraman. You have committed no sin. Indeed, you are doing wrong by causing pain to your beautiful body. This life is to enjoy. Be my wife and live happily."

Sur-sundari thought, "What an irony. I saved myself from one trap and landed into another." She turned towards the ship-owner and said, "Men are proud of their physical strength. If I do not submit to you I shall be threatened of that physical strength. But know that this physical strength is what breaks man into pieces. A ship of another merchant vanished into the sea by the curse of this Sati. You have saved my life and now you want to violate my chastity. Is that what your religion recommends?"

The merchant hid himself behind the veil of deceit and said, "Sister! Pardon me. I was just testing you. Indeed, you are a Sati. Go ahead and do your Pratikraman without any worry." And he left that spot. Sati commenced her meditation.



After some time the ship arrived at a port near the town of Sovankul. This was a place where numerous merchants traded innocent young girls. The merchant disembarked taking Sur-sundari along. He entered the town and went to a prostitute. He negotiated with Kaamlata, the prostitute, in the privacy of her chamber and sold Sur-sundari at a high price. Sur-sundari was unaware of this conspiracy. The merchant said to Sur-sundari, "Sister! Please stay with Kaamlata for some time. I am going to the market on business and shall return by evening."

When the fake merchant did not return even after the dusk Sur-sundari got worried. She asked Kaamlata, "Mother! When my brother will return? He had told that he will be back by evening. It is almost three hours past dusk."

Kaamlata, "Sundari! Forget your brother and think of your mate. Here you will get mates not brothers."

Innocent Sur-sundari could not understand the hidden meaning of this remark. She replied with joy, "Husband! Do you know my husband? Where is he and when will he come?"

Kaamlata, "Here you will get numerous husbands. You shall meet them one by one. Now the bumble-bees are soon going to hover over the flower." And she laughed heartily for a long time. Sur-sundari now understood everything, "So I have been sold to this prostitute. Alas! there is no end to the miseries caused by cruel fate."

The prostitute thrust a heap of garments and ornaments before Sur-sundari and said, "Take these, remove your rags, and dress up at once."

Sur-sundari, "Mother! I am wearing the ornaments of chastity and Dharma. Please leave me alone." The prostitute thought that the girl was new. It would take her five or six days to adapt herself to the new ways. She called her maids and instructed, "Take her with you and serve her

well. Explain her duties to her and mould her to the needs of this place.”

The maids took her with them. When Sur-sundari did not eat or drink anything even after a lot of persuasion one of the maids said, “There is no use abandoning food like this. In the beginning it seems bad to every girl. But soon you will start liking it.”

Sur-sundari, “Sister! I am not one of those who accept their defeat and compromise with the situation. I would rather die than accept this profession.”

Observing her innocence and strict adherence to chastity the maids were moved. The senior among them said, “If you really don’t want to live here I shall help you get away. But mind you, under no circumstance should my name be revealed.”

With the help of the maid Sur-sundari fled from that place during that very night. The maids reported to the prostitute in the morning, “The new girl has escaped. It seems that she has jumped down from the window.” The prostitute repented, “I paid the price asked by the merchant and have now lost the girl. This is the first time that I have suffered such loss.”

Sur-sundari was running with all her strength. Just before dawn she reached the sea shore. Chanting the Namokar Maha-mantra she jumped into the sea and disappeared in that deep water body. A huge fish swallowed her. Coincidentally a fisherman had thrown his fishing net just at that moment. The huge fish was caught in the net. The fisherman jumped with joy, “What a giant of a fish. I shall get a lot of money today.” And while still on the beach he at once slit the fish with his knife. He was taken aback when he saw a beautiful damsel inside the fish.

Sur-sundari was almost dead. She had turned pale. Jumping into the sea, being swallowed by the fish, the fish being caught in the net of the fisherman, and the slitting of

the fish—all these acts occurred in so quick a succession that Sur-sundari did not die. The fisherman lit a fire and warmed her up. The heat and fresh air made her regain consciousness. She opened her eyes.

The fisherman thought that this beauty from the sea should be presented to the king. Accordingly he took Sur-sundari to the court of the king of Sovankul and said to the king, "Sire! I have got this beauty-from-the-sea from within a large fish. Please accept her and give her an appropriate place in your palace." The king amply rewarded the fisherman and asked the maid servants to take Sur-sundari to the inner palace.

The queen saw the pale face of Sur-sundari and enquired about her well being. Sur-sundari told the tale of her recurring miseries to the queen. The queen became sympathetic but thought, "If I allow her to remain here, the king will violate her and I shall be in disfavour. It is best to remove her from here. It will be a double benefit. One, I shall earn good Karma by doing the good deed of saving the chastity of a Sati; and two, I shall not lose the favour of the king."

The queen helped Sur-sundari to escape through a secret escape route. She also advised her, "You should go into the forest and live in hiding. If you go into the city you shall be caught again. That would harm me and you will never again be able to escape."

Sur-sundari fled and during the same night penetrated deep into the jungle, walking non-stop. She sat under a tree and started thinking about her future. Concealed in a nearby thicket was a group of thieves. When they saw Sur-sundari they deliberated, "We did not get anything to steal today. We shall take this woman along and give her to the chief. He shall be pleased to get this invaluable gem."

After these deliberations they approached Sur-sundari and said, "Sister! Come with us. We cannot offer you

cookies and comforts but you are welcome to our simple food and living. We had also lost our way during the night and stayed here. Come with us, you have nothing to fear.

Considering them to be good persons Sur-sundari joined the thieves. The thieves went to their chief and gave her to him. The chief of the thieves also tried to seduce her but a mountain cannot be moved by meagre human effort. The determination of the Sati defeated the chief. He ordered his gang, "Take her into the jungle. If she agrees to submit to my wishes bring her back; otherwise kill her. She should not remain in our hideout. She may expose our secrets."

The thieves took Sur-sundari into the jungle and were about to kill her. Sur-sundari was worshipping the Arihant and chanting Namokar Maha-mantra. When one of the thieves lifted his sword to strike Sur-sundari he could not bring down his hand; some unseen hand had caught his wrist. A Vidyadhar (demigod) named Chandragati appeared there and challenged the thieves. None of them had the courage to face this divine figure, and they ran away. Divine flowers were showered and there was a divine communication—

"O Sur-sundari! Your conduct is praise worthy. Now your miseries have ended. Go to Venatat. You will meet your husband, Amar Kumar, after twelve years."

Hearing this divine communication Sur-sundari was reassured. Vidyadhar Chandragati said, "Sister! Get up and come with me. The Viman (a space vehicle or a divine vehicle) is ready." A burnt child dreads fire. Till now she had been deceived by those who called her a sister, so Sur-sundari said, "I will not go anywhere now. Many persons have deceived me by calling me sister. The thieves you have made run away from here also called me sister."

Vidyadhar, "Sister! All are not same. If one does not find a good man after a few bad ones, this earth will become hell. Sister I belong to the clan of Vidyadhars and

my name is Chandragati. I am a follower of Jain religion. Have faith in me. Consider my home to be your parents' home. You can live there and engage in your religious activities and worship of the Arihant."

A genuine and heartfelt communication has a convincing quality. There was truth in the Vidyadhar's statement. Sur-sundari was reassured and she boarded the Viman as if she had come to her parents' place. The four wives (Chandraprabha, Svayamprabha, Padmavati, and Vallabha) of Chandragati welcomed her as if she was their sister-in-law.

Sati Sur-sundari lived happily in the house of Chandragati and devoted her time to religious practices. One day four brothers-in-law of Chandragati came to his house. When they saw Sur-sundari they were attracted towards her. They asked Chandragati, "Respected brother-in-law! Where did you get this gem of a woman? You have our four sisters and still. . ."

Before they could complete the sentence Vidyadhar Chandragati lost his temper. He said harshly, "Shut up! She is my sister. Does the house of a brother not belong to a sister? Listen to the preaching from a Sati who chants Namokar Maha-mantra day and night, and be blessed."

They accepted the Vidyadhar's advice and accompanied him to the place where Sur-sundari was sitting in meditation. They all bowed before her and sat down. Chandragati said, "Sister! We all want to hear to your preaching and be benefitted."

The Sati started preaching and all those present, including the four wives of Vidyadhar Chandragati listened attentively. In her sermon she included an incident—

In the city of Nalpur ruled a king named Nal-putra. In his court was a minister named Karalping. The king respected him very much. In the same city lived a merchant named Pushpadev who had an extremely

beautiful wife named Padmashri. Pushpadev used to frequent the king's court.

With the passage of time Pushpadev and Karalping became friends. The closeness between the two increased and Karalping started visiting Pushpadev's house also. One day Karalping happened to see Padmashri and at once got attracted towards her. He sent the message of his love, with a maid, to the merchant's wife. But the chaste and virtuous Padmashri rebuked the maid and kicked her out.

When Karalping heard about this rejection by Padmashri he thought, "It takes time to cook something. One has to bend his fingers in order to take out frozen butter."

On the other hand the merchant's wife told Pushpadev, "Your close friend Karalping is a wolf in the skin of a lamb. He cuts the branch on which he is perched."

After hearing everything the merchant said, "There is no use raising this issue. Both of us should be cautious of him. As one sows so he reaps. It is said that he who deceives a friend or a teacher becomes a blind or a leper. Another possibility is that he may turn in the right direction and be free of his malice." The incident was forgotten. Karalping continued to work out new plans for his evil designs.

One day King Nalputra, had a terrible headache. All treatments failed to cure him. Karalping cured the king by performing some esoteric ritualistic chanting. The king was pleased with him and wanted to reward him, "Karalping! Ask whatever you desire. I want to reward you." Karalping replied, "Sire! By your grace I have all I need. However, if you really want to reward me kindly get me a bird named Kinjalk. For a long time I have the desire to see this bird."

The king, "Where is this bird available and who could bring it? Also, how would we know that it is that very bird?"

Karalping, "Sire! My friend and your reliable subject Merchant Pushpadev is capable of doing this work. You may assign this duty to him. He knows the Kinjalk bird."

The king called Merchant Pushpadev and ordered him to get that bird. He also arranged for enough money from the treasury. The merchant understood that it was a conspiracy. As soon as he reached home he explained the plan of Karalping to his wife. The merchant couple also worked out a plan to counter it in a way that the snake is killed without a damage to the stick.

Karalping thought, "Now that the merchant is not at home I will see how his wife saves herself from my advances. He came to the merchant's house. Padmashri greeted him and said, "You have come after a long time. Were you offended because I snubbed your maid? Come, we shall go sit in the cellar."

Karalping was very much pleased. He thought, "The butter has melted now and I need not bend my fingers. It seems that earlier she was afraid of the merchant's presence. Now all is under my control." He followed Padmashri down the stairs into the cellar. She asked him to sit on the cot already lying there. The moment Karalping sat on the cot its flimsy surface gave way and he fell into a pit. The merchant's servants were waiting there. They tied him with ropes and threw him in a corner.

Merchant Pushpadev applied blue and white paint over Karalping's body and covered his whole body with feathers using wax as an adhesive. He had turned Karalping into the Kinjalk bird. He put this human bird, Karalping, into a large cage and after a few days took him to the king. The cage was covered with a cloth. Every member of the court was filled with curiosity to see the new bird. All the queens also came into the court to see the strange and rare bird.

Merchant Pushpadev said, "Sire! With great difficulty I could trap six Kinjalk birds. As the weather conditions were averse, five of them died on the way. Only one is left." And he removed the covering cloth. Everyone crowded

around the cage. The king said, "What sort of bird is this. It has no beak. It looks like a human being. Anyway, call Karalping. After curing my headache it was he who wanted to see this bird."

Merchant Pushpadev "Sire! You need not call Karalping. This bird has divine powers, Karalping will come without calling. You may talk to this bird; it will also reply you in human language."

The king, "Bird! Tell me what do you want to eat?"

The bird did not utter a word. The merchant requested the king to send everyone away as the bird will only talk in private. The king asked everyone to leave. After much persuasion the bird said without raising his eyes, "Sire! I am Karalping. Kindly get me out of this prison."

The king was astonished. He asked the merchant, "Merchant Pushpadev! Tell me the truth. Why did you put him in this miserable condition?"

The merchant told everything in detail to the king. The king ordered, "Take away this devil of a man and hang him. His offence is unpardonable."

The merchant asked, "Sire! Please do not kill him. Such an evil person should not remain in your kingdom. So please punish him by excommunicating. Please order him to be exiled."

When the story ended Sur-sundari said, "Every religion including Jain and Vedic professes that every woman other than one's wife should be considered mother or sister. Those who have evil designs on other women always end in misery."

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Thus Sur-sundari was spending her days in worship and other religious activities. One day she decided to go to Venatat. She said to Vidyadhar Chandragati, "Brother! According to the divine communication I shall be able to



behold my husband at Venatat. So please make arrangements to send me to Venatat.”

Vidyadhar, “Sister! A brother never wishes that his sister should go away from him. But I should do what is good for you. I will soon make necessary arrangements.”

Every age has its own means and methods of power. These are the days of machines but those were the days of Mantras. During that period many seemingly impossible tasks were accomplished with the help of Mantras.

The Vidyadhar thought, “In Venatat my sister Sur-sundari may be harassed by rogues and cheats. Let me first teach her some skills and Mantras so that she is able to cross every hurdle.” And he taught her five divine skills.

First was the skill of disguise. It allowed a person to turn himself into any desired form including male, female, animal or bird. The second was the skill of healing. With the help of this, one could cure even the most incurable diseases. The third skill was of secret observation. It helped one to become invisible and observe the secret plans and activities of others. The fourth was the skill of enhancement. Using this, one could bring about any desired enhancement of one’s physical powers. The fifth was the protective skill. With the help of this, one could nullify all or any effect of the adversary’s divine powers and Mantras.

Thus the Vidyadhar endowed his sister with the five useful divine skills besides giving her clothing, ornaments and other essentials. The Bhabhis (brother’s wives) gave her a tearful send off and Sur-sundari boarded the Viman.

The Viman landed in a garden in Venatat. While taking her leave Sur-sundari said to her brother, “Brother! Please return now and don’t be concerned about me. The religion of the Jineshvar god (the Jain Tirthankar) will protect me. You are not only my brother but teacher also. The divine skills you have taught me will remove all my hurdles.” The Vidyadhar left Sur-sundari there and returned in his Viman.

( 3 )

Adversity is the best teacher. If a man is firm in the face of an adversity he automatically finds unusual ways to save himself and gains new experiences. While sitting in the garden Sur-sundari thought, "If I transform myself into a male I shall have no fear from anyone." And she transformed herself into a healthy and strong man and lived boldly in the garden. She took a new name now—Vimalyash (in some sources the name is Vimalvahan).

In the town of Venatat lived an old she-gardner. Her name was Salka and she came daily into the garden to collect flowers. Sur-sundari, in the form of Vimalyash, greeted her with respect and said, "Mother! I will collect flowers for you and in the mean time you should take rest." And Vimalyash started plucking flowers. Soon he brought a basket full of flowers and placed it before the old gardener. The old lady was thankful for this help and she started loving the young man like her son.

Vimalyash started living in the house of gardener Salka. He would go to the garden with her, collect a basket full of flowers, and return home. Slowly Vimalyash learned to make a variety of bouquets, garlands, braids, and other flower-ornaments. He also gathered knowledge about numerous multicolored flowers, their properties and uses.

One day Vimalyash purchased flowers worth seven Kaudis from the gardener. He made a fan, entwining these flowers, and potentized it with the healing Mantra he had perfected. He gave the fan to the gardener and said, "Mother! Take this fan for sale along with your garlands. Sell it for one lac gold coins."

Gardener Salka enquired with surprise, "Son! Indeed you have made a beautiful and attractive fan. Any one would love to buy it but what is so unique about it that he would pay one lac gold coins for this. At the most you will

get ten gold coins and that too if some tasteful merchant falls for it."

Vimalyash, "Mother! This is no ordinary fan. It is a divine fan. It will certainly sell for one lac gold coins. You should know about its properties. It is a healing fan and it can heal any grave and incurable disease including leprosy, high fever, and other fatal ailments. The only condition is that all medicines and all healers available must have failed to cure the ailment. When the patient has lost all hope he should be fanned with this and he will not only be cured but also regain his normal health. This is the divine effect of this fan."

Gardener Salka took the fan to the town. She moved around the crowded lanes shouting, "Buy flower garlands, braids, other ornaments and a divine fan." She had regular customers who bought all her products except the fan. Who would buy a flower-fan at one lac gold coins? Gardener Salka had almost lost all hope when a billionaire merchant, Sagardatt arrived. He said, "Gardener Salka! All your flowers are sold today? It's not your fault; it was I who came late. All right, let me have this fan. What is the price?"

Gardener Salka, "Sir! It will cost you one lac gold coins."

The merchant, "One lac gold coins! Is it studded with diamonds? It seems that you do not want to sell it."

Gardener Salka, "Of course I want to sell it and that too at one lac gold coins. It is a healing fan and it can heal any grave and incurable disease including leprosy, high fever, and other fatal ailments. When you fan with it any disease will be cured and the patient will regain his normal health."

The merchant, "But how to believe what you say?"

Gardener Salka, "Sir! Money is for man and not otherwise. You may take this fan today. I am sure of my claim and you will confirm it by experiment. Tomorrow at the same time I shall collect my one lac gold coins. Do you agree?"

The son of merchant Sagardatt was a leper. All the efforts of the rich merchant had failed to cure him and he had lost all hopes. The merchant thought, "I have already spent millions of gold coins, one lac more is nothing. If my son is cured all my money will be recovered. Moreover it would benefit other hopeless sufferers." And the merchant took the fan agreeing to Gardener Salka's condition.

The leper son of Sagardatt had lost all hope. He was sitting and praying, "Of what use is all this wealth and grandeur to me. I cannot enjoy as I desire to. O God! Why not bring this life to an end and call me to heaven." Just at that moment Merchant Sagardatt arrived there with his newly acquired fan and said, "Son! Now you will be cured of your disease. Just see the divine power of this fan."

The merchant himself started blowing air with the fan. The repelling wounds of leprosy started disappearing and soon the putrid skin regained its normal texture. The complete body acquired a healthy glow. The son touched various parts of his body with his hand in surprise and said, "Father! What magic! I am absolutely cured. Can anybody even say that I was a leper?"

All the members of the family came to see this miracle and the house of the merchant was filled with joy. They started celebrating their good fortune. The fan they got was considered to be the source of all the eight Siddhis (divine powers). The merchant rushed to his treasurer, collected one lac gold coins, boarded a chariot and rushed in the direction of Gardener Salka's house.

He knocked at the door and when the old lady opened the gate he poured the gold coins in her courtyard. Gardener Salka was poor but honest, she said, "Sir! The credit of making this fan goes to my foreigner son Vimalyash. It is the magic of his hands." The merchant met Vimalyash. After thanking Vimalyash profusely the merchant left.

After one gets benefited himself he thinks of others. When the merchant's son was cured he thought of the king, "The king also suffers from the ruinous disease. The king has announced that he shall give half his kingdom to the person who cures him. Why not cure the king and get half his kingdom? I will be doubly benefited by this fan. My son is cured and now I shall get half the kingdom as well."

The merchant happily embellished himself with ornaments and left for the palace. He approached the minister and said that he could cure the king with his fan. A man in distress has no choice. The king called the merchant to his room. The servants were given the fan and they blew its air at the ailing king. But nothing happened.

The king got annoyed and rebuked the merchant. "Merchant! How dare you make fun of me? Of all the people why did you choose me, your king, for this ill conceived buffoonery of yours. I am sure, the greed to acquire half of kingdom must be behind this absurdity."

