



# Ramayana

MAHATMA DEVESH BHIKSHU



SULTAN CHAND & SONS

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**Sultan Chand & Sons**  
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# PREFACE

The purpose of writing this English version of RAMAYANA is to provide to the young generation the knowledge of their ancestors in its right perspective, without shrouding it with mythology, which largely eclipses the actual events.

The Ramayana written by Valmiki is a historical epic and an exquisite piece of Sanskrit literature. It is the mirror of Aryan culture and civilization of that age. But as many poets and writers have used it as a source material for their own works and as there has been numerous interpolations, the actual story has been lost under a veil of mystery and at some places, it appears impossible to digest it as a real drama of life. While writing this book, I have tried to remove all the anomalies and ambiguities and offer rational explanations for the marvellous parts of the epic as far as possible.

The title 'RAMAYANA' means RAM and AYANA, i.e., Ramasya Ayana, the path of Ram, the path he adhered to during his life's voyage, viz., of truthfulness, brahmacharya, bravery, nobility, generosity, renunciation and sacrifice. It is a saga of courage. Ram's behaviour, character and conduct throughout is so glorious and sublime that he is known as 'Maryada Purushottam Ram\*', i.e., Ram who always observed the canons of social and ethical conduct expected of an ideal human being.

I am confident that the youth of my country for whom this narration has primarily been written will be duly edified and inspired by it With Blessings,

**MAHATMA DEVESH BHIKSHU**

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## Introduction

It is well known that Mahrishi Valmiki was a contemporary of Ramchandraji Maharaj and he wrote the Ramayana at the same time as Ram was ruling over Ayodhya. Most of the events were known to Valmiki personally and wherever there was any doubt, he verified the facts and was thus able to preserve the authenticity of his narrative.

With the passage of time, the chronicle has not remained unaffected, as there have been many changes and interpolations. Many writers have attempted and written about Ram, as Maithili Sharan Gupt says:

राम तुम्हारा चरित स्वयं ही काव्य है ।  
कोई कवि बन जाय सहज संभाव्य है ॥

O Ram! Your character itself is a poem; it is so inspiring that anyone attempting to portray your character is bound to be inspired by the muses.

The two most famous poets are: (1) Tulsidas in the North; and (2) Kamban in the South. Both of these have portrayed Ram as an incarnation of God. Sometimes, they have referred to Ram as the incarnation of Vishnu also. Thus, they have confused Vishnu with God. The fact is that Vishnu was a very noble and illustrious king. So, only great souls come as incarnations, not God Himself. Most of the people have confused this issue and even writers have also fallen in this trap. It is possible that the soul of Vishnu came as an incarnation of Ram and later on as an incarnation of Krishna also.

Ramchandraji was born at the end of Treta-yuga and now we are passing through the 5090th year of