Merchant Sagardatt replied with all humility, "Sire! I never intended any mockery. I have purchased this fan just yesterday by paying one lac gold coins to Gardener Salka. Air from this very fan has cured my leper son. The glow his body has acquired is worth a look. I am surprised myself that this fan has not performed here what it performed at my house."

The king instructed his servants to produce Gardener Salka before him at once. Gardener Salka came to the king along with Vimalyash. Afraid of the king's anger she presented Vimalyash and said, "Sire! This fan was made by this foreigner."

Vimalyash said calmly, "Sire! The merchant does not tell a lie. Give me the fan and I will cure you at once." Vimalyash took the fan in his hand and once again potentized it by chanting Mantras. Now he fanned the king with the healing fan. The signs of leprosy vanished like the

stars at the dawn or the sun at the dusk. Everyone present was surprised. The body of the king also acquired a unique healthy glow. He got up and embraced Vimalyash with joy.

Now the king asked, "But why did the same fan not cure me when the merchant used it?"

Vimalyash, "Because the merchant had already got what he paid for. This fan can be used only once."

As per his announcement, the king gave half of his kingdom to Vimalyash. Gardener Salka also became rich by getting the one lac gold coins. Vimalyash requested to the king, "Sire! You have given me the kingdom on your own. Now give me something I ask for."

The king, "Why not? Ask what you need."

Vimalyash, "Sire! I want to work as the chief of customs for some time. I shall inspect and obtain the customs duty from any ship that comes to our kingdom."

The king, "What a petty thing you have asked for. For you there is nothing that I cannot give. I have no son. As such, you are like a son to me and whatever I have is yours to ask. I am pleased to give you the charge of the chief of customs of my kingdom."

Vimalyash started living in the king's palace. Now he owned half the kingdom. He was the ruler of half the kingdom. With seven Kaudis he had made the fan and using the fan he had acquired the kingdom. At last Sur-sundari in the form of Vimalyash had purchased a kingdom in seven Kaudis. She had proved that woman was better than man.

Vimalyash now sat in the customs office and collected duty from the incoming ships under his own supervision. He used to meet the owners of the ships and inspected the ships also. When he did not find what he was looking for he would let the ship go.

Once an expert thief came to the city. He created such havoc in the city that the citizens started crying for help. His methods of theft and swindling were unique. He would cleverly disguise himself every time and would swindle the wealthy merchants. He could never be caught. The sufferers thronged the court daily and appealed, "Sire! Save us from this magician of a thief. He uses a new trick every day." The king announced a reward of a million coins for catching that thief.

When no one in the brigade of guards was able to apprehend the thief the king decided to try himself. He armed himself and set out riding a horse during the night. In a lane he heard people shouting, "The thief has just run away in this direction," and he galloped the horse in the direction indicated. After going some distance he saw a heap of stolen ornaments under a tree. He looked around and found that there was a pond nearby. He looked carefully and found that in the middle of the pond the top of a human head was visible. He thought that the cunning thief had hid himself in the pond.

The king took off his clothes and jumped in the pond thinking that now it was impossible for the thief to save himself. When the king reached the middle of the pond and touched the head, he found it to be an overturned pitcher. He was extremely disappointed, "What! This is a pitcher floating in the pond. The thief has tricked me too."

All this time, the thief was hiding in the foliage of the tree. He had anticipated that the king would jump in the pond. He grabbed the opportunity he was looking for and put on the dress of the king including his crown and weapons. He jumped on the king's horse and galloped towards the palace. The guards and door keepers thought that the king was returning. They opened the gates.

In the disguise of the king the thief went to princess Kanakvati and said, "Daughter! Come along. I shall take

you to the palace of Vimalyash for your safety. The thief has threatened to kidnap you." The thief took along the princess and while leaving the palace he instructed the guards, "Be careful. The thief will come pretending to be the king. Don't allow him to enter the palace."

After some time the drenched king returned and asked the guards to open the gates. The guards laughed at him, apprehended him and threw him in the prison without ensuring who he was. They were keen to get the prize money. In the morning when the senior officers came, the king narrated the whole incident. Everyone sympathized with each other as the ministers, the chief of guards, and other high officials, had all suffered at the hands of the thief.

Next day the king made an announcement—"Whoever apprehends this thief and frees princes Kanakvati from his trap will be given the hand of the princess in marriage and also the remaining half of my kingdom."

Vimalyash decided to take the challenge. With the help of the divine skill of secret observation he acquired all the information about the thief and, becoming invisible, followed him. This way he found out the hideout of the thief. Vimalyash heard the thief say to the princess, "Kanakvati! You should marry me. Know of my strength—all the power of your kingdom has failed to apprehend me. Besides this I have no dearth of wealth."

The princess, "Cunning thief! A lioness can never live with a jackal. Vimalyash has accepted the challenge of apprehending you. He is sure to catch you one day."

As soon as the thief stepped ahead to grab her, Vimalyash appeared and challenged the thief. That rogue was also no weakling. He leaped to combat. With the help of his power-enhancing skill Vimalyash increased his power beyond that of the thief and subdued him. He tied the



thief's limbs with a rope and put him on a horse. He called the nearest patrol and returned to the palace with the thief and the princess.

In the morning the thief was produced in the king's court. A large crowd gathered to see this brilliant thief. When the commotion subsided a little, the king said, "O Thief! You have tormented my people a lot. You have not spared the merchants, traders, ministers and the chief of guards; not even me. Still your proficiency is commendable. Tell me how should I punish you?"

The thief, "Sire! I belong to the Vidyadhar clan. My parents are Jains who worship the Jineshvar god. I got caught in bad company and that led me to this despicable profession. I had resolved that as long as I didn't get caught I would continue my miraculous art. When caught I would become an ascetic and make my life a success. Therefore if you pardon me and let me free I shall atone for my sins and reform my life."

The King, "You are indeed cunning! You want to deceive me once again in name of asceticism. How can I believe you? Even after you become an ascetic you may torment other ascetics and monks."

Vimalyash, "Sire! I have a request to make. You are a king. To give charity is a duty of the king and there is no greater charity than forgiving. As such, kindly pardon him. If mutual faith is lost nothing can be accomplished. One who embraces Jain religion never returns on the evil path."

The king, "Son Vimalyash! I fail to find words for your praise. You have saved me from great miseries. I can never reject your advice."

The king pardoned the thief and let him free. The thief with his five hundred accomplices got initiated and became an ascetic. He commenced his spiritual practices.

The king married his daughter Kanakvati to Vimalyash and gave him the remaining half of his kingdom. Now Vimalyash became ruler of the whole kingdom.

Kanakvati came to the palace of her husband Vimalyash. It was the honeymoon night but a strange one, the meeting of a woman with another woman. Sur-sundari in the form of Vimalyash said, "Darling! A friend of mine is expected to come from Simhal island with a ship-load of merchandise. Before meeting my friend I cannot consummate our marriage. Till then we shall remain celibate." Kanakvati accepted her husband's wish. She marveled at the depth of their friendship and resolved to honour and praise it. And so she slept on a different bed.

The period of twelve years since the divine communication was coming to an end. Sur-sundari in the form of Vimalyash was thinking, "The divine communication gave assurance that after twelve years I shall meet my husband. Now the time is ripe and I should be able to meet my husband." Expectantly Vimalyash daily asked his assistant, "Has no ship arrived from Simhal Island?"

The assistant replied, "Prince! The day a ship arrives I shall not only inform you about it but also produce its owner before you?"

One day the assistant informed, "Prince! Twelve ships loaded with cargo have come from Simhal island. I have brought the owner, merchant Amar Kumar, with me. He will himself pay the duty."

Amar Kumar was produced. Vimalyash asked, "Give your name, address, and the details of the ships."

Amar Kumar, "I am Amar Kumar, the son of Merchant Dhanpal, resident of Champa city of the illustrious king Aridaman. I am returning with my ships after twelve years. Six of my ships contain textiles and the other six grocery goods. Please charge whatever duty is due. I want to leave today."

Vimalyash, "Merchant! You are a jackal in disguise. You deal in contraband and should be punished."

Amar Kumar, "Why do you say this? This is my ancestral business. My father is famous for his integrity and fair dealings far and near."

Vimalyash, "It may be so in the case of your father. But I am talking about you. Sons of honest fathers become thieves after they cross childhood. Good may come out of bad and vice versa. The lotus grows in swamp and black soot is produced by the bright flame. Religious Prahlad was the son of evil Hiranyakashipu and evil Kamsa was the son of religious Ugrasen. Is it not Mr. Merchant?"

Amar Kumar, "But I have committed no theft. You are accusing me unnecessarily."

Vimalyash, "When you are put behind the bars you will remember what theft you did commit."

Sur-sundari in the form of Vimalyash had recognized her husband and so she was teasing him. Amar Kumar on the other hand was fearful of the looming punishment. He thought, "I have been caught in an unexpected trap. I should report this to the king and seek his intervention." And he went to the king's court. Vimalyash allowed him to go with four guards.

Amar Kumar reported to the king, "Sire! your customs officer has accused me of theft without any ground. I am ready to pay the due customs duty. Please do justice and allow me to proceed for my destination. Is this the treatment foreign traders get in your kingdom? All my ships have been detained by your guards."

The king, "Merchant Amar Kumar! Had it been someone else I would have taken the matter in my hands. I would have punished the criminal and suspended such customs officer. But this matter is being handled by prince Vimalyash and I have full confidence that he will never do anything illegal or undue. He is not capable of doing

injustice. A person who got pardon for a famous thief could never harass you without any reason. There must be some secret or special reason. You should go back to him and appeal once again. Only he can set you free if he so desires. I cannot do anything."

Amar Kumar returned to Vimalyash and joining his palms appealed, "O great man! Please pardon me. I have never committed any theft knowingly. If I have done so inadvertently kindly forgive me. You are the ocean of forgiveness. You even got a pardon for the famous thief in the kingdom."

Vimalyash, "All right I shall release you if you fulfill one condition. Put off all your cloths except your underwear and consume one and a quarter Seer (about one kilogram) of sesame-seed-oil by massaging it over your body. When you consume the prescribed quantity of oil you shall be released."

Amar Kumar was surprised to hear this strange condition or punishment. But somehow he needed to gain his freedom. And so Amar Kumar agreed to do as told. There was no other way to obtain his freedom.

Asking his assistants to look after the office Vimalyash took Amar Kumar into another room. He put a bowl full of one and a quarter Seer of oil before Amar Kumar and lay down on a bed to take rest. Amar Kumar took off his clothes and started massaging his body with the oil.

Brought up in luxury as a wealthy merchant's son, delicate Amar Kumar could not even consume a few grams of oil by massaging it over his body; one and a quarter Seer was out of the question. However, out of compulsion he started doing just that. Vimalyash closed his eyes and acted as if he was asleep.

Amar Kumar thought, "Why not drink the oil. This is the only way to cross this hurdle. It is beyond my capacity to finish this oil by rubbing it over my body." But the

moment he touched the bowl with his lips Vimalyash admonished him, "What are you trying to do, Merchant? You said that you have never committed theft but it seems that stealing is in your blood."

Amar Kumar, "Prince! You may kill me or let me free but the job you have forced on me is beyond me. This was the only way I could think of avoiding it. In fact I am not a thief."

Vimalyash, "Every thief when caught says he is innocent. You have been a thief since your childhood when you stole seven Kaudis. When the owner of those Kaudis called you a thief you abandoned her, your own wife, in a forlorn jungle. Tell me if it is not true? And you still keep on harping the same tune that you are not a thief. Now I have caught you red handed."

Amar Kumar was taken aback at this statement of Vimalyash. He said with choked throat, "Prince! Now I will not object even if you take my life. Please tell me, did my darling Sur-sundari ever come to you? Where is she now? I just want to behold her. If that ideal and virtuous woman is alive I would like to beg her pardon. If not, I would embrace peace by terminating my life. It is true that I am an unpardonable criminal and sinner. Please punish me by death or even a painful death. Do whatever you wish but let me behold that goddess."

When he saw Amar Kumar crying like this, Vimalyash was extremely pleased. He thought, "Yes! My husband also suffers, with the same intensity, the pain of separation. He had done all that he did under the influence of the Karmas of the past. He is not at fault." He said to Amar Kumar, "You sit in the lotus pose, close your eyes and remember your wife. Within no time you will find her standing before you." Amar Kumar followed the instructions. Vimalyash transformed into Sur-sundari with the help of the divine power and said, "Darling! Open your eyes. Look who is standing before you?"

Amar Kumar opened his eyes and could not believe what he saw. He asked, "Are you the same Sur-sundari, my wife, who was separated from me twelve years ago?"

Sur-sundari, "I am not only Sur-sundari, the daughter of King Aridaman, daughter-in-law of Merchant Dhanpal, but also prince Vimalyash, the king of the city of Venatat and husband of Kanakvati, the daughter of the erstwhile king of this city."

The surprise, joy, and happiness of Amar Kumar saw no bounds. Sur-sundari explained him everything from the beginning to the end and said, "See, I have not only purchased such a large kingdom in seven Kaudis, but also married a princess on your behalf. I thought you were fed up with me?"

Amar Kumar, "Sur-sundari! Please don't extend it too far. No more jibing at your husband. I am convinced that woman is better than man. I have caused so much pain to my lovely darling that I don't know if God will ever forgive me."

Sur-sundari, "Darling! This is not your fault. The fruits of the past Karmas cannot be avoided. The only wise step within man's control is that he should avoid the bondage of any fresh Karmas and begin shedding Karmas of the past. I am thankful to you that you have helped me tolerate the fruits of past Karmas and shed them. Come now, let us go to the king and acquaint him with our secret."

When the king learned the story he said, "Daughter! You have excelled over man in wisdom, knowledge, power, intelligence, valour, and what not. You have proved that woman is a step ahead of man. Now please take care of your sister Kanakvati. I am confident that you will love her like your younger sister."

Sur-sundari replied with a naughty smile, "Father! Kanakvati is my wedded wife. She is more dear to me than my own life. I cannot even dream of causing pain to her. Rest assured, we shall never be plagued by the envy of co-

wives. We shall serve our husband like one soul in two bodies.”

The king arranged for the formal coronation of Amar Kumar and his marriage with princess Kanakvati. After that he said to Amar Kumar, “Son! Now what can I give you in dowry? My kingdom is yours. Rule it with all happiness and take care of your subjects. Spend your family life with your two wives with all grace and piety. Remember that youth and wealth are ephemeral like dew drops and the shade of clouds. This gold-like body will also turn to ash one day. All the relationships in this world are based on self interest. Those beings are lucky who are born as humans. I shall now renounce this mundane way of life and become an ascetic. Till today I was worried about my successor but now that is over.”

Amar Kumar, “Sire! You have taken care of the kingdom for a long period. I would request you to continue for some more time. My parents have been waiting to see me for the last twelve years. This long separation from their son must sit heavy on them. Please allow me some time so that I may go and meet my parents. I promise you that I shall return soon with their permission.”

Sur-sundari once again made use of her divine skills and produced a Viman. Amar Kumar boarded the Viman with Sur-sundari and Kanakvati and left for Champa city. There the merchant couple, Dhanpal and Dhanvati, had been eagerly looking forward to the return of their son every single day for the past twelve years. One day they suddenly got the news that Amar Kumar had come back.

When the merchant couple saw their son and his two wives they beamed with joy. King Aridaman was filled with happiness seeing two daughters instead of one. After spending a few days with his parents Amar Kumar sought their permission to return to Venatat. How could the parents allow the son they had seen after a period of twelve years to go away? The mother said with tears in her eyes,

“Son! You are our only hope and support. We have seen you after such a long period. Now do not talk of going away.”

Amar Kumar, “Mother! What you say is absolutely right. But I am bound by a promise. I have given my promise to the king of Venatat. Your blessings have turned me from a merchant to a king.”

The parents reluctantly gave permission, thinking of the good of their son. King Aridaman also said to his daughter, “Daughter Sur-sundari! With your power you have turned a merchant’s son into a king. Go and live happily and gracefully with your husband and sister Kanakvati. My blessings are with you.”

Amar Kumar returned and took over the reins of the kingdom of Venatat. One day ascetic Dharmaghosh arrived in the city. The royal family was indoctrinated by the ascetic and commenced penance and spiritual studies in order to discipline their passions (vices including anger, conceit, illusion, and greed).

Amar Kumar ruled for a long time. During this period he got two sons, one each from Sur-sundari and Kanakvati. He crowned the elder son (the son of Sur-sundari) as the next king and made the younger son (the son of Kanakvati) the prime-minister. He himself with his two wives took the harsher vows of a lay-person and commenced higher spiritual practices aimed at salvation.

One day Amar Kumar with his two wives went to the omniscient ascetic Dharmaghosh and asked, “Revered one! Why did Sur-sundari have to suffer so much in spite of being a chaste women fully devoted to her husband? Please tell me the secret.”

Revealing the earlier life of Amar Kumar and Sur-sundari the ascetic said, “Amar Kumar! I will tell you the story of your earlier birth.

“Long ago, in the town of Sudarshanpur ruled a king named Shoorsen. The name of his beautiful and virtuous



wife was Revati. One day the royal couple went into the jungle for an outing. There they saw a great sage standing in deep meditation unaware of his body and the surroundings. The king bowed before the ascetic but the queen lost all her reason and said, 'I will disturb the deep concentration of this sage.'

"And she started causing a disturbance to the meditating sage just for fun. She continued this for twelve minutes without any success. Sometimes man indulges in such frivolous activity without knowing the damage it might cause. Every single act has its consequences. When the ascetic concluded his meditation the royal couple, with due respect, gave him the food they had brought along and returned to their palace. In due course they died and were reborn in the dimension of gods.

"From there they reincarnated as Sur-sundari and Amar Kumar. Sur-sundari suffered for the ill treatment of the meditating sage during her earlier life as Revati. This is the story of your earlier birth.

"All deeds necessarily have their consequences. Had queen Revati atoned for her sin the bondage of Karmas would not have been so strong. The good deeds you had done during your earlier birth are the sources of the happiness you enjoy here and now. All beings suffer and enjoy because of the trap of Karmas. They are unaware of the attitudes that caused these Karmas. Amar Kumar! It is so simple to commit sins but to suffer for them is very hard and painful."

After hearing about their earlier life they all decided to further enhance their spiritual practices. They got initiated and became ascetics. With the help of harsh practices they were able to shed all their Karmas before they died. Their mission of asceticism was successful. This is the greatest victory man can have—in exchange of the earthly body he gets the gold of spiritual attainment.



## THE MAINSTAY OF COURAGE IN THE VESSEL OF SORROWS

*(Ratnapaal and Ratnavali)*

( 1 )

It is a story from the remote past. A city named Purimtaal was the capital of King Shoorsen. Under the rule of the pious king Shoorsen townspeople were happy and contented. The town had all types of people, rich and poor, merchants and traders, artists, artisans, laborers, those who gave charity as well as beggars. Everyone was sincere in performing his duty and following his religion.

In Purimtaal also lived a merchant named Jindatt. The name of this reputed and honoured merchant's wife was Bhanumati. She was beautiful as well as virtuous. She had all the virtues of an Aryan woman. Merchant Jindatt considered himself lucky to have such an obedient and devoted wife.

The merchant couple were followers of the Jain religion and extremely compassionate. Merchant Jindatt religiously followed the conduct of Samayik (Jain system of periodic meditation performed in slots of 45 minutes), Pratikraman (the Jain ritual of reviewing the activities of the day or other specific period and atoning for misdeeds), and Paushadh (a partial ascetic vow under which a householder lives like an initiated ascetic for a specific period). He meditated about the three ultimate wishes of a Shravak and worked towards salvation. In his view the desirable was religion and not wealth.

A well decorated building looks deserted in the absence of just a lamp. What is enchanting to look at, becomes

invisible in darkness. Merchant Jindatt had all the comforts and pleasures of life including beautiful house, slaves, servants and immeasurable wealth. But all this grandeur appeared gloomy to him in absence of a child. The childless couple worried every moment of every day about when they would be lucky enough to behold a son.

Once on the spring festival all the townspeople dressed up in gay apparel and moved about in throngs meeting each other. It was as if a river of joy and vivaciousness was flowing through the town. Bhanumati was looking at this scene from the balcony of her house. The noise of the children and their playful activities saddened her by stirring the longing for a child of her own. Tears started flowing from her eyes like streams. She was thinking, "A sterile woman who fails to light her clan with the lamp of a successor and continue the family line is a black spot on womanhood."

This world is an abode of sorrows. Those whose courtyards are filled with the playful activities of sons and daughters or grand-sons and grand-daughters are also unhappy. They do not have enough money to provide milk, toys, and clothes to the children. On the other hand those who have wealth have no child to enjoy it. Either way, this world is the abode of sorrows.

When Merchant Jindatt saw the drawn face of Bhanumati he asked, "Darling! What is it that gives you so much pain? To free you of your torment I would spend all the unlimited wealth I have and become a pauper. Tell me if someone has insulted you? If someone has dared to utter a single word against you I have the capacity to slit his tongue. Tell me at once what is it that troubles you?"

"My lord!" And before uttering another word her voice choked. She started crying and could only wail. Merchant Jindatt wiped her tears and made her rest her head on his chest. After some time Bhanumati regained her composure and said, "Darling! Blessed is the woman who gets a

husband like you. Under your protection there is nothing that can cause me pain. The vacuum that has overpowered me today is the same that every moment torments you as well. But you are strong enough to contain it and I fail to do so. Do whatever you can but we should have a son. The agony is beyond tolerating now. Who is going to enjoy all this wealth? Who will continue our family line? Will our youth, middle age, and old age pass just like this? Will our lives come to an end without tasting the fruit of our pious deeds in the form of a son?"

Merchant Jindatt carefully listened to all that Bhanumati said. Matters of fate are revealed by fate only. At the moment he could do nothing but give some form of assurance to his wife. He put his finger at the chin of Bhanumati and lifted her face. Looking into her eyes he said, "Darling! Everyone has to taste the sour, sweet, or bitter taste of the fruits of Karma. If the taste of these fruits is bitter why cry and be sad to make it all the more bitter? The lines of fate are beyond human power to erase. In this world there are people who are childless as well as poor. Still they avoid being sad, considering all this to be the fruits of Karma. You know the religion and still you are sad. We have done all we could and still we could not get a child. So what else it is if not the fruit of Karma?"

With the passage of time man forgets his worries and miseries. Bhanumati also forgot her misery and got involved in her household duties. Still, once in a while that thorn pierced her heart. Even in the face of continued failure hope remains alive. Hope is the only plant that never dies. Bhanumati kept her hope of getting a son one day.

By chance one day a Yaksh and Yakshini (demi-goddess) appeared before Bhanumati. With tear-filled eyes she appealed to them, "Respected ones! I am blessed to have this unexpected opportunity of beholding you. It is beyond me to continue this childless life any more. You are all-powerful and wield unlimited influence. Please favour me."

The Yaksh was moved by the agonizing misery of Bhanumati. With the help of his Avadhi Jnana he looked into her future and said, "You can get a son. But this son will add to your miseries. You will lose all your wealth and become destitute. Even your son will not remain with you. Neither will you be able to bring him up nor fulfill your desire of enjoying the playful activities of the toddler. He will grow up in some one else's house. You have to leave your home and wander around in far away regions."

"I will have a son; whatever happens after that is immaterial." This thought excited her so much that she did not seem to register anything said after—"You can get a son." Overwhelmed with joy Bhanumati fell at the feet of the Yaksh and said, "Lord! Please do not delay in giving your blessing. We do not require wealth. My son will be brought up in the house of some other person but I will certainly be called his mother. Please oblige me."

The Yaksh couple bestowed their blessings on the merchant couple and disappeared. One wish of Bhanumati was fulfilled and another dawned.

Some time later Bhanumati became pregnant. There was no limit to her joy. Relatives, friends, and townspeople flocked to greet the merchant couple. The harder the achievement the greater is the joy.

As the fetus in the womb of Bhanumati developed the wealth of Merchant Jindatt started diminishing. Sometimes he would get the news of his godowns being reduced to ashes, at other times of some business loss. Often it happened that the market prices of the goods in stock would crash down to half of his cost prices. He had to pay the wages of his staff from his capital. Within seven months Jindatt became poor and a destitute. The wandering goddess of wealth takes no time either to come or to go. Like sun during a winter afternoon, she vanishes before one realizes. There was a big difference between the Jindatt of today and the one of seven months back. This is the irony of fate.

The merchant couple thought that they should do the traditional function of Saadh-Purai (a social function done during the seventh month of pregnancy that signifies the celebration of joy and announcement of the pregnancy). Jindatt said, "Darling I want the function of Saadh-purai to be celebrated with all the pomp and show befitting our status. But does a poor man have any status? Today even my well-wishers avoid me. Where would I get some loan?"

When she saw the problem facing her husband Bhanumati advised, "My lord! This is the way of the world that when you are poor the close ones become far removed. Still the tree of hope is evergreen, and one should not abandon hope. Merchant Manman is your childhood friend. It is possible that he may extend you help. At least try once."

"Darling! Indeed, Manman is my childhood friend. But for him wealth is everything. He may die for a friend but will never part with his money. It is easier to extract oil from sand than to get money from him." In this way, Jindatt told her about the futility of approaching Manman.

Bhanumati once again said, "Aryaputra! (a term of address meaning son of an Aryan) What you say is true but there is no harm in trying once. Sometimes effort makes difficult things easy. Things beyond reach can come within reach and the impossible can become possible. It is said that distress is the sure test of friendship. Even if you don't get help from Merchant Manman at least a friend would be tested. You must go."

On Bhanumati's persuasion Merchant Jindatt was filled with a little hope. He started for Merchant Manman's residence. On the way the train of his thought kept moving, "It is better to die than to beg. How strange are the acts of fate. There was a time when people used to come to me begging and today I am going to someone's place to beg. The strings of fate makes one dance like a puppet." And he arrived at the residence of Merchant Manman.

Looking at the haggard appearance of Jindatt, Merchant Manman was surprised. He greeted Jindatt warmly and offered him a seat. With sweet words he consoled his guest. This normal behaviour of his friend was reassuring for Jindatt. He narrated in details the story of his misery and told his purpose of coming.

Merchant Jindatt added, "Friend Manman! I have tried every possible source and after failing I have come to you. Now my prestige is in your hands."

For some time Manman remained silent. And after that, guided by his stingy attitude, he conveyed his inability, "Friend Jindatt! You are my childhood friend and so there is nothing to hide from you. These are very bad days for business. Everything is running in loss. I am somehow pulling on and I find myself unable to be of any help to you. I am sure you will appreciate my problem and excuse me."

This point-blank refusal from Merchant Manman shocked Jindatt. He became hopeless. However, he had nowhere else to go and so he tried once again, "Manman please do not disappoint me. Fate had been good to me once and it has stopped smiling at me now. It may smile once again and then I shall repay your debt with interest. Please have faith in me and do not disappoint me. Now my life is in your hands. It is up to you to let me live or die."

At this touching appeal from Jindatt, Merchant Manman changed his attitude and said, "If it is so, you will have to bring something to pawn. I can give you money only then. Business and friendship are not to be mixed. Everything has to be done according to its own rules. Please don't take it otherwise."

At this cunning of Merchant Manman, Jindatt got angry but containing his anger he said, "Manman! Had I anything to pawn I could have got money from anyone. Why would I come to you? I have nothing, but please have mercy and don't crush my hopes."

"Please don't push me too much. Without keeping some form of security I am unable to advance any money," Manman refused finally.

This stone-hard attitude of Merchant Manman rubbed Jindatt hard and he was in tears. But he accepted the challenge of fate and said, "All right friend!. I am ready to accept your condition and pawn my yet-to-be-born son. Since this day that child is yours as long as I do not repay the loan. Please give me the amount I require."

Manman was extremely pleased at this proposal from Jindatt. As if the fate had smiled on him and he got what he desired without any effort. Manman was also without a child. Like Merchant Jindatt, he also had tried all he could to get a son but his home was also without the radiance of a smiling child. He could not let such an opportunity slip from his hands. He immediately accepted the proposal and said, "Friend Jindatt! The condition of pawning was my business policy and I did not want to break it. Please do not worry. Your child will live with me as he would have lived with you. I shall give you whatever sum you require. Please tell me how much do you need."

Before the money was handed over to Merchant Jindatt he had to sign a promissory note—

"I, Jindatt, hereby agree that I have promised to give as security my child, who is yet to be born to my pregnant wife Bhanumati, to Merchant Manman against a loan of one thousand gold coins I have taken from him. From the date of his birth till he becomes young my son will live with Merchant Manman as his son. Merchant Manman will bring up my son with all care and love, provide him with the required education, and make him expert in business. When the boy grows into maturity Merchant Manman will send him away to other states for business. When my son returns after earning enough money he shall be allowed to return to me only when he repays this loan with interest, and not before that."



Five reputed citizens signed this document as witnesses. Jindatt took one thousand gold coins and a signed copy of the document and returned home.

One eye of Jindatt was filled with pain and the other with pleasure. Pleasure because his mission was successful, and pain because he had to pawn his son for that. When Bhanumati came to know of this she cried bitterly. Jindatt tried to console her, "Darling! There is no reason to weep. We were warned by the Yaksh in advance of what we were to face. The end of the wealth and the bringing up of our son at another's place, everything was explicitly told by the Yaksh. Why should we be sad while suffering what we have accepted knowingly and gladly?"

Bhanumati accepted this and Merchant Jindatt celebrated the Saadh-purai function with all the grandeur befitting his status and family tradition and enhancing the glory of his ancestors. He honoured and greeted the elders and other guests and relatives. He gave a grand feast. He gave liberal charity to the destitute. All rituals were performed on a grand scale.

At the end of nine months of pregnancy Bhanumati gave birth to a healthy son and beheld his glowing face. The merchant couple were still in the process of enjoying the happiness of getting a son when messengers of Merchant Manman arrived. They conveyed the message of Merchant Manman and said that they had come to take the infant.

Merchant Jindatt was bound by agreement. There was no possibility of refusing. But he still asked the messengers, "Convey my humble request to Merchant Manman. My son became his the day I signed the promissory note and took money from him. But considering our cordial relations, it is not proper for him to be so unyielding as not to allow me to perform the naming ceremony of my son. Please tell your master that he should wait for twenty seven days. He may send you again to collect the child precisely on the twenty eighth day."

The messengers conveyed this message of Jindatt to Merchant Manman. Although he courteously accepted the request, he suspected that during this period Merchant Jindatt and his wife might flee with their son during the dark hours of some night. He ordered his servants, "Go and guard the house of Merchant Jindatt to ensure that he does not flee with his wife and son."

On the twenty seventh day Merchant Jindatt celebrated the naming ceremony of his son. He invited his relatives and friends to a feast. Everyone was pleased that Merchant Jindatt had got the gem known as son. They profusely greeted him. The child was named Ratnapaala.

On the twenty eighth day the same messengers came again. Bound by his promise, Jindatt gave his adored child to the messengers with a heavy heart. He went into his room and with the haggard face of a robbed person fell on his bed. The deep sorrow of Bhanumati was beyond describing. Merchant Jindatt was worried more about his wife than himself. In order to give her solace he said—

"Darling! There are certain things that come near from far and there are others that drift away. This is true about human relations also. In the beginning a husband and a wife are unknown to each other but slowly they come closer and closer. About a mother and a son it is a rule that the son slowly moves away. In the beginning he is in the womb, like a part of her body. From the womb he comes into the lap, from there he moves into the cradle, and from cradle into the courtyard. Thus he gradually moves away. When he grows up he goes away for studies. Even later, he goes to distant lands for business. Why are you so disturbed? He is under proper care and will be brought up in comfort. We should now think of our future."

Bhanumati came out of her miserable melancholy, "My lord! What you say is absolutely correct. I hope that just like this you can keep on inspiring me to keep my poise in the face of all miseries. For the sake of his duty

Harishchandra had sold his wife and son to the keeper of a cremation ground and became a slave himself. Irrespective of its being long, night certainly has to end.”

The messengers handed over the infant to Manman who became ecstatic with joy. Getting this beautiful child with all auspicious signs the stingy Manman gave up his miserly attitude and habits. He had costly ornaments and a gem studded cradle made for the infant. He said to his wife, “Consider this child to be your own son. This child with all auspicious signs is the lamp of our clan. After being brought up under our loving care he shall consider us as his parents. That, when he grows up he will return to his parents after reimbursing our loan with interest, is as impossible as the existence of flowers in the sky. In the end he will remain the sun of our family.”

Manman’s wife took the child in her hands with motherly affection. Both the husband and wife started taking care of the infant with love. Their home reverberated with the sounds and playful activities of the growing infant.

In the meantime Merchant Jindatt was thinking, “The cursed work I did by pawning a piece of my heart is known only to the five senior citizens who have witnessed my promissory note. Slowly this news will spread throughout the town and I will not be able to show my face. Therefore it is best to leave the town.”

Accordingly he said to his wife, “Darling the money I got from Merchant Manman is almost exhausted. Now we have to work for our living. It is all the same if we do manual labour here or in some other town. In order to avoid becoming the talk of the town, it is better that we leave the town. So during the dark of this night we should leave this house and the town.”

Bhanumati agreed to the idea put forth by her husband. They packed their possessions and prepared food for the journey. When the darkness descended they heard

footsteps. The large hearted and good natured old woman, who was their neighbour and considered Merchant Jindatt and Bhanumati as her own son and daughter-in-law, was standing at the gate. Jindatt said, "Mother! We are going to some distant town to spend the dark night of our bad days. If by your blessings our luck turns to happy days, we shall see you again. Till then keep this key of our house with you."

The old woman said with tear filled eyes, "Son! I have no courage to tell you not to go and not to create such a vacuum in my neighbourhood. However, I know that this is for your good and so I shall bid you good bye happily. Don't worry about your house. My blessings are with you, and may your journey be successful."

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( 2 )

Jindatt today loved the darkness that normally oppresses people. Even the faint light of the blinking stars was unwanted.

It was midnight and the whole town was asleep. The fearsome silence was broken only by the fluttering of distant birds. Carrying the bundle of his belongings on his head Jindatt was covering distance on the road away from the town. It appeared as if he had collected the miseries of his past into the bundle on his head.

Next day the news spread around the city. Merchant Manman became all the more confident, "How good it is. Had Jindatt continued to live here Ratnapaal would have known the secret of his birth by the time he became young. Then he would have tried to return my loan. In the absence of Jindatt he will never know that he was born to some other parents who had left him here in exchange for money.

Now Ratnapaal is mine forever. There is no one in the town who will go against me and reveal the secret to Ratnapaal.”

Merchant Jindatt continued to walk all night. In the morning he stopped near a lake and after cleaning up and taking breakfast the couple resumed their journey. After covering some distance they arrived near a village. They spent the scorching summer afternoon under a banyan tree in a garden outside the village. During these halts they also performed their daily religious routines including Samayik. Except for these brief stops they walked continuously for three days.

On the fourth day they arrived near a city named Vasantpur. Outside the town they located a good place and erected a hut. They plastered it with a mixture of sand and cow-dung and decorated it with leaves and creepers. Jindatt purchased an axe. Everyday he would go into the jungle, cut wood, sell it in the town, and with whatever he earned he subsisted somehow. This became his lifestyle and he followed it performing all his religious duties. Distress is the testing ground of the religious and Jindatt was faring well on this test with regular improvement.

One day Jindatt was caught in a quandary. If he followed the path of religion he would lose his livelihood and if he earned his livelihood he had to abandon the path of religion. It was the monsoon season. The bodies of water were overflowing. Everything all around had turned green. Even the dry stumps had sprouted leaves. Jindatt was a Shravak who had taken the twelve vows and so the cutting of green trees was prohibited for him. All the day he wandered in the jungle but could not find a dry stump. He returned empty handed in the evening.

The next day also he entered the forest with the axe on his shoulder. Other wood cutters tried to persuade him, “Brother! One can tread the path of religion only with the help of this body. If this body does not remain healthy how

can you observe the twelve vows? During this season it is foolhardy to search for dry wood. In grave circumstances it is not wrong to bend the rules. What is the use of wandering around for nothing? You should also cut the wood we are cutting and earn your living."

Jindatt was strong in his religious resolve and steadfast in attitude. He replied, "Brothers! The purpose of life is to follow religion. If while following religion this body is destroyed there is nothing to lament about. If I do not get dry wood I will not cut. It does not matter if I have to remain hungry every day."

When the other wood cutters heard about this unbending resolve of Jindatt they dispersed and resumed their work. And Jindatt resumed his search for dry wood. As it is difficult to clean in absence of water the same way it is difficult to find dry wood during the monsoon. Even after a long search Jindatt returned home empty handed. Bhanumati was his coreligionist. When she saw him return empty handed she consoled him, "It is the duty of a sagacious person not to abandon the eternal spiritual pleasures for the sake of ephemeral physical pleasures. Don't get disheartened; one of these days you are sure to get dry wood."

"Darling! I am blessed to get a companion like you. You bolster my courage and multiply it by your inspiring words. Tomorrow I shall cover a longer distance and go to another jungle in search of dry wood. God willing I shall succeed in my mission." And Jindatt went to bed. Early in the morning he got ready and taking his axe proceeded in the direction of the jungle.

While wandering far in the jungle the force of his piety and the religious law took him to a cave and he saw a dry tree of Amar-chandan (a species of the best quality sandalwood). Fate is a powerful misguiding force. Under its influence man throws away gold considering it to be a

worthless lump of clay. Jindatt could not recognize the sandal-wood. He was happy just because he got dry wood. He cut and tied the wood in a bundle. He happily rushed towards the town. He was carrying more than he usually carried but today he was moving with springing steps. The force of joy is such that it pushes a sick man too out of his bed.

When he approached the town he came across a cunning and unscrupulous trader named Dhandatt. The smell of the sandal-wood drew his attention. Such cunning cheats always prey on simple and innocent people.

Dhandatt thought, "This idiot does not know that he is carrying the most valuable wood on his head. I will pay him what he asks for and take advantage of his ignorance."

He approached Jindatt and helped him put down his load saying, "You seem to be very tired. Rest awhile." After a little while he said again, "Would you like to sell this bundle of wood? If you want then tell me your reasonable price. If you ask the right price I will give you what you ask for. I believe in buying only at a fair price."

Jindatt thought, "This man appears to be religious. For this big a bundle I used to get eight Menmudi (the lowest denomination coin of ancient India, a little more than current 1.5 paise) and sometimes 12 Menmudis after a lot of moving around and hard bargaining. So I should not ask more than 12 Menmudis." Accordingly he said, "Sir! The final price of this lot is 12 Menmudis."

Dhandatt pretended to be fair and said, "Right you said! Indeed you have asked a fair price. I will pay you 12 Menmudis. Other people ask for two or three times more than the actual price and then I have to bargain. If you carry it to my home I shall pay you 16 Menmudis."

Jindatt took the bundle to Dhandatt's residence and said, "I have no moral right to charge 16 Menmudis from

you. As it is I would have brought this bundle into the town to sell. Had I sold it in the town itself I would not have got 4 Menmudis extra."

Dhandatt also showed his morality, "No brother! I should actually have paid you and taken delivery at the spot I made the deal with you. You have brought it here after I bought the lot. So the 4 Menmudis extra is for the labour of delivering it at my place. I am certainly paying only 12 Menmudis for the wood. You can not refuse this 16 Menmudis. If it comes by fair means I am ready to take thousands of gold coins but by unfair means I do not wish to add even 4 Menmudis to my wealth. I do not want to be sinful. Please do not argue."

Dhandatt gave Jindatt 16 Menmudis and added, "And remember, now you need not run hither and thither to sell your wood. You may come every day here and sell your bundle for 16 Menmudis to me."

Both were happy. Jindatt was thinking, "I have found plenty of dry wood. So much that I will not be able to finish it till the end of the monsoon season. And I have also got one customer who will only buy from me and that too at a fair price."

And Dhandatt was thinking, "I am getting gold at throw away price. What luck; this fool will deliver valuable sandal-wood at just 16 Menmudis every day. When I collect enough I will export it and earn a fortune."

When the sun is covered by dark clouds the day turns into night as if the sun did not even dawn. Sometimes a lie too appears to be truth and a sinner appears to be a pious man. Dhandatt in his own eyes was a sinner but for Jindatt he was a highly pious man. But sooner or later the clouds disperse and the sun shines. A lie is always a lie and it cannot veil the truth for long. The difference between a pious man and a sinner is soon revealed.



The life of Merchant Jindatt had started moving in a specific direction steadily.

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( 3 )

A Hindi poet named Vrind has said—"The lamp of the family or the able heir makes his presence felt in his childhood by his auspicious signs exactly as a healthy sprout by the smoothness of its leaves indicates that it will grow into a healthy tree and not die immature. (Coming events cast their shadows before.)

The infant Ratnapaal was like that. He started going to school. With his intelligence and ability to grasp concepts he astonished his teachers. Everyone commented that this boy has a bright future. He went to the school in order to show that he could read everything. Soon he acquired proficiency in the subjects of religion and politics, and excelled in commerce.

At the early age of twelve years he started looking after the business of his foster father, merchant Manman. He took charge of various departments including money transactions, sale, and purchase. Merchant Manman was extremely happy and contented at his son's acumen and efficiency. What more did he need? A blind man had got two eyes. He got a son, and that too like the sun of the family. Getting this Ratna (a gem) he praised his luck.

Scholarly Ratnapaal was also humble and soft spoken. As is said—true knowledge brings humility. Such a humble and soft spoken person wins over all he comes in contact with. Everyone enjoyed talking to him.

One day Ratnapaal went to collect some due amount from a party. The debtor expressed his inability to repay. Ratnapaal got angry, as this person had done the same thing many times in the past.

Ratnapaal said, "I will not go without getting my dues. Every time you find one or other excuse and avoid payment. You neither pay interest nor the principal amount. When you are called, you find some excuse and don't come. Is there no limit to your effrontery? If you continue behaving like that I shall summon the five elders (senior citizens who act as arbitrators in such cases) and ask them to reprimand you. I will move from this place only after deciding the matter once and for all."

The debtor got angry at this insult and the high handed attitude of Ratnapaal. He raised his voice and said, "O unfortunate! You are crossing your limits and using insulting words as if I have taken a loan from your father. First know your status, and find out who you are. You are a purchased slave of Merchant Manman and are still acting as if you are the son of a merchant. Go away."

This unexpected outburst astonished Ratnapaal. His face lost its natural glow. He felt as if he would faint. He got up and walked out silently. After walking some distance he saw an elderly acquaintance sitting at the gate of a house. Ratnapaal approached him and after greetings he humbly asked, "Sir! You must be aware of the secret of my birth. Please tell me if Merchant Manman is not my father? If not, what made me his son?"

"Son! Why are you so dejected? Has Merchant Manman illtreated you? What has provoked you to know the secret of your birth?" The old man asked before revealing the secret.

Ratnapaal said, "Sir! Merchant Manman has always treated me like a son. There is nothing wanting in his affection or love. But every yellow and shining thing is not gold. Great men love others' sons as their own. You are also like my father. But after all, a real father has his own importance. If I do not do something for my true father and don't give any happiness to him, my life is worthless. If today one citizen has called me a purchased slave of Merchant Manman, tomorrow the whole town will do so. When one person has said so, many others must be

knowing about it. Therefore, Sir! I beseech you to tell me the secret of my birth and relieve me of my torment.”

The old men was impressed by Ratnapaal’s reasonable and logical request. He said—

“Son! Your father, Merchant Jindatt, was also a reputed merchant like Merchant Manman. When you were in the womb of your pious mother, your father suffered misfortune, lost all his wealth and become a destitute. For the function of Saadh-purai he pawned you and took a loan from Merchant Manman. Merchant Jindatt signed a promissory note. I was one of the five elders who witnessed that document. According to the document if you go to distant lands for business and, after earning money, if you repay the loan of Merchant Manman you will have the right to return to your father. It is also mentioned in the document that Merchant Manman will train you and send you out for business, providing the needed investment. In brief, this is the secret of your birth.”

Ratnapaal sighed and said, “Sir! I am highly obliged to you for this information.”

Ratnapaal returned home. As soon as Merchant Manman saw him he said, “Son! Where have you been? I got worried. I and your mother both have been waiting for you to join us for dinner. Come, the dinner is getting cold.”

“Respected merchant! Why do you call me your son? I am your purchased slave. Now I have entered majority and have acquired proficiency in business. Kindly allow me to go and earn so that, according to the promissory note, I may repay the loan my father took from you.”

Merchant Manman was taken aback. “Who is this enemy of mine who has poisoned the mind of Ratnapaal? Who is envious of my happiness? Indeed, the dew can not quench your thirst, it is only the water from your own pitcher that can help. Who has been able to derive

happiness from a borrowed son?" With these thoughts Merchant Manman replied—

"Son Ratnapaal! It seems that some enemy has poisoned your mind. He was presenting imaginary names like Merchant Jindatt and Bhanumati. These sycophants can make trees out of smoke. You are my son and all this wealth belongs to you."

"O great merchant! You are like my father, and you are respectable for me like my own father. You have also undertaken my care and brought me up like a father. And like father you have made me expert in business and accomplished in other fields. But kindly do not veil the truth any more. Send me to distant lands for business in presence of the five witnesses who had signed the promissory note of my father. I will sell whatever merchandise you give me and out of the profit I earn I shall repay the loan taken by my father, besides reimbursing your cost."

Now Merchant Manman realized that it was not possible to prevent Ratnapaal from going. He gave permission. They both had their dinner and started the preparations for the journey.

A ship was prepared and filled with exportable goods. An auspicious date for departure was fixed. At the time of departure the five witnesses were also present among others who had come to bid good bye. Addressing all those present, Ratnapaal said—

"My foster father Merchant Manman and respected citizens! I am going on a trading voyage with export goods in order to repay the loan taken by my father, Merchant Jindatt. Out of the sale's proceeds I shall repay the loan taken by my father besides reimbursing the cost of these goods to Merchant Manman. However, at the time of my departure whatever money Merchant Manman gives me as reward and for my expenses will be mine and I shall not be obliged to return it.

“All the townspeople have liberally showered me with their love and affection. My foster father, Merchant Manman, has rocked me in the cradle of happiness. I will always remember this. Please bless me that I return soon after accomplishing my mission.”

Merchant Manman gave Ratnapaal one Menmudi for expenses and they all wished him good luck and goodbye.

Those who have determination and enthusiasm to achieve something make pathways on the horizon. Rare are such people who, like King Bhagirath, have the capacity and will to bring the Ganges on the arid plains. But Ratnapaal was one such person who indeed possessed such enterprise. For him a difficult mission was simple and an impossible mission was difficult but certainly not impossible. On the way he found auspicious signs also. He met a gardener with a basket full of flowers. He purchased those flowers paying the coin Merchant Manman had given him. He kept these Dadim and Dhatki flowers safe in his cabin in the ship. At last his ship sailed.

At the time of departure a well wisher had advised him, “Son! You may go wherever you want and earn enough profit but never should you go to the island named Kaalkoot. The crafty tricksters on that island invariably swindle visiting foreigners.” Ratnapaal carefully listened to this and resolved not to go there.

A sea voyage is infested with hardships, but gold is refined only by heating in the fire. Only by crossing the hurdles is a voyage made successful—a voyage on the sea or the voyage of life. Ratnapaal's ship was cutting the leaping waves and covering distance. During the night suddenly it started raining profusely with lightning and thunder. The force of the wind increased and it turned to a gale. During that dark night the ship quivered and tossed around on the giant waves. All the passengers and the crew panicked with the mere thought of drowning and started chanting prayers to their deities. The navigator and the other members of the crew lost control of the ship and it

was left to the mercy of the waves. By morning it had covered a considerable distance in an unknown direction and drifted near a beach. All aboard the ship were relieved seeing the land.

The ship was anchored near the beach and Ratnapaal disembarked. He saw that a stranger was approaching him from the land. Ratnapaal asked, "Gentleman! What is this place? Our ship has drifted here in the storm. This place is absolutely unknown to us."

The stranger replied, "Man! I saw your ship drifting to this side and that is why I have rushed here to warn you. I had to ensure that you do not end up as I did, losing everything I had. This island, named Kaalkoot, is the home of cheaters, robbers, and every sort of crafty people. Krishnayan is the name of the king of this place and he is a rogue among rogues. He is the epitome of cruelty and evil. This island is famous for what it does to gullible voyagers. No one who knows about it dares to come here. When ignorant and uninformed people drift here they are cheated and deprived of all their possessions."

Ratnapaal recalled all what his well wisher had told him at the time of his departure. He said, "Sir! I will think of entering the town only after I hear about your experience. I am curious, please tell me everything."

The man told his story—

Like you I also once drifted to this island with my cargo ship. I had a box full of priceless gems. I thought I would give that box to some upright and honest person here for safe keeping. Later when I sold all my merchandise I would collect it back. It was not practical to go everywhere carrying that big box. So I took the box with me and went into the town in search of some honest person.

Taking me to be a foreigner and carrying a big box one shopkeeper greeted me. I found him to be a good natured and well behaved person. He offered me a seat near him and offered me drinks and betel leaves. To prove himself to

be an upright and honest person he waited for an opportunity to play his game.

After some time a girl came to buy some butter for one Menmudi. The shopkeeper gave her double the quantity. The girl went away very happy. I asked, "This is against business policy. To take a reasonable minimum profit is the right policy. To incur one hundred percent loss is foolishness, not charity. Why have you done this?"

The rogue hesitated at my question but then he composed himself and said, "What can I do? Charity is my obsession. Even while doing business I cannot help doing so. However, I am happy and lucky that I still earn enough for my living."

When the girl reached her home her father asked with surprise, "How did you get double the usual quantity? Was there some foreigner sitting with the shopkeeper?" The girl said, "Yes, a stranger was sitting there." The father said, "Now I understand. That rogue has given double the quantity of butter just to entrap the stranger. Do one thing, go back and return the butter to the shopkeeper and tell him what I say loudly so that the stranger listens."

The girl returned with the butter and gave it back to the shopkeeper. After that she said loudly, "Why did you do this wrong thing? My father got annoyed with me. He says we do not need any thing unearned, not even a heap of gold. Even a single Menmudi is like a thousand gold coins for us if we earn it. Please take the butter back."

After returning the butter the girl turned around to go. I thought that the father of this girl must certainly be an honest, upright, and moral person. If I keep my valuables with him they are sure to be safe. And I followed the girl. The cunning shopkeeper tried to stop me but all his hopes were shattered now.

I arrived at the house of that girl. The father of the girl extended me a hearty welcome and called me in. As soon as I went in I requested him to accept my jewel box

for safe keeping. The man refused saying, "Gentleman! This is a risky and dangerous work. How would I be able to guard this priceless box of yours when I do not even keep my own rejected utensils. If someone has an inkling of this and a thief or a bandit takes it away I will lose my prestige and be a sinner as well. Moreover, how would I be able to return these priceless things to you. I would no more be able to show my face. Kindly take this to some other person."

While he was talking to me, a beggar called at his door, "God bless you!" My host called his wife and asked her to give four bowls of rice to the beggar. This large quantity surprised the beggar. He thought, "It appears that this man wants to swindle this stranger and in order to impress him he is giving this unusual quantity of rice. I should do something so that he does not succeed." The beggar returned after going some distance. He took out a sliver of hay from his Pagdi (head gear, a length of cloth wrapped around the head) and addressed my host—

"Without my knowledge this sliver of hay from your thatched roof was caught in my Pagdi. This is your property. The sin of stealing a straw is as bad as that of stealing gold. I am a beggar and can accept anything given in charity. But even to take a straw otherwise is not acceptable to me as it is the root of sin. I return this sliver to you and ask forgiveness for this mistake."

The beggar returned after this. I thought that I was fortunate to have come across such an upright man, as they are one in a thousand, and so he was the one to be entrusted with my jewel box. I followed him. The earlier host tried to stop me but I refused. When I arrived at the beggar's hut I made the same request to him. Although he wanted the box, he pretended not to accept the responsibility, saying, "Such a priceless thing you should entrust only to some merchant. How can a beggar like me protect it? A thing given for safe keeping has to be protected even by putting life at stake. I am sure you will excuse me."



At his denial my insistence increased. But just then a mendicant came and asked for alms. The beggar first bowed before him and then filled his bag with rice. He also offered sumptuous meals to the mendicant. When the mendicant returned to his Guru and told everything, the guru asked with surprise, "There is hardly any chance of such a charitable person being in this city? Was there some stranger sitting with him?" The disciple affirmed it. The Guru briefed the disciple and sent him back to the beggar.

When this mendicant arrived at the beggars house he said, "O Charitable soul! What have you done? My Guru reprimanded me, saying—'Idiot! Is it proper for a mendicant to take so much alms? Those who have renounced everything are not concerned with tasty food. We should not save food even for the next day and you have collected enough to last six days.' Sir! my guru will not accept even a grain more than a pinch full of grains." He left the bag full of grains and returned.

I thought that such a detached mendicant would certainly take care of my jewel box and followed the mendicant. When I approached his Guru and conveyed my desire he got angry. He said sharply, "Idiot! What connection can I have with wealth? We spiritualists run away from wealth and you have come to me with that same deplorable thing. If you want to talk of religion and worship you may sit here. I cannot even touch your wealth."

These words of the mendicant added to my confidence in him. I joined my palms and said, "O great saint! I am not giving this wealth for your use. It is not necessary that you touch it. I will myself place it where you say. For you it is just like dirt. I only request you to accept it for safe keeping."

At my insistence he called one of his disciples. At his instruction I handed over the box to this disciple who wrapped it into a bundle and placed it aside. When my worry was over and I started to move the Guru said, "Son! Don't mind what I said. I have accepted your request only

because you are a foreigner. Go and commence your business activities. Whenever you return you will find your goods safe and secure."

After six months when I returned at that place I found that it was completely transformed. The Guru had shaved his head and was blind in one eye. When I demanded my box he said, "Are you mad? What box, whose box? It appears that you have come to the wrong place."

Mr. Ratnapaal! That rogue refused point blank. Since that day I have been wandering around the city and appealing to everyone, but nobody sympathizes with me. My purpose in telling you all this is that although what happened to me is a thing of the past, you can take steps to protect yourself from these swindlers and be cautious in what you do. Now I will beg your leave because in the morning the state employees roam around in search of sea-faring merchants. It would not be good if any of them saw me here."

The man left after telling his story and Ratnapaal started worrying, "How am I to cope with the crafty swindlers of this place? The old man has pre-warned me. But what to do? Luck has forced me to come here. Now I have to tackle things as they come." Ratnapaal's musings were interrupted when he saw two cavalry men coming in his direction. They were talking, "As a lucky charm these seafarers take Dadim and Dhatki flowers with them at the time of commencing their journey. I am sure this passenger has these flowers. Our king is lucky that we saw this seafarer first thing in the morning; otherwise who comes this way?"

Talking to each other they came near Ratnapaal, greeted him and said, "Young merchant! We are lucky that you have come to our island. Our king is suffering from some ailment of the eyes. An expert doctor has advised the use of Dadim and Dhatki flowers. If you have some please give them. You will get any price you ask."

While the guards waited for his answer, Ratnapaal thought, "True enough. These people are, indeed, accomplished swindlers. How did they know that I carry these flowers with me." Apprehensive Ratnapaal said, "Guards! If the prime minister comes himself I can give the flowers to him. It is not proper for you to come for such an important task, and so I have my doubts about your genuineness. Please don't mind my frankness."

The guards appreciated Ratnapaal's frankness and returned, saying, "You are perfectly alright." After some time they again came with the prime minister and few other members of the court. Ratnapaal warmly greeted them and after confirming about the king's ailment he said, "Minister, Sir! I am fortunate that my flowers will be used to cure the king's ailment. It is not proper for me to charge any price. For me the regaining of the health of the great king Krishnayan is the best price. Please bear with me for a moment, I would like to come with you and present these flowers to the king myself."

Ratnapaal immediately dressed and embellished himself with ornaments fit for the occasion. He asked some co-passengers to come with him and left others to take care of the ship. In one hand he took the basket with flowers and in the other he took some costly gifts for the king. He then at once left with the king's men.

After arriving in the king's palace he respectfully greeted the king and handed over the flowers to the doctor in attendance. The doctor immediately prepared the medicine and applied it to the ailing eyes of the king. The king happily greeted Ratnapaal and accepted his gifts. He offered him a seat near his own and said, "Young man! You have saved me today. I could not be cured in the absence of these flowers and could lose my eyes. These two types of flowers are hard to find here. My staff did all they could but were unable to find these flowers. I fail to find words to thank you."

Ratnapaal, "Sire! Please do not humiliate me. All this is the result of your pious deeds of the past. I am only an instrument. You have been cured of your ailment, I am content and feel honoured."

King Krishnayan was craftier than the crafty and the chief of rogues and swindlers. Our readers already know that his town was filled with cheats and rogues. But even thieves and cheats, rogues and bandits, sinners and murderers, all have some goodness in some corner of their heart. They too have the inherent potential to become pious and religious. A snake slithers obliquely but enters its hole straight. King Krishnayan also knew how to love. He was also capable of discriminating between what belonged to him and what did not. He was extremely pleased with Ratnapaal. He made arrangements for Ratnapaal's independent stay in a house. He also provided all facilities and comforts in the house including servants. Besides all this he also appointed guards for the security of the ship.

The king found in Ratnapaal a youth endowed with all virtues and abilities. The king had a daughter named Ratnavati who was ethical, intelligent, virtuous, as well as beautiful. It appeared that she was created with these four attributes only. The king found that Ratnapaal and Ratnavati matched each other perfectly. "Why delay?" thinking thus the king consulted his queen and the prime minister. They both approved of the king's idea.

One day the king called Ratnapaal into his private chamber and said, "Young man! I want to make you mine for ever. However, please don't think that what I say is inspired by an intention of repaying your obligation. It reflects my unadulterated affection for you. I want to marry my daughter to you and make you my son-in-law."

Ratnapaal got worried at hearing this proposal from the king, "My prime duty is to search for my parents and repay the loan of Merchant Manman. If I am shackled by the responsibilities of married life how would I be able to accomplish my mission?"

He said to the king, "Sire! I am extremely fortunate that you intend to make me your son-in-law. But we traders are greedy for wealth and are not fit to have family ties with kings. The status of a king, who is best among men, who is endowed with the four attributes of courage—that is, who is full of courage in the fields of battle, religion, charity and compassion—is much higher than that of a merchant. Princess Ratnavati is best suited to embellish some ruling family. Thus it would be proper to marry her to a prince."

The king smiled, "Young man, what you say is perfectly all right. But a king and a merchant too, before being anything else, are human beings. A prince could also be licentious, wanton, and immoral, and a merchant too could be endowed with the four attributes of courage. I feel the pair of Ratnapaal and Ratnavati was made in heavens. You can not refuse. The responsibility of finding the virtues and vices of the future groom is mine, and you should not worry about that."

Ratnapaal became silent and thought, "To oppose the king is to invite trouble. Moreover, it is indeed my good luck to become the son-in-law of a king. Of course, I shall not forget my duty even after I am married. I will certainly do the work for which I started my journey."

At the silence of Ratnapaal the king asked, "Young man! Why are you silent?"

"Sire! I accept your order. When you are giving me an honour how can I deny?"

The good news spread into the palace like a wild fire. The state priest was called. Auspicious day and moment were found and the marriage ceremonies were performed with great fan fare. The whole city glowed with lighting as if it was the festival of lights. In dowry the king gave ample wealth including slaves.

On the honeymoon night Ratnapaal said, "Darling! This is our tradition that as long as we do not worship our

family deity we do not share the same bed. We shall soon proceed for that ceremony. I am sure you will not take it otherwise."

Shy Ratnavati could only utter, "The word of my husband is law for me."

Ratnapaal added, "Darling! This vow of ours should be kept a secret as well."

"As you say," and Ratnavati kept silent.

The newly wedded couple enjoyed their mutual and loving conversation and the days passed happily. After a few days Ratnapaal one day remembered that he had a mission to accomplish. He became worried and unsettled and immediately went to the king.

After due greetings he said, "Sire! I want to return to my country now. I have to do some urgent and important work so I should leave as soon as possible. At present I shall be leaving alone but soon I will return to fetch Ratnavati."

The king became worried and said, "Son! Only few days have passed since you came, why do you want to go so soon? And then why do you say this impossible thing that you want to go alone? Can the shadow of a tree be separated from the tree? The glow of the moon always remains with the moon. How can one imagine about fragrance without its source? Ratnavati will always remain with Ratnapaal."

Ratnapaal requested humbly, "What you say is correct as well as logical. But coming together and getting separated are also two facets of life. I fully agree that I should take Ratnavati with me. But this mission is such that I will have to go alone. Please do not force me otherwise."

This did not reduce the king's worry, he thought, "The love of an alien is like that only. If this fellow does not return, the life of my daughter will become a curse. What should I do? I can not insist beyond a limit. When he has resolved to go who can stop him?"

In the queen's section also the news reached and Ratnavati's mother tried a lot to persuade Ratnapaal but he did not budge an inch.

Preparations for Ratnapaal's journey started and the king's staff were entrusted all the arrangements. One day the king was sitting dejected in his court when a Yogi arrived and asked the cause of his worry. The king told him everything. The Yogi said, "O great king! Stop worrying. I am giving you two divine and potent roots. The one which is thin and whitish in colour transforms a man into a woman when smelled. The one which is thick and black in colour re-transform the man into the woman. With the help of these the princess could accompany her husband."

The king was now relieved. He explained the properties of the two roots to Ratnavati. After some time Ratnavati smelled the black root and was transformed into a man. She dressed herself in a loose silk gown reaching her knees. She completed her disguise of a Yogi by donning a cap and taking a Veena (a Sitar like musical instrument) in her hand. Now she had turned into a young, attractive and impressive Yogi who inspired reverence. The king called him Raul.

The king now called Ratnapaal into his private chamber. Raul Yogi was also sitting near the king on a high seat. The king said, "Son! Even after my insistence you want to go alone. I have agreed unwillingly. But now I insist you for one thing and you should have no objection to agree to it. This young Raul is a childhood friend of Ratnavati. I want him to go with you. As long as he is with you, you will not forget that you have to return to Ratnavati. He will also remind you if and when an occasion arises."

Ratnapaal happily agreed, "This is excellent. He will also be helpful to me in accomplishing my mission."

Thus in the disguise of Raul Yogi, Ratnavati got ready to go with Ratnapaal who was thinking, "How serenely attractive is the face of this young Raul. He has got

detached at a very early age. He is an individual with very pious attitude and so the savior of his family. Blessed are his parents."

When he could not contain his curiosity any more, he asked, "Revered one! What is the cause of your detachment at this premature age? This is surprising to me. How could you break the social and family ties?"

Raul replied with a smile, "If you open your inner eye you will find causes for detachment at every step in life. In this world what is stable? Those who procrastinate in commencing the spiritual pursuit are under an illusion. The future keeps on announcing loudly that death is inevitable and only the fools who think that they will not die when the time comes can afford to procrastinate." Even before completing his statement the Yogi transcended into a state of meditation. Ratnapaal was highly impressed.

Ratnapaal's ship was ready. He had disposed off all the goods he had brought. Now the ship was loaded with such goods that were plentiful in Kaalkoot island and scarce in Ratnapaal's home town, Purimtaal.

On an auspicious day and at the auspicious moment many citizens came at the port to bid good bye to Ratnapaal, everyone loved him. He was seen off with state honours. The ship finally sailed in the direction of Purimtaal.

Ratnapaal had ample wealth. The merchandise he had brought along had yielded very good profit. He also got great wealth including gems, gold, and gold coins as dowry from his father-in-law, the king. Now he was not bothered about how to repay the loan of Merchant Manman and be able to meet his parents.

However, he was worried about his parents. On the other hand Ratnavati in the disguise of Yogi Raul was sad because of her separation from her parents. Both these worried and sad individuals found solace in talking to each other. Raul recited spiritual and melodious songs and



verses in accompaniment with the sweet music from his Veena. The ship continued sailing without any untoward incident. With passage of time it covered the distance and arrived at the harbor near the town of Purimtaal.

The news of Ratnapaal's arrival spread in the town fast. The prominent citizens came to know that after selling all the export merchandize Ratnapaal had returned with a ship load of import-goods. The prominent citizens as well as the elders gathered and friends and relatives of Ratnapaal came to receive the young merchant.

Ratnapaal left the ship in care of his staff and came into the city. He went to the residence of Merchant Manman who formally greeted and extended warm welcome, apparently displaying great love and affection. The first thing Ratnapaal did was to repay the loan of one thousand gold coins with interest. After this he reimbursed the cost of the goods Merchant Manman had given him for export. The promissory note was taken and shredded in presence of the five witnesses. Ratnapaal also took the receipt of full and final settlement of Merchant Manman's account.

Now Ratnapaal sought permission from Merchant Manman to go to the house of his parents. Merchant Manman had no alternative left but to give permission. At the time of taking leave of Merchant Manman, Ratnapaal said, "You have brought me up with great love and affection. Otherwise also, you are the childhood friend of my father Merchant Jindatt. Both ways you are to be fatherly respected by me. If there is any service for me, please remember me without any hesitation. Now, please bless me that I may find and see your childhood friend, my father, as well as my loving mother, Bhanumati."

Merchant Manman also replied formally, "Son! Even when you live there you are mine. I wish you all happiness and prosperity in life."

Ratnapaal came to his ancestral house with Yogi Raul. The old lady in the neighbourhood gave him the key.

Ratnapaal opened the gate and got the house cleaned and furnished. He took charge of all the old godowns of his father, got them cleaned and filled them with the cargo unloaded from his ship.

After making all necessary arrangements, he went to the court of King Shóorsen. He gave the necessary levies to the king and also rich gifts. The king was happy to accept a young and courteous merchant as a citizen in his kingdom. Ratnapaal introduced himself to the king and said —

“O great king! My father Merchant Jindatt is not here but I want that if my father owes anything to anybody by way of loan or other business dues, all such creditors should come to me and get their dues back. Also, if anyone owes anything to my father he may come and pay the dues to me.”

The king arranged to make an announcement to this effect in the city.

The very next day people started coming to Ratnapaal to settle the dues. Within a week this work was over. Now Ratnapaal started the usual business activities his father was forced to leave. All the old employees returned to the business house and Ratnapaal appointed them according to their abilities. Thus Ratnapaal became a honorable and famous merchant as his father was. The mercurial goddess of wealth had stationed herself at the house of Ratnapaal.

The citizens of Purimtaal were also worried about Jindatt. Everyone wanted to find the whereabouts of Jindatt. Ratnapaal turned very sad and disturbed due to his worries about his parents. Yogi Raul was also moved by this miserable state of Ratnapaal. But he continued to give solace to Ratnapaal with his serene bearing and religious discourses.

( 4 )

One day an astrologer came to the town. Ratnapaal went to meet him and asked, "Sir! Please tell me where are my parents? When will they be able to come here? and How could I reach them?" Eager Ratnapaal asked many questions in one breath. The astrologer did his calculations and said, "Your father is in the southern direction from this place. Both your parents are well. After six months you will be able to meet them. Your bad days are over so don't worry."

Ratnapaal was relieved. He said to Raul, "Friend Yogi! I don't want to leave you alone but there is no alternative. I have to go in search of my parents to the south. You should remain here and look after the house and other work. You will have no inconvenience here. I will soon return and then we both will go to Kaalkoot island to fetch Ratnavati who should be waiting for me."

As always Raul replied with a smile, "What you say is correct. In absence of parents the life of a son becomes worthless. Parents are considered gods. A son is always indebted to his mother. But Kumar please entrust this work of searching your parents to me. Every man is expert in his own field. Looking after your home and your business is your expertise not mine. As much is my inability to do this work so is your ability. On the other hand, a Yogi's life is to wander. Yogis like me have the capacity to tolerate the extremes of weather. I shall succeed in finding your parents soon. Therefore you should remain here and allow me to proceed to the south."

Ratnapaal opposed this proposal out of his love for the young Yogi Raul, "Yogiraj! You are my revered guest. Your security and well being is my responsibility. How can I send you alone? Moreover, this is the duty of a son and so I should perform it. I will not let you go under any circumstances."

Raul conveyed that his resolve was unshakable by saying, "The life and the body of an ascetic is for the service of mankind. You are the husband of Ratnavati and I am her childhood friend. So tell me, are your parents not like my own parents? We Yogis believe in universal fraternity. The whole universe is our family. I will certainly go. Your efforts to stop me are against the established norms."

After this outburst Raul picked his Veena in his hand and putting his bag on his shoulder he left. Ratnapaal had no other alternative but to bid him goodbye. He came with Raul to the city gate and bid him farewell. After the young man left, Ratnapaal stood there as long as the diminishing figure of the Yogi could be seen.

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Yogi Raul's mission of searching Ratnapaal's parents was launched. He passed from one inhabited area to another including villages, towns, and cities. While walking he played the Veena and sang religious songs attracting people. Children and grown up, young and old, men and women, all used to gather around him. They loved this young and charming yogi with a melodious voice as soon as they looked at him. Raul would search for the parents of Ratnapaal in such crowds at every place. He also described the couple and enquired about them wherever he went. Raul earnestly indulged in the search going from one place to another.

He did not even leave places like temples, jungles, gardens and other isolated spots. But he could not find Jindatt. However, he did not lose hope and continued his wanderings southward. It is true that failures are the pathways to success.

Covering distance this way, he one day reached the city of Basantpur. There also he recited his Veena. Many people gathered around and soon Yogi Raul became friendly with them. He then asked about the merchant couple. There also was a wood cutter in the crowd. When he heard the question he said at once, "Yes, I know them. An elderly wood cutter

lives outside the city with his wife. He is Jindatt and his wife is Bhanumati. He used to go with me in the jungle once."

When Ratnavati disguised as Yogi Raul heard the name of her father-in-law her joy knew no bounds. She was excited with happiness, and tears of joy brimmed her eyes. She thought, "How pleased they would be to know about the well being of their son. This day is very lucky for us." And Raul proceeded toward the hut outside the town. Jindatt had gone to collect wood in the jungle. Bhanumati was alone in the hut.

In front of the hut there was a platform plastered with a mixture of clay and cow-dung (the prevalent plastering material in villages in those days). Raul sat on the platform and started playing his Veena.

When Bhanumati heard the enchanting melody she came out. As soon as she saw the young Yogi she thought, "This day is auspicious for us that this young Yogi has honoured our hut with his presence. Such sudden arrival of a sage is harbinger of good luck."

And she collected some eatables, approached the Yogi and offered him affectionately to accept the alms. The Yogi said, "Lady! Although the alms you are giving are enriched with your love and reverence, but at the moment I have no need for this. I am neither hungry nor thirsty and it is prohibited for the Yogis to collect for future."

Raul remained silent for a few moments and then said, "Mother! You are suffering for being separated from some one very dear to you. Is it not?"

Bhanumati was surprised. With all respect she sat down near the Yogi and started talking to him.

Raul, "Mother! I am coming from the northern direction. I lived there for a few months in Purimtaal city."

Bhanumati interrupted, "Do you know the important people there?"

Raul, "Yes, I know everybody."

Bhanumati, "Do you know Merchant Manman?"

Raul, "Yes, he is a rich but very stingy merchant."

Bhanumati, "He has a son named Ratnapaal. Do you know him also?"

Raul, "That is not his son. Ratnapaal's parents are Bhanumati and Merchant Jindatt. As luck would have it, they gave their 27 days old son to Merchant Manman and left the town. Ratnapaal is a close friend of mine and I have lived with him for six months."

Tears of love flowed from Bhanumati's eyes. Bursting with curiosity she asked, "O great Yogi! Tell me more about him."

Raul, "Who teaches a lion-cub to hunt elephants? No matter for how long a lion-cub is kept with lambs, when it grows its roar makes the whole jungle tremble."

"Brought up happily in the house of Merchant Manman when Ratnapaal got his education and became major, one day a debtor insulted him by calling him a purchased slave of Merchant Manman. When he knew the secret of his birth he resolved to do business and repay the loan of Merchant Manman. He filled the hold of his ship with exportable goods and reached Kaalkoot island. Ratnapaal had Dadim and Dhatki flowers. These flowers helped cure King Krishnayan, of that island, of his acute ailment of eyes. The king was so happy with Ratnapaal that he married his only daughter to the young merchant."

"Ratnapaal returned to Purimtaal after earning good profit on the sale of his cargo. His wealth was further enhanced by the lavish dowry given by the king. He repaid the loan to Merchant Manman besides reimbursing the cost of the merchandise he was given. After this, he met the king and gave him rich gifts. He also repaid other loans of his father and squared all pending business accounts. After

taking over all the property and business establishments of his father he is now doing good business.

“When in autumn a great tree sheds its leaves all the birds nesting in that tree migrate to other places. In the spring when it regains its foliage all the birds return. The same way the servants and other staff who had drifted away in absence of Merchant Jindatt have again returned.

“But mother why are you so interested in this story? What is your connection with the far away city of Purimtaal? How do you know Ratnapaal?”

“Great Yogi! I am that ill fated Bhanumati. Please come and grace my hut.”

Yogi Raul went into Jindatt’s hut. There lying in a corner he saw a few pieces of the rare sandalwood. Raul picked up one piece and smelled it. He asked Bhanumati, “Why are these pieces of wood lying here?”

“These pieces of wood are brought by Ratnapaal’s father and every day he sells one bundle to merchant Dhandatt in 16 Menmudis. This is our only livelihood.”

Raul tried to grasp the situation, “This Dhandatt seems to be a great swindler. He is buying this costly wood from the simple minded Jindatt by paying a meagre amount of 16 Menmudis.” And he placed that piece in his bag.

Just then he saw Jindatt returning from the town after selling the bundle of wood. Bhanumati rushed to him and narrated the whole story. The aging body of Jindatt was rejuvenated. He ran into the hut and said, “Bhanumati! We will not live here anymore. Come we should leave for our city at once. At this explosion of enthusiasm Raul said, “When you have spent so much time here, please stay a few days more. I shall also go to Purimtaal soon. Please give me company. Now I beg your leave. I shall come again.” And Raul left for the town.

Yogi Raul went around the town, met a lot many people and gained their confidence and respect. He got many

invitations for food but he rejected all rich food. He cooked his own meals. His austere life style and total lack of greed raised him very high in the eyes of the townspeople. With his sharp wit and keen eyes he was able to know the address of Dhandatt and also that he had filled godowns of the rare sandal-wood by swindling Jindatt.

One day the king of Basantpur had very high fever. Even after all treatment he could not be cured. He heard of the great young Yogi and his powers. The king called him with due respect and told his problem. Raul checked his pulse and said, "There is nothing to worry about. Arrange to get some Harichandan (the rare variety of sandal-wood), grind it into paste and apply the paste on the patients body, he will be cured."

The rare sandal-wood was searched all over the town but could not be found. Everyone including Dhandatt said that it is not available. The king lost all hopes and appealed to Yogi Raul, "Great Yogi! The sandal-wood you have prescribed is not available in the town. Now you must perform some miracle and cure me."

Raul remained silent for a few moments and then started chanting some Mantra. When the chanting was concluded he shouted three times, "The king is ailing. Harichandan materialize at once." After this he put his hand inside his bag and brought out the piece of wood he had brought from Jindatt's hut. He gave the wood to the king. The king and all his ministers were astonished. The paste of that wood was applied all over the kings body and soon he was cured. The king was highly obliged and he heaped gems and gold at the feet of Yogi Raul. The Yogi refused to take anything, "Great king! for me a fist full of flour is as good as this heap of gems. I have no use for gold and gems."

One night Raul sat outside the gate of Dhandatt's residence and started playing Veena. Dhandatt was not at home. His wife came out and humbly requested the Yogi, "Revered one! Please do not play Veena here. If my husband comes he will be extremely annoyed. Please go to



some temple and play your Veena there. During these late hours of night and in absence of her husband, it is not proper to play Veena before a lady."

Raul replied, "Lady! Please do not take it otherwise. I have just come to save your husband from some impending danger. The life of sages is for the good of others. I will leave after doing my duty. Then it is your decision what to do."

"The king was suffering from high fever. For his treatment the king's employees approached all the traders for Harichandan. Like all the others your husband also replied that he had not heard of Harichandan, he did not even have ordinary sandal-wood. Now it has been revealed on the king that there are godowns full of Harichandan at Dhandatt's property. If the king's men find even a piece of Harichandan they will confiscate all your godowns. Dhandatt will be heavily penalized, he may even get the death penalty."

After instilling fear in the mind of Dhandatt's wife Raul at once left. When Dhandatt returned home his wife told him everything. He panicked and put all his men to throw the Harichandan outside the city, and in the jungle. He swept his property clean of Harichandan.

In the morning, during his routine wanderings Raul found out where the wood was thrown. He went to the king and said, "Sire! I have spent enough time in your town and now I want to proceed to another place. I have come to take something from you."

The king, "Great sage! Your wish is an order for me, please tell me what you need. It is a sad day for me that my benefactor is leaving. Why so soon, I wish you had prolonged your stay."

Raul, "Not at all, when one stays at a place he gets attached to the place and the people living there. That is why it is good for water to be flowing and a Yogi to be itinerant. Please give me a few bullock-carts. Some charitable merchants of this town have given some wood for my Math (the place of stay and worship for

mendicants). The wood is lying outside the town and I need carts to carry the same.”

The king gave Yogi Raul the needed number of carts with healthy and strong oxen. Raul loaded all the wood in these carts and drove them on the road to Purimtaal. He stopped them after covering some distance and himself returned to Jindatt.

He said to Jindatt, “I am leaving for Purimtaal. You should come with me at once.”

Jindatt said, “Great sage! We have been waiting for you. We have packed all our belongings and were waiting for your call.”

“Then come at once. I am just leaving.” And he left.

Merchant Jindatt and Bhanumati collected their belongings and followed Yogi Raul. When they arrived near the carts they boarded a cart that contained Raul’s belongings. Raul kept on walking. The bullock carts also moved along.

Raul was following the ways of a mendicant. The caravan would stop at suitable place and time. Yogi Raul would go and collect alms from the inhabited areas. He would himself cook the food and before eating himself feed Merchant Jindatt and Bhanumati. This way they slowly covered the distance to Purimtaal.

At Purimtaal Ratnapaal was getting worried, “A long time has passed since Yogi Raul left, almost six months. Either he has still not been able to find my parents or he himself has been caught in some quandary. But Raul is an accomplished Yogi as well as a scholarly and prudent person. I am confident he will return with my parents.”

One morning while Ratnapaal was standing on the roof top and looking at the road, he saw Raul coming at a distance. He rushed down and ran ahead to greet Raul. He embraced Raul and asked, “Tell me at once, where are my parents, the objects of my worship?”

“They are stationed in the garden. Now you should go and fetch them.”

Ratnapaal and Raul took some servants along and went to the garden. Ratnapaal touched the feet of his parents and they in turn just kept on staring at their long lost son. Ratnapaal shifted his eyes looking at his mother and then at his father. Tears of love were flowing from the eyes of all three.

Merchant Jindatt and Bhanumati entered the town and arrived at their residence. They were adorned with rich cloths and ornaments. Merchant Jindatt sat on a high throne. Townspeople thronged to meet the merchant couple and greet them. Friends and relatives also came in an unbroken stream.

Yogi Raul said to Ratnapaal, “O son of the merchant! The carts filled with the rare sandalwood are your father’s earnings. You will get enormous wealth by selling this.”

Looking at Raul, Merchant Jindatt enquired with surprise, “My earnings? How this rare sandalwood can be my earning?” Yogi Raul narrated the whole story in details starting from the incident of Dhandatt swindling Merchant Jindatt and ending with loading of the sandalwood in the carts. Ratnapaal and Merchant Jindatt were astonished and happy at his profound knowledge and prudence.

Some days elapsed happily. One day Ratnapaal said to Yogi Raul, “O great Yogi! I am longing to see my wife Ratnavati as her absence makes me sad. I want to go as soon as possible to Kaalkoot island and fetch Ratnavati. I had promised my father-in-law that I shall return soon. But my parents are still recovering from the pangs of the long separation from me and do not want to let me be away from their sight even for a moment. They will never allow me to go on such a long journey. What should I do now?”

Yogi Raul, “Your father-in-law had told then only that the journey is very long and it would be very difficult to return. He had asked you to take Ratnavati along but it

was you who did not give any heed to your experienced father-in-law's advise. Now the only solution is that I go and fetch Ratnavati."

Ratnapaal replied, "No, not at all. To send you there is not proper. It is my duty to go to fetch her who is my life-partner and whose hand I have held with an oath. I have given my word to my father-in-law and promises are broken only by cowards. I will try to persuade my father and go to Kaalkoot."

When Ratnavati in the disguise of Yogi Raul saw the earnestness of her husband towards his duty she was overwhelmed with joy. Yogi Raul went into the bathroom, took off the garb of a Yogi and took bath with a fragrant paste. He then wore Sari and adorned himself with ornaments. After all this he smelled the white root given by the sage and transformed again into a woman.

When Ratnavati opened the bathroom and stepped into the room Ratnapaal could not believe his eyes. He rubbed his eyes but Ratnavati was still before him. He thought he was dreaming and he pinched himself. But his beloved wife was smiling now. He was surprised to find that before him was standing the daughter of King Krishnayan, his wife Ratnavati. He thought, "How come she has suddenly materialized here?"

Ratnavati touched the feet of her husband and revealed the secret, "My lord! I was disguised as Yogi Raul."

She now put forth her mock-complaint, "You have been keeping secrets from me. Back at my father's place you never even touched me. You even refused to bring me here with you. Thanks to the blessing of the great sage and wit of my father that I could come here otherwise I would have continued to suffer the agony of separation."

Ratnapaal explained, "Darling! You should not complain. One has to sacrifice a lot on the path of duty. I earnestly desired to bring you along but my circumstances did not allow me."

They both went to Ratnapaal's parents. Ratnavati touched the feet of her father-in-law and mother-in-law. They were pleased to know that the daughter of King Krishnayan of Kaalkoot island was there daughter-in-law. Everyone praised her daring deeds in the disguise of Yogi Raul. The whole town talked that Ratnapaal, the son of Merchant Jindatt was the son-in-law of a king. All friends and relatives as well as prominent citizens came to greet and bless the new couple.

Merchant Jindatt became a wealthier merchant and lived happily.

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One day while doing his night long worship, Merchant Jindatt got detached from the mundane life. He thought, "Three fourth of my life has passed. I have had all the happiness life could provide as also terrible miseries. Now once again I am wasting my life in the worldly pleasures. All these ups and downs have not been able to open my eyes. Even during this remaining part of my life I am doing nothing for the purification of my soul. I still ignore the permanent for the ephemeral."

Merchant Jindatt conveyed his thoughts to his wife Bhanumati who affirmed his ideas and resolved to follow him on the path of spiritual endeavour.

After seeking permission from his son and other relatives Merchant Jindatt and his wife Bhanumati went to Acharya Dharmaghosh and got initiated into the ascetic order. They did harsh penance to discipline their bodies and inspired their soul with religious studies and meditation. In the end they took the ultimate vow of Sanlekha and left their earthly bodies to be born as the Viman dwelling gods.

Ratnapaal and Ratnavati were also spending there days happily doing all their duties. They got a son who was brought up as a son of an upright merchant. He was given all the required education and business training. Once he graduated he joined his father in the family business.

One day the great Acharya Amitgati, who was endowed with all the four types of knowledge arrived in the city. All the citizens including the king went to pay homage to him. He influenced the congregation with his discourses, "Every one suffers due to his own Karmas. The illusioned masses are not able to recognize the true form of the soul. Their life is like a long night filled with dreams. All their acts including laughter, crying, sitting and standing are the activities in a dream."

Every one present was filled with joy listening to the ambrosia like discourse. Ratnapaal humbly enquired about his earlier birth, "Revered one! What was my sin that I had to suffer a long separation from my parents?"

The all knowing sage Amitgati said, "Son! Once in your earlier birth you criticized a charity to the deserving by your mother and ill treated ascetics. You have suffered because of that sinful Karma. When your mother explained the truth, you became interested in religion. You also supported charity to the deserving. You got happiness in life due to that."

When Ratnapaal knew about his earlier birth he got detached with his mundane life. He thought that he had got happiness and sorrow as a result of his right and wrong deeds. So, should he not accept the right or the spiritual path and gain the ultimate bliss? What will happen when the pious Karmas that are the source of his present happiness are exhausted?

With these thoughts he handed over all the responsibilities to his son, took along his wife and got initiated into the ascetic order. Both these individuals did harsh penance, religious studies, and meditation and after death were born as gods in the Brahm Devlok (a dimension of gods). From there they will descend into the Mahavideh area and attain the accomplished and enlightened state of liberation ending all the sorrows,



## THE BEST AMONG THE SATIS : ANJANA

( 1 )

Founding a city with his own name, King Mahendra, the lion among men, ruled over Mahendrapur. The name of the queen of King Mahendra was Manovega. The royal couple had many sons. After all these sons they also got a daughter. The royal couple loved their daughter more than all their sons. The birth celebrations of this daughter were performed with much more grandeur than those of their sons. It appeared as if a stream of joy had started flowing in the city of Mahendrapur. The naming ceremony was also performed on a grand scale and the new born daughter was named Anjana.

The wise who observed the child said that because, with her divinely serene beauty, she applied the Anjan (collyrium) of uprightness and good conduct in the eyes of the beholder she was called Anjana. She was the beloved of not only the royal family but also of all the young and old, and male and female townspeople of Mahendrapur. It is a rare coincidence that beauty and virtues are found together. Anjana was one such rare being, she was a rare beauty and was the abode of all womanly virtues.

At the appropriate time she was given her schooling. She excelled in all subjects including the fine arts.

Suddenly King Mahendra found that his playful daughter had crossed the threshold of adolescence and become a young woman. He got worried about her marriage. But before looking for a match the king thought, "Anjana is not only my daughter but she is also the beloved

of the whole town. The people of this town have the same right over Anjana as I have. Therefore I shall not decide about the marriage of Anjana before consulting my people."

King Mahendra conveyed his thoughts to Queen Manovega and added, "Darling! you should send Anjana to my court tomorrow. My ministers and the senior citizens want to see the princess. I shall be consulting them for Anjana's marriage."

The queen accepted, "My lord! This is an excellent idea. Such close family like relationship between the king and his people create heaven on this earth."

Anjana came into the king's court. The king addressed the ministers and prominent citizens present in the court, "This Anjana is not only my daughter but also like a daughter and sister to you. Now she has completed her studies and reached the marriageable age. You should suggest a suitable match for her so that after marriage to him she spends a happy married life, and the association adds to the glory of Mahendrapur, its citizens, and its king."

This question first of all stopped all commotion in the court. Later everyone started consulting each other. At last the prime minister stood up and said, "Sire! I feel that King Ravan of Lanka would be a suitable match for our princess. His power has spread his influence far and near. Our association with him would add to our strength as well. When the other kings will know that Ravan is the son-in-law of King Mahendra they will never dare to raise their eyes at Mahendrapur."

Another member of the court got up and opposed this suggestion, "You have chosen the match keeping in mind the interest of the king and the state. But our prime aim should be the interest of the princess. King Ravan is an abode of vices. How can poison be mixed with ambrosia? He is extremely conceited and arrogant. Besides this, the age



difference between him and our princess is very much. He also is already married. Although a king is allowed to have many wives but monogamy has its own value."

In support of this, another member stood up and said, "I concur with this and advise that why not choose prince Meghnaad, son of King Ravan."

This idea was also opposed, "Both are alike. Like father, like son. We should abandon any thought of that family. Meghnaad is also not a suitable match. In my opinion Vidyutparva is a good match. He is upright, disciplined and charitable."

This proposal was also not accepted, another member said, "Vidyutparva is an able man. But marriage with him is embracing widowhood. He is destined to become an ascetic at an age of 18 years and get liberated at the age of 26 years. This is what the sages say. One cannot marry his daughter to a person with a predicted short life-span."

The king intervened, "This problem cannot be solved by such a debate. You should enquire and consult at leisure and find out a way. It is not essential to come to some conclusion today itself."

Everyone affirmed the king's advise and started enquiring. After a few days they unanimously decided that Anjana should be married to prince Pavan, the son of King Prahlad. Prince Pavan was upright, disciplined, and virtuous. Being a member of an illustrious family he was suitable for Anjana from every angle. The decision was conveyed to the king, "Sire! We have come to a unanimous conclusion that Prince Pavan was the most suitable match for our princess. Now please enquire from the princess if she likes him or not."

When the king asked Anjana she blushed and left the court. The king understood her silent consent. The king send the marriage proposal to King Prahlad, prince Pavan's father. He also conveyed that this marriage should be a

simple ceremony. Both the parties would gather at Maansarovar for a simple ceremony.

King Prahlad was also pleased at this proposal. He liked the idea that such a rare beauty and highly virtuous person as princess Anjana would become his daughter-in-law.

Prince Pavan also heard the praise of Anjana's beauty and virtues. He was driven by the natural curiosity to see the girl who was so much talked about and who was to be married to him. He decided to see Anjana and took his friend Prahast in confidence.

Prince Pavan was a Vidyadhar (one having divine powers). Movement in air, riding a Viman was a usual thing for him. He and Prahast boarded their Vimans and reached Mahendrapur. But to be able to see the princes stealthily was also a problem. The two friends were sitting in the garden and discussing what to do.

Coincidentally, the princess with her friends also came into the garden and sat. Prahast surmised that the divine beauty sitting surrounded by other girls must be the princess. He said to Pavan, "Friend! This glowing beauty who is surrounded by her friends is none other but princess Anjana. Come let us conceal ourselves and hear to their conversation."

Pavan and Prahast hid themselves in a nearby thicket and listened to the girls.

A girl named Vasantmala said, "Princess! How lucky you are that you will be married to Prince Pavan. You will be a blessed one to get a husband as disciplined and upright as him."

Another girl named Mishrakeshi said, "Prince Pavan can never be better than Vidyutparva. I accept that his life is very short. He is destined to become an ascetic at an age of 18 years and get liberated at the age of 26 years. But even

to spend a short period with such a pious soul who is going to attain liberation is worthwhile. Even a drop of ambrosia is acceptable rather than having a pitcher full of poison. There is no comparison between Vidyutparva and Pavan.”

The friends of the princess were divided into two groups. One supported Vasantmala and the other Mishrakeshi. Someone was praising Vidyutparva and some other was proving Pavan to be the best. Anjana was listening to both the sides without any comment.

Prince Pavan did not find the discussions of the other girls so irritating as the silence of Anjana. His reaction was that silence is acceptance. He thought, “This acceptance meant that she confirmed that Vidyutparva was better than him. She has been listening to the criticism of her future husband and praise of another man (in some sources it is mentioned that she even praised Vidyutparva as he was destined to be liberated, and this annoyed Pavan very much). What sort of woman is she? Curse her beauty? She is not fit to be my wife.” These thoughts made Prince Pavan so angry that he took out his sword with the intention to behead Mishrakeshi, the girl who was praising Vidyutparva.

Prahasht caught his hand and said, “Prince Pavan! What are you doing? To kill a woman is a hyenous crime. Your doubt about Anjana is baseless. Out of shyness she is not being able to present your side. But this does not mean that in her opinion you are not better than Vidyutparva.”

With his friends efforts Prince Pavan calmed down. But the seed of doubt for Anjana was sown. He resolved to marry Anjana, teach her a lesson, and avenge his insult.

When Prahasht found that Prince Pavan agreed for the marriage, he was pleased. But Prince Pavan did not agree to this marriage because of the beauty and charm of Anjana. It was the flaming fire of vengeance that made him agree to the proposal.

May what, the gold has to go through the process of heating to gain the desired purity. Anjana was an upright and virtuous woman but she too had to pass through the harsh test of pain, caused by her husband, in order to reach the pinnacle of virtuosity.

At the appointed auspicious day and moment King Prahlad reached Maansarovar with Prince Pavan. King Mahendra also came there with Anjana. In an austere ceremony Anjana and Prince Pavan were married. Marriage is an auspicious arrangement. Before entering into this arrangement both the sides are free, but once you enter you are not free any more.

Anjana came to her husband's house. Courteous Anjana touched the feet of her in-laws, King Prahlad and queen Ketumati. The royal couple was pleased to get such a virtuous daughter-in-law. King Prahlad had already got a grand mansion constructed for Anjana. The newly married couple went into that palace.

Prince Pavan did not like even to see the face of Anjana. So on the honeymoon night he did not go into the bed chamber. Anjana waited alone on the bed prepared for the occasion. Throughout the night she waited for her husband and did not sleep a wink. Anjana's friends tried to persuade Prince Pavan to go to Anjana but he did not relent.

This apathy and rejection by her husband disturbed Anjana very much. She kept on thinking, "What grave mistake I have committed that my beloved husband remains annoyed with me?" When she could not find any reason she accepted that the annoyance of her husband was caused by some Karmas of the past life. "Even great men have to suffer the fruits of Karma, what of me, a powerless woman."

Although Anjana consoled herself with such rationalization and maintained her poise, still the inherent softness of female attitude made her moan with pain. She

satisfied herself by peeping through the windows of her room and beholding Prince Pavan while he moved in and out of the palace. Her friend Vasantmala could no more tolerate this pitiful condition of Anjana. One day she said, "Sister! This is injustice. For no apparent reason your husband is apathetic towards you. You still do not complain. After all what is your mistake? He is ill treating you and you still wish good of him."

Anjana was irked at this comment from her friend. She could not tolerate the criticism of her husband. She reacted sharply, "Vasantmala! May what, he is my husband, the one I worship. If he is happy by being annoyed with me and rejecting me, I too am. To derive happiness in his joy is my duty. What is bad for him is bad for me as well. In future please never say anything against him before me, I will not be able to tolerate it."

When Prince Pavan came to know that Anjana used to look at him from the windows he got them closed. Anjana still did not loose her patience. Her ideal was love for her husband with her soul, body and speech. That was her duty, that was her religion.

Prince Pavan had rejected her wife because of a misunderstanding. But this did not mean that he was not an upright man. If he wanted he could have married once again. But he too believed in monogamy. Although his friends advised him to do so, he did not marry again and led a celibate and disciplined life. When his friends repeatedly insisted he said, "How do you know that the new one would be to my liking. What was fated is acceptable to me. I am happy alone. It is a good opportunity to observe discipline and religious conduct. I will be benefited by this disciplined way of life and Anjana will get her punishment for her sin of praising another man and silently listening to her husbands criticism."

Vasantmala still could not tolerate the miserable condition of her friend. She advised, "Friend! It would be

good for you to go to your parents' place. How would you be able to tolerate this continued rejection? If you go to Mahendrapur for some days you might get some inspiration."

Anjana replied, "Vasantmala! What is their for me in my parents' home? Now my husband's home is my home. It is true that I am leading this celibate life because of my husbands annoyance. But before me there have been many such Satis (chaste and virtuous women) who have remained celibate of their own will or due to husband's rejection. Women like Brahmi, Sundari, Kaushalya, Sita, Vijaya, Damayanti, and many others are my ideal. Sister Vasantmala! Please stop worrying about me. It is not my husband's fault. It is just the fruition of Karmas from my earlier life."

Vasantmala silently praised the patience, sacrifice, and the disciplined life of her friend Anjana and left.

The life of Anjana and Prince Pavan took separate directions and pace. Bhagavan Neminath had rejected Rajimati even before the marriage and she followed a celibate life. The same way Anjana and Prince Pavan were following their individual and celibate lives.

As a rejected wife Anjana spent twenty two years of her life (some sources say it was 12 years). Time has no end, year after year passed and Anjana lived with the hope that when the bad Karmas would end she will be accepted by her husband.

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( 2 )

One day Ravan, the king of Lanka was brooding, "All the kings and other rulers bow before me, are my subjects, and consider me to be their emperor. Only Varun is a ruler

who has never bowed before me. If this situation prevails other kings will also revolt. So I should make Varun my subject.” And he send his emissaries to Varun with a message that Varun should either come under his banner or face him in a battle.

The emissaries delivered Ravan’s message to Varun and left. The message made Varun worried. He called his sons and they all deliberated, “Sons! Ravan is conceited, arrogant, evil, and a Rakshas (devil or demon). What of agreeing to be his subjects, we upright and good natured people would not even like to be his friends. But Ravan has enormous power and not to agree to his message is to invite him to war and face certain defeat.”

Varun’s sons said, “Father! What you say is correct, but we should not bow before Ravan. No matter how strong and powerful he is, we will defeat him with our tactics and diplomacy. We are going to Ravan and will defeat him with our cunning in such a way that he will always remember.”

Varun’s sons went to Ravan and said, “O Rakshas King! Why do you consider Varun to be an ordinary king? He is also a great king. You may be great in your own eyes but not in the eyes of Varun.”

Ravan, “You are too young to talk like this. If he is great let him face me in the battle field. Who is truly great can only be decided in the battle field.”

Getting the opening they desired the sons of Varun parried, “Varun fights with weapons and if you also face him with weapons you both will be equal. Victory or defeat will come later. Right at the beginning your claim of greatness loses its meaning. If a great man like you also uses weapons like ordinary mortals what is so great about it?”

Ravan’s pride was hurt. Driven by the bloated ego of his power he reacted, “I will fight Varun without any weapon. Even if he uses weapons, I will fight him bare handed.”

Getting this promise from Ravan the sons of Varun returned and said to their father, "Father! Make your preparations for a war with Ravan, the Rakshas King. You will be victorious because he has declared to fight you or your army without the use of weapons."

Ravan sent his commanders Khar and Dushan, who were his brothers-in-law also, to defeat Varun. As their large army had no weapons it was defeated and they were captured. Ravan kept on sending new commanders and troops and each one of them met the same fate. Now Ravan realized that to defeat Varun was indeed a problem. He called all his ministers and consulted.

He said, "I have cut my own hands. Because of my oath that I shall not use weapons against Varun my armies and commanders are being defeated. You should advise me what to do."

One member of Ravan's assembly said, "Sire! Many valorous kings are your subjects. It is only you who have taken that oath, not the kings who are your subjects. You should send one of these kings, with all the arsenal at his command, to challenge Varun and defeat him."

Ravan liked the idea. He then asked his assembly about who should be entrusted with the job. After consultation they conveyed, "King Prahlad is the most qualified person for this job. He will fight and make Varun your subject."

Ravan sent a message to King Prahlad that he should challenge and defeat Varun. Times of trouble are the sure test of a subject.

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When King Prahlad got Ravan's message he thought, "It is my duty to assist my monarch during difficult times. If I am defeated, I am not at a loss because I will have the satisfaction of performing my duty. If I win, the cause of my monarch will be served and it would add to my glory." And he ordered his army to prepare for a war.



When Pavan heard of his father's preparations for a war, he went to his father and after greetings said, "Father! You should remain at home. I will go at war. Please give me a chance. After all when will I get a chance to lead our army?"

Out of affection King Prahlad said, "Son! You have yet to fight a war. You are not experienced enough to lead, let me go."

Pavan insisted, "When you loose an opportunity you don't get experience. He is a worthless son who, being strong, still allows his father to go to the battle field. Please give me permission to go."

At his sons insistance Prahlad at last relented. Prince Pavan started his preparations. The news spread around the town like wild fire. Anjana also heard about this. She silently prayed for the success of her husband. Suddenly Vasantmala came running and said, "Friend! Have you heard? Prince Pavan is going to war against Varun. It is alright to be an obedient son but, is it right to abandon one's virtuous and religious wife?"

Anjana sad sharply, "Vasantmala! How many times have I told you not to criticize my husband before me. I don't want to hear anything against him. Whatever he is doing is correct and justified. He will certainly give me a chance to serve him when my sufferings for all my Karmas from the earlier birth come to an end."

Vasantmala was humbled by this sharp reaction from Anjana. Accepting her mistake she said, "Friend! What you say is correct but it would be good if you two somehow come together before he marches. Anjana, you should write a letter to the prince. I will deliver it to him. May be he changes his mind when he reads your letter and comes to meet you."

Anjana, "Vasantmala! He always resides in the temple of my heart. Where is the need of a letter? When the time comes he shall certainly meet me."

Vasantmala still insisted, "Friend! There is no harm in writing a letter. Just this once take my advise and write a letter."

Anjana, "Alright, if you insist like mad I shall write."

Anjana wrote a letter. She conveyed best wishes for the success of his mission, her humble greetings, and the request to see her. Vasantmala took the letter to Prince Pavan. As soon as he saw the name of Anjana he tore it into pieces and threw away. Staring angrily at Vasantmala he said, "Mind you, never bring any letter from that worthless woman to me."

Vasantmala returned dejected to Anjana and started crying. Anjana consoled her, "Are you mad? Why do you cry? I told you in advance that he resides in the temple of my heart. You would have been annoyed had I refused your request."

The marching trumpets were blown. To bid an auspicious goodbye to her husband Anjana took a bowl full of curd and joined the rows of townspeople queued up on the road. Prince Pavan had to pass through this road. On both sides of the road were rows of people standing to greet their prince. On the horseback Prince Pavan moved slowly. He saw that some married woman was standing with a bowl full of curd. He was happy to witness this good omen. When he arrived near and saw that it was Anjana, he kicked the bowl with his foot and galloped the horse.

Anjana thought, "I am sure this is a test of my patience. The intensity of the love of a Chatak (a species of cuckoo that is said to drink only rain water) is not dampened even in the face of thunder and hail-storm." She returned to her palace and said to Vasantmala, "Friend Vasantmala! Now I shall start fasting in order to shed my evil Karmas. How can I please him? The load of my past Karmas is so heavy

that without fasting and penance it is not possible to reduce them.”

Vasantmala tried to console her, “Dear one! You should be courageous. The Karmas are not shed by fasting. The best way to achieve that is to tolerate them with equanimity. You are living like a lioness. This is the sure sign of your success. One day you will certainly get what you desire. If a man remains alive he gets ample opportunities to achieve the desired.

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( 3 )

With his friend Prahast, Pavan camped at Maansarovar with the aim to proceed ahead at dawn. It was a deathly silent night. Pavan had no sleep in his eyes. Suddenly the oppressive silence of the night was broken by the pathetic call of the she-bird Chakvi. The deep melancholic tone profoundly stirred Pavan, and he thought—

“How disturbed is this bird due to her separation from its mate. When the pangs of separation are so hurting even to the birds, what would be the condition of the humans? Is Anjana also in a similar condition due to her being separated from me. Twenty two years have passed since our marriage and I have not allowed her the pleasure of even a short meeting with me. Like this Chakvi, Anjana has also spent innumerable days and nights of separation. I should at least enquire about her agony. If she is also as hurt as this Chakvi I am a great sinner.”

With these thoughts Pavan turned and woke up his friend Prahast.

Prahast asked, “Friend! You are still awake? What is the matter? Are you not able to sleep?”

Pavan, "Prahast! The pathetic call of a Chakvi has made me sleepless. Today I am missing Anjana. I am thinking that without meeting her would I be able to summon enough courage to march in the morning? Is it possible to meet Anjana now?"

Prahast, "Friend! Till today you believed Anjana to be at fault and never cared for her. This is the same Maansarovar where you two were married. This is an auspicious night that you have been inspired to meet Anjana. Now you stop worrying. We will board the Viman and go to the palace. Before morning we shall return."

By heart Pavan was pure and pious. The deadly combination of fate and illusion had veiled his inherent virtues. When Anjana had shed all the Karmas of her earlier birth, Pavan got inspired to meet her. The spot of his marriage, Maansarovar, stirred his memories. He earnestly repented for the ill use of his manly attitudes. At last he arrived outside the palace of Anjana on a Viman.

When Pavan wanted to knock at the palace door Prahast stopped him and said, "Prince Pavan! Before your marriage we stealthily heard the conversation between Anjana and her friends. And that was the cause of your anger at Anjana. Today we have a similar opportunity. Vasantmala and Anjana are talking. This is a chance to listen to Anjana's opinion about you. I am sure it will remove all your doubts and misunderstandings."

Pavan agreed to this idea of Prahast. Both the friends put their ears to the door and listened attentively. Vasantmala was telling Anjana, "Friend! Your husband has insulted you in a way that even an enemy would think twice before doing so. You still sing only his songs. You still hope that he will undergo a change of heart and accept you."

Anjana, "Friend! you are utterly ignorant. Can't you see how great is my husband. In spite of being apathetic to me he has not married another woman. Although he is

annoyed with me he still observes celibacy and discipline. I am suffering because of the Karmas of my earlier birth and that is no fault of his. What the other person is doing is no consideration at all in the observance of religion. Even in the face of great difficulties the codes have to be observed unconditionally. Fidelity is the religion of woman and her husband is her life. The basis of fidelity is not to find faults in her husband but to always think good of him. My only desire is to always follow this pious conduct. If my faith is true he will come and meet me of his own accord."

When Pavan heard this his eyes became wet. He got exhilarated with profusion of joy. Prahast said, "Do you still have any doubts? Prince Pavan! you are a blessed one to get a wife like Anjana."

Prahast knocked at the door. Anjana asked, "Who is there?"

Prahast, "I am Prahast, a friend of Prince Pavan."

Anjana, "At this unearthly hour your coming here in his absence is a great crime. Whoever you are, go back at once. Don't think that I am a weakling. Before my anger harms you please go away. That only will be good for you."

Pavan laughed and said, "Prahast! No more play acting now. We have to return also. Announce me and get the gate opened."

Prahast, "Madam! I am not alone. Your husband, Prince Pavan, is also with me. Please open the gate."

Anjana peeped from her balcony and saw that Pavan was standing there. She at once opened the gate and bowed at the feet of her husband. Pavan also bend down and raised her up. He said, "Darling! I misunderstood you. I have committed a grave mistake and so I beg your pardon."

Anjana interrupted, "My lord! The mistake is mine and so it is I who should beg pardon. My mother had taught me

that the wife who is unable to mould herself according to her husband is at fault. Mother told me about six ways to help mould myself according to my husband—1. Always do what the husband desires, 2. Never do what the husband does not like, 3. Be completely devoted to your husband, 4. Protect your husband, 5. Keep the secrets of your husband concealed, and 6. Be humble to your husband. At some point or other I have been wanting in the proper observation of my conduct. And that is why you have remained annoyed with me, that sure is my mistake.”

Pavan was highly impressed by the large-heartedness of Anjana and her feelings of devotion and submission for her husband. Vasantmala and Prahasht left them alone in their bedroom. This now was the honeymoon night. In spite of their independent existence they became one like a water-body and its wave, like the moon and its glow, like a flower and its fragrance. Anjana and Pavan were now united. The long night passed like a moment.

Prahasht came and called, “Friend! the day is just about to dawn. Recall your duty and don’t delay our departure.”

Pavan was jolted out of his blissful state. He said to Anjana, “Darling! I have to leave before the morning. We will meet after the war is over. I would now take your leave.”

Anjana, “My lord! If I am pregnant, without any evidence how would I be able to prove that I am carrying your child. Who would believe that you had visited me. I am afraid people might slander me by calling me an unchaste woman.”

Pavan, “Darling! You are absolutely right. But if I announce my coming here now, I will be looked down upon as a coward because I am on a war mission. A warrior who returns from his war camp and hides in his bedroom even before the war is started is termed a weakling and cannot even show his face. My father as well as townspeople will

take me to be a coward and lusty person. Now we should find a solution that proves your innocence without tarnishing my image. Take this ring with my emblem and keep it safe. If and when the need arises you can show it as an evidence.”

Prince Pavan and Prahast left in their Viman and arrived at Maansarovar just before dawn. They joined their commanders and marched ahead.

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Anjana got pregnant. The news spread all around. Women started gossiping—“The prince has been keeping away from Anjana for last 22 years. He does not even want to see her face, and at the moment he is not even in the town. Whose illegitimate child she is carrying in her womb? No matter how chaste she may appear but in reality she is a great sinner.”

The gossip reached queen Ketumati also. At first she did not believe what she heard. She thought, “How can Anjana behave like this. She is a strict follower of the code of conduct, but then whose child is she carrying? Pavan even got the windows of her palace closed. He did not even want to see her face. It is possible that after twenty years of separation she has slipped and indulged into this sinful deed.” This brooding slowly increased her anger to bursting point. She asked her maid to go and fetch Anjana.

Anjana was pleased to get the call from her mother-in-law. She rode a chariot and arrived at the palace of Ketumati. After getting down, as soon as she wanted to touch the feet of her mother-in-law, Ketumati drew back her feet and said angrily, “Evil woman! Don’t touch my feet with your dirty hands. Tell me, whose illegitimate child you are carrying? You have put a blot on my family.”

Anjana started crying, “Mother! I carry the child of your son in my womb. I have this ring with his emblem as the evidence of his visit to my palace.”

Ketumati, "You cannot hide your sin behind your tears. The man who has not been willing to see your face for last 22 years suddenly came to you without anybody knowing about it and gave you his ring; all this is a story made up by you. You must have found this ring or even stolen it. You have indulged in a sinful act and made up this story. This ring is too flimsy to cover your sin. An elephant cannot be hidden behind a sesame seed."

Anjana had no other alternative but to remain silent. What explanation could she give? Her silence confirmed her guilt in the eyes of Ketumati. For Ketumati Anjana was now proven guilty. Shedding tears Anjana returned to her palace.

Anjana said to her friend Vasantmala, "Friend! The bad Karmas of my past have not yet ended. The extreme happiness of joining my husband has been overshadowed by this black spot of uncalled for notoriety. As long as he does not return I cannot prove myself innocent."

Vasantmala, "Friend! Your capacity to tolerate is commendable. Till now you have tolerated the continued ill treatment by your husband and now you are forced to tolerate this slandering. But keep your patience. When your husband returns he will silence everyone."

Ketumati said to her husband, King Prahlad, "Anjana has become the talk of the town. What to do now?"

Prahlad, "In order to save life, a decayed part of the body is amputated and thrown away. Now it would be proper if we put Anjana in a chariot and send her within the limits of her father's state. If she desires she may go to her father King Mahendra and if he wants he may keep her. We will not allow her to remain here."



( 4 )

Even before the sun dawned the driver of the chariot knocked at the door of Anjana's palace. When Vasantmala opened the gate he said, "The king has asked me to take princess Anjana for sight-seeing in the jungle. The chariot is ready."

Anjana took no time to understand that she was being exiled. Anjana and Vasantmala both boarded the chariot. The chariot picked up speed and by dawn it covered a considerable distance. When they crossed the forest Anjana asked the driver, "Where the chariot is to be stopped? Don't be afraid. Tell me the truth. What are the instructions of the king?"

The driver replied with tear filled eyes, "Madam! I have been ordered to leave princess Anjana near Mahendrapur so that she could go to her father King Mahendra. King Prahlad has exiled you."

Anjana, "Now you may return with the chariot. From this place Mahendrapur is not far and I know the way." The driver returned with the chariot and Anjana and Vasantmala proceeded towards Mahendrapur. When she reached the city gate she send the information of her arrival to the palace.

Anjana was telling Vasantmala, "Friend! I have come here on your insistence otherwise I wanted to live in the jungle. When the father-in-law has turned me out from my rightful home why would my father keep me at his home? After marriage the house of her husband is a woman's home. When there is no place in one's own home how can you expect a place at the already abandoned house or father's home. Living in the jungle is much more pleasant. There is no one either to praise or to curse. Meeting with pious saints, the innocent love of animals and birds,

ambrosia like water of streams, the fruits and vegetables available to all, soothing shade of dense trees, and unbroken peace, all this is freely available in the jungle."

King Mahendra was overwhelmed with joy when he heard about his daughter's arrival. He started giving orders to his servants, "At once decorate the chariots. Today our beloved daughter Anjana has come. I will extend a warm welcome to my daughter."

As time passes the intensity of excitement is reduced. When the intensity of King Mahendra's joy reduced he asked the messenger, "Is the son-in-law also with my daughter? Who has come along with Anjana? Why did she not inform me in advance?"

The messenger replied, "Sire! Princess Anjana has arrived here under grave circumstances. Prince Pavan has gone to fight a war with Varun and king Prahlad has exiled Anjana because of her questionable character."

The king fainted. When he regained his senses and composure he said, "Instruct the gate keeper not to allow Anjana to enter the city. We have married Anjana to Prince Pavan. She does not belong here any more. When he, to whom she belongs, is not ready to keep her, we have no right to do so. For a ruler, justice and the good of people come first. I cannot abandon the path of justice for my personal feelings or gains. Tell Anjana that she is not allowed to live in my kingdom in her present state."

This message had no adverse reaction on Anjana. She said to her friend, "Vasantmala! This is what I desired for. Had my father allowed me to stay I would have felt cramped. However, you should go into the town. Why should you continue to suffer for me. Live with comfort in the town. You shall be welcome again when my husband returns and my guilt is washed."

Vasantmala, "Do you not consider me to be a friend? You want to enjoy the freedom of the jungle but would like

to deprive me of that pleasure. No matter what you say, I will never leave you alone.”

Both the friends started for the jungle. When they entered the jungle, tired Anjana sat down in the shade of a tree. There, she saw that an ascetic was deeply engrossed in his meditation. The value of the solitude of a jungle is enhanced by the presence of few such hermits. Those who are infatuated with the mundane indulgences never like the solitude of a jungle, they only love the hustle and bustle of towns. But those who are beyond attachment and aversion and have no mundane desires and ambitions, like no place better than a peaceful jungle. The peace of a jungle becomes all the more blissful with the presence of sages and hermits.

When Anjana saw the ascetic she went near him. Both the friends sat down after bowing respectfully before him. When the ascetic concluded his meditation he opened his eyes and said, “Anjana! you have also come? You will get peace in the jungle and your miseries will come to an end.”

Anjana was not surprised at all. She knew that omniscient ascetics know all there is to know, transcending even the scale of time. She asked humbly, “Revered one! When I was rid of leprosy I got eczema. When I met my husband after 22 years I was marked as a depraved woman. What sin did I commit that I had to suffer so much? Would I be able to shed all the evil Karmas during this life time?”

With his profound serenity the ascetic said, “Princess Anjana! Everyone has to suffer the fruits that the past Karmas bear. The sufferer has no power to avoid it. The only thing one can do is to tolerate these sufferings and drink the poison with a smile. He should never leave the right path even while suffering. Everyone has to suffer, the wise do so smiling and the fools do so crying. I will tell you what did you do during your earlier birth.

“In your earlier birth you were a queen. You also had a co-wife. You had no child. Driven by jealousy you thought that as the other queen had a son and the king would love her more therefore you should make her childless. With this idea you hid her son. When she lost her son, the other queen cried and became miserable. But you were happy and it showed on your face. The other queen thought you knew about her son. But when she asked, you bluntly said that her son was like your son and there was no reason for you to hide him.

“In order to conceal a sin one has to commit another sin and then another. You first committed the sin of hiding a child belonging to someone else. Then you committed another crime of telling a lie and once more you sinned by being happy in others’ misery.

“On being persuaded by a woman in the neighbourhood you returned the child after 22 hours. Your sufferings in this life are due to this sinful activity from the earlier birth.”

After telling the story of her earlier birth the ascetic added, “But now the end of your miseries is near. You will give birth to a son who will become a great warrior, an extremely powerful man, and a leader among scholars and wise. That son of yours will become an emissary of the most upright among men, Rama the great. With his prowess he will glorify your name in the three worlds for all times to come. By calling him ‘son of Anjana’ and ‘son of Pavan’ people will sing in your praise as well.”

Anjana was contented to hear about the deeds of her earlier life. She forgot all her miseries by learning about her bright future. If there is no pain the experience of happiness loses its importance. As day follows night happiness follows sorrow.

Anjana lived happily in the jungle with her friend Vasantmala. The inner peace of Anjana and the outer peace

of the solitude of the jungle became complimentary. It appeared as if the chirping of birds, perched on branches of trees, were songs of welcome. The dancing pea-cocks, the leaping deers, the playful rabbits, and monkeys jumping from one branch to another made the atmosphere enchanting. On one side were green thickets and on the other were the canopies of vines entwined with trees. At one place there was the soothing shadow of dense trees and at another sun rays were sprinkling gold on the ground. The sweet and nourishing meal of fruits was far superior to the best cooked meal including sweets. The velvet like grass and the spongy bed made of hay made one forget the comforts of a bed with milky white and smooth bed-cover.

Away from the noises of the city, Anjana was spending her time in spiritual activities. With the help of this pleasant jungle life she had been able to forget her miseries like a bad dream. Also in the hope of the foretold future even the present appeared to fly.

One day Anjana had labour pains. She took Vasantmala along and entered a cave in the facing hill for delivery. When the two women entered the cave they found that a lion had already taken shelter there. When the lion saw them entering it slowly went out as if it was a pet dog.

Often it so happens that great warriors and valorous individuals are not born in palaces. There are no celebrations when they are born. Vasudev Shrikrishna was born in a prison. His parents were imprisoned by the cruel king Kamsa. Anjana also gave birth to a highly illustrious son in a lion's den. When she looked at the radiant beauty of the child she got exalted. Vasantmala congratulated her and said with tear filled eyes, "Friend! It is a royal child but born in rags. Had he been born in the palace, this would have been a day of celebrations."

Anjana, "Vasantmala! You are not aware of the fact that courage and jungle are two inseparable things. Have you

forgotten what the ascetic had predicted. There is some hidden purpose behind my giving birth to this child in the jungle. Who can fathom the laws of fate.”

While they were talking, a Viman landed at the mouth of the cave. King Shoorsen of Hanumatpatan disembarked from the Viman. Anjana at once recognized her maternal uncle.

Shoorsen said, “Daughter Anjana! Some divine inspiration drove me to come to you. Come and board the Viman. You are going with me to my palace. Had I known earlier, you would not have suffered this solitude of the jungle life.”

Anjana, “Uncle! My father-in-law as well as my father both have obliged me by denying me shelter. Had I not come into this jungle I would not have met the great ascetic and learned about my earlier birth as well as the bright and happy future. I love this jungle life now. Please let me be here.”

But Shoorsen did not allow her to prevail. Anjana, at last, could not avoid her uncles request and boarded the Viman with Vasantmala and her child. While the Viman was fast covering the distance in the sky the new born was attracted towards a bunch of pearls dangling at the windowsill of the Viman. It jumped from Anjana’s lap to catch the shining pearls and fell down from the Viman. Anjana shrieked with panic and Shoorsen was shocked. Vasantmala thought, “Would the child still be alive after falling from this height?” Shoorsen turned the Viman around and landed at the spot where the child had fallen. They all were utterly surprised to see the infant perched at the summit of a hill and playing. The rock on which the infant had fallen was shattered to pieces. This is said to be the result of the 22 year long celibacy of the parents. Due to observing strict celibacy for this long a period Pavan and Anjana had got a son with diamond hard body.

They all again boarded the Viman and arrived at Hanumatpatan. King Shoorsen got the whole town decorated to celebrate the arrival of Anjana and the birth of her son. The birth ceremony of Anjana's son was celebrated with great fan-fare. The child was named Hanuman.

Living with her aunt and other members of the family Anjana started bringing up her son with due care. Her days were filled with the memories of her husband and nights were spent singing devotional songs.

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( 5 )

When Ravan saw Prince Pavan he asked, "Why didn't your father come himself? Would you be able to conquer Varun?"

Pavan replied, "Sire! When a son becomes capable he represents his father. Victory and defeat are just consequences of a war, the important thing is the will and prowess to fight. With your blessings I shall certainly defeat Varun. Please rest assured."

After taking Ravan's permission Pavan went into the battle field. A fierce battle was fought with Varun. Pavan got the commanders of Ravan's army, Khar and Dooshan, released from the prison of Varun. After a one year war Pavan defeated Varun. Ravan extended a warm welcome to victorious Pavan and honoured him with rich gifts.

Pavan and his friend Prahast returned along with the army. King Prahlad also warmly greeted his son. Pavan got apprehensive when he did not see Anjana at the greeting ceremony, "Why did she not come?" After duly greeting his parents Pavan and Prahast went to Anjana's palace. The gloomy atmosphere of the palace was indicating that Anjana was not there. A maid revealed everything to

Prince Pavan. He was taken aback. Prahast tried to console him but Pavan started crying. In choked voice he uttered, "It was due to my mistake that a chaste woman like Anjana had to suffer such infamy. Afraid of my own criticism I met her stealthily. Had I informed my parents about this visit I would have not faced this misery. What should I do now? Where should I go and search Anjana?"

Prahast tried to console him, "Hardship is the test of patience, religion, friend, and wife. I beseech you to be patient and not to abandon your duty. Your friend Prahast is with you. You are sure to find your wife soon. You will gain nothing by crying and wailing. Let us first go to Mahendrapur. It is possible that Anjana may have gone to her parents' home."

Pavan went to his mother. She herself was suffering under the load of her guilt. She was thinking, "Did I have to be so impatient? I should have waited for my son's arrival. I put a false blame and exiled my chaste and virtuous daughter-in-law. Where did my wisdom disappear?"

Pavan said, "Mother the mistake is neither your nor Anjana's. Only I am to be blamed. I should not have met Anjana secretly. Now I am going in search of Anjana. Give your blessings, mother, that I may succeed in finding your daughter-in-law, even if I have to search every nook and corner on this earth."

Ketumati replied with wet eyes, "Son! Go with my best wishes. I am sure you will find Sati Anjana as pure and scintillating as gold."

The news that Anjana was not guilty at all spread throughout the town. Those who were blaming her repented silently.

Pavan and Prahast first of all went to Mahendrapur. King Mahendra and queen Manovega were pleased to know



about the arrival of their son-in-law. The king extended a ceremonious welcome to Prince Pavan. But Pavan was sad and gloomy. The king organized a ceremonial feast in honour of his son-in-law. By that time Pavan knew that Anjana was not here and this added to his gloom. All the sumptuous food became tasteless for him. During the feast he just sat there formally, but did not touch the food.

After the feast he sought permission to leave from King Mahendra. The king himself felt embarrassed and could only say, "Son Pavan! I am elder to you. But I have committed a mistake as gross as I am old. Had I allowed Anjana to live here only till you returned I would not have been so sad today. Please forgive me."

Pavan consoled, "Father! Please don't blame yourself. The mistake was mine. I was apathetic to your daughter for 22 years. And when I met her, I did it secretly. Under such circumstances it is natural to have doubts. You and my father did what was right according to our family traditions. In fact, Anjana had already expressed her apprehension. Had I informed my mother of my deed Anjana would not have suffered as she is doing."

Taking leave of King Mahendra Prince Pavan and Prahast set out in search of Anjana. Prahast asked, "Where should we go now? Where can we find princess Anjana?"

Pavan, "In my opinion she should be living in the nearby forests. Jungle is the only refuge for such distressed as well as pious souls. I am sure Anjana must have taken refuge in the jungle."

The two friends started their search in the jungle. Hills, caves, thickets, and other such places suitable for living or concealment were thoroughly searched, but in vain. Pavan got dejected and said to Prahast, "Friend Prahast! This was my last hope, but here also I found only dejection instead of Anjana. It is possible that Anjana might have come here and some carnivore might have killed her and devoured her

remains. Now my life is cursed and I don't want to live any more. Go home and tell my father that as he courageously tolerated the loss of his daughter-in-law so should he bear the loss of his son. Now I can find solace only in death."

Prahasht, "Friend! You are a brave man, why do you act like a coward. If you commit suicide you will only add to your sins. Patience and courage are the beacons that show the right path. I have this premonition that you will certainly find princess Anjana."

Pavan, "Prahasht! I have no courage to face life without Anjana. I have lost all hopes of seeing her again. Even if I see her that would only be in my next incarnation. Please accept what I say and go to father with the sad news. Please leave me alone."

Prahasht, "You did not accept my suggestion earlier also. You did so only after causing a long suffering of 22 years to your wife. Only then you realized your mistake. You again want to repeat the same thing. Still, I agree to do as you wish, but only if you agree to my condition that you will not end your life as long as I do not return with your father, King Prahlad. You will wait for us and when we come you should convey your decision yourself to your father."

Pavan agreed to this condition. Prahasht went to King Prahlad and told him everything. King Prahlad at once got up and with his body-guards followed Prahasht into the jungle. He said to Pavan, "Son! I will tell you only two things. First is that Anjana is the best among Satis. No beast can kill her or eat her. Her life will be saved even in the gravest predicament. Therefore she is alive and must be bearing her sufferings somewhere. The second is that not all efforts have been made to find her. I will search every corner of this earth and try to find Anjana as one does a needle in a haystack. Only when all my efforts fail you may think of ending your life. To do efforts is our duty. Continue your efforts and wait for the outcome, you are sure to get success."

Prahast also affirmed, "Prince Pavan! Your father is absolutely right. What is the harm in giving it a try?"

Pavan got reassured and he composed himself. King Prahlad returned to the city with Pavan and Prahast. He called his soldiers and spies and instructed, "Go and search for princess Anjana everywhere including hills, forests, wells, ponds, gorges, ditches, cities, villages, hermitages, religious places, and any other place from the zenith to the nadir. Find her and bring her back."

King Prahlad spread a net of thousands of his spies in all directions. Thousands in number, they searched non stop round the clock. At last a group returned with the information, "Sire! Princess Anjana with her son prince Hanuman lives happily in Hanumatpatan with her maternal uncle King Shoorsen."

This news was so effective that it appeared as if all present there had seen Anjana with their own eyes. King Prahlad, Prince Pavan, Prahast, and others left for Hanumatpatan to bring back Anjana.

When Anjana heard that her respected father-in-law is coming to take her back she started praising her luck. King Shoorsen received King Prahlad and his family ceremoniously. Getting back his daughter-in-law along with a grandson, King Prahlad was overwhelmed with joy. Anjana bowed first at the feet of King Prahlad and then Prince Pavan. When Vasantmala narrated the story of Hanuman's falling from the Viman King Prahlad and Prince Pavan were filled with pride. It is only the lucky who are blessed with a child having diamond-hard body.

After this formal meeting and exchange of news Pavan went into privacy with Anjana and Vasantmala. The first question Anjana asked was, "My lord! Tell me the news of the war. How did you win the war and if you remembered me in the battle field or not?"

Pavan, "Darling! You should have first told me your story, the story of your sufferings. But you are really great that you have forgotten your sufferings and are curious about what I did. My war with Varun stretched to one year. I defeated the foe and got the commanders of Ravan's army released. Ravan was pleased with me and honoured me with rich gifts. It was the desire to meet you that brought me back to Mahendrapur so soon, otherwise Ravan was bent upon detaining me there for some more time. But for just a little mistake of mine. . . . ."

Anjana interrupted, "My lord! I don't believe that it was your mistake, not even in my dream. All these sufferings are in fact, the fruits of the Karmas of my earlier birth. What you term as your mistake, was the cause of my going into the jungle and meeting a great sage. He told me all about my earlier birth, as clear and vivid as an image in the mirror. The sage also predicted about your son having a diamond hard body. You have already heard all that from Vasantmala. The sage has also predicted that your son, Hanuman, will be the messenger of Rama the great. He will perform miracles and will be famous as a leader among the sagacious. Masses will sing in his praise calling him 'son of Anjana' and 'son of Pavan' and thus he will immortalize our names as well."

On hearing about this encouraging prediction about his son Pavan was extremely pleased. Commending Anjana he said, "Madam! This all is your doing. Where would I have got such son had you not been my wife. You get all the credit for this."

Anjana said shyly, "Please don't lift me high. Clapping is not possible with one hand." Pavan smiled and the couple spent the night talking about various incidents from the past.

King Mahendra also came to Hanumatpatan. He invited his daughter and son-in-law to come to Mahendrapur. Pavan excused himself cordially, "Things are

enjoyable only when done on suitable and proper occasions. If someone plays a flute at midday during the summer season no body would like it, but if it is played when it rains during the monsoon season everyone would love it. At this time it is proper for me to return home and not to go to the house of my in-laws. I am obliged for the invitation. I will certainly come when the occasion demands.”

King Mahendra accepted the logical answer and did not insist. He gave his love to his grandson and left for Mahendrapur.

King Prahlad also left with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. Shoorsen happily bid them farewell.

This was a happy day and the whole town was decorated. Anjana’s glory had spread throughout the town like the aroma of a fragrant flower. Queen Ketumati extended warm and affectionate welcome to her daughter-in-law and grandson. Beggars were given donations liberally.

When the intensity of the joy of re-union settled down Ketumati one day said to Anjana, “Daughter! I have hurt you very much. I did not allow you to be here even till my son returned. I took the evidence you provided to be false. It was because of me that you had to wander in the jungle. Daughter! I have committed mistakes. Please forgive me.”

Sati Anjana had an equanimous attitude. To her praise and criticism were same. She could understand the agony of her mother-in-law. She consoled Ketumati, “Mother! You have always done good to me. What I have suffered was due to my Karmas. Had you not sent me away I would never have gained the knowledge about the deeds of my earlier birth and also the predictions of my pleasant future by the sage. By tolerating the pain and suffering I have been able to pass the test of patience and piety. Please forget all what you are saying. You are respectable to me. I am blessed to have a loving mother-in-law like you.”

Ketumati's eyes became wet at these words of consolation from Anjana. She thought, "How great is Anjana. She hides the shortcomings of others. She is equanimous towards friend and foe both. I pray to god that may fortune always smile on her."

This way all happiness returned into the life of Anjana. Everyone in the family was sailing on the waves of happiness and pleasure. The wise make necessary arrangements for future in time. The traveller packs his things before the time of departure. It is foolish to search for the needful at the nick of time. King Prahlad thought that he was in the advancing age. Who knows when the last call comes. I should accept the ascetic way in time to work for spiritual uplift. Accordingly he handed over the responsibility of the kingdom to Prince Pavan and became an ascetic. Queen Ketumati also followed him on the spiritual path.

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Now Pavan was on the throne taking care of his people. He was very happy to have a brave son like Hanuman.

Although Pavan had defeated Varun, he did not become a subject of Ravan. King Pavan once again got a message from Ravan that this time Varun should be captured and produced before him. Pavan decided that now he will rest only when he makes Varun bow at the feet of Ravan. He started preparing for the war. When Hanuman knew of this he thought that it was time he shared the responsibilities of his father. He was an accomplished warrior and an intelligent and wise man. With this idea he approached his father and said what he thought.

Pavan replied, "Son! There are many wars you will have to fight. At present you are still too young to face a powerful foe like Varun. The time is not ripe for you to go to war."

Hanuman was very sharp. He said, "Father! When your father was going to fight Varun you had stopped him and went yourself. It is a similar situation today. Have

confidence in me. Small too is very dangerous. The tip of an arrow is very tiny but it is enough to kill the enemy. A Mantra is also very short but still a source of great powers. Please give me permission. I will certainly fulfill the desire of Ravan and add to your glory.”

Pavan allowed Hanuman to march. When Varun came to know that young Hanuman is coming to fight him he laughed. To fight Hanuman seemed to be insulting to him. And so he sent his sons to face Hanuman. In a fierce battle Hanuman with his power and skill defeated Varun’s sons and captured them. Now Varun himself came and challenged Hanuman to a duel. Both the warriors faced each other and grappled. One moment Hanuman went down and the next moment Varun. This way they wrestled for a long time without any result. At last Varun got a chance and throwing Hanuman on the ground he sat on his chest. He mocked Hanuman and asked him to use all his strength. Hanuman got a spurt of energy and using all his power and skill he slipped out of Varun’s trap and threw him on the ground. He continued his assault and sitting on Pavan he gave a barrage of blows with his fists. When Varun went limp Hanuman captured him.

Varun was produced before Ravan in shackles. Ravan smiled and said, “Tell me Varun, would you still not bow before me?”

Varun, “King Ravan! If you free me now I shall abandon my kingdom and become an ascetic. But I will never bow before you as long as I live.”

Hanuman was impressed by Varun’s frankness and valour. He recommended to Ravan, “Sire! Please don’t become an obstacle on the pious path of asceticism. Please release Varun.”

At Hanuman’s recommendation Ravan released Varun. Varun became an ascetic and Ravan returned his kingdom to his sons. Hanuman was pleased at this magnanimous act of Ravan.

Ravan heartily honoured Hanuman. The sons of Varun promised their sister to Hanuman. Impressed by the courage of Hanuman, Khar and Dooshan also decided to marry their daughters to Hanuman. In a grand ceremony these girls were married to Hanuman. His victory added to the glory and prestige of King Pavan. The new relationship with two prestigious royal families also added to the influence of the kingdom. Hanuman's valour was praised everywhere. Anjana was also very happy to get daughters-in-law. She considered herself blessed to get such illustrious husband, brave son, and beautiful and virtuous daughters-in-law.

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One night Anjana could not sleep. In spiritual mood she thought, "While I am still involved with mundane pleasures I will not be able to follow the spiritual goal. No matter how sincerely I follow the code of conduct, the worldly indulgences are impediments. Now that Hanuman is matured and he has the ability to rule the kingdom I should take to ascetic way."

After resolving to turn into an ascetic she went to her husband to seek his permission. When Pavan heard of her decision he was taken aback. Regaining his composure he said, "You can follow the ascetic way while still living with the family. Very little time has passed since the marriage of Hanuman. What our daughters-in-law will think? How would Hanuman bear the pangs of separation with his mother? I think you should do whatever religious practices you want at home. It is not proper to be an ascetic unless you are in old age."

Anjana was firm in her resolution. Once a decision was made she would not waver. She said, "If you want to stop me from getting initiated I will do so. But I have one more request, please block my death also."

Pavan could sense the purpose behind this argument. However, he said, "No one has the power to block death. It will come when it has to. How will I be able to block death."



Anjana, "Then please allow me to become an ascetic. I have suffered and enjoyed the bitter and sweet fruits of my Karmas of the past. Now I should devote some time for the purity of the soul."

Anjana's logical presentation of the need to accept the spiritual path impressed Pavan so much that he himself was inspired to become an ascetic. This added to Anjana's happiness. Now she had the opportunity to get initiated along with her husband.

Hanuman was very much disturbed at this turn of events. Driven by his love for his mother he appealed strongly, "Mother! Where do you want to go leaving me alone? How would I live without you?"

Anjana got Hanuman released from the trap of mundane feelings by her convincing religious discourse. King Pavan crowned Hanuman and the royal couple prepared for renunciation.

Hanuman was sober, brave, valorous and wise. He took over the reigns of the kingdom gladly. Anjana and Pavan got initiated. For a long time they strictly followed the code of conduct and did penance and meditation in order to purify their souls.

In the end Anjana took the ultimate vow and when time came she left her earthly body. She reincarnated in the dimension of gods and shall get liberated after reincarnating once again in the Mahavideh area.

Anjana was the best of the Satis (chaste and virtuous women). She suffered worst of the miseries but never compromised her virtues and chastity. Her devotion for religion, her disciplined and pious way of life, are worth emulating by every Indian woman.



THE END

## *About the Author .....*

Upadhyaya Shri Pushkar Muni Ji enjoyed a revered status among the spiritual leaders of his time. He was a great scholar of Jain, Buddhist as well as Vedic literature. He was an accomplished poet and orator having equal command on Sanskrit, Hindi and Rajasthani languages.

Upadhyayashri gave special stress on chanting and meditation. He himself devoted 8-10 hours daily to meditation sitting in the lotus posture.

Besides all this he was a prolific author. His 111 volumes of Jain stories is a record of sorts even today. The publication of this series in Hindi was completed in 1980. Now a free flowing translation of these volumes has been started, this being the first volume.

### **Born**

17-10-1910

(1967 V. Ashwin Shukla 14)

### **Diksha**

12-6-1924

(1981 V. Jyeshtha Shukla 10)

### **Death**

3-4-1993

(2050 V. Chaitra Shukla 11)



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narrative literature  
has enormously  
contributed towards enriching  
the great canvas of Indian narrative  
and fictional literature. Jain Agamic,  
Churnic, Biographical and Poetical literature  
as well as various styles of commentaries and  
explanatory literature is a vast storehouse of  
thousands of stories and tales. These stories are  
filled with spiritual, religious, social, political, moral  
and cultural information and values woven into the  
interesting and entertaining fabric of fiction.

**Upadhyay Shri Pushkarmuni ji** was the pioneer who  
compiled and edited a one hundred and eleven  
volume series presenting about two thousand  
selected stories in modern Hindi idiom. On  
increasing demand of the English speaking  
readers, his illustrious disciple **Acharya Shri  
Devendra Muni ji** has now taken a step further  
by launching this project of arranging to  
present these stories in modern English  
idiom.

This is the first volume of this new  
series—

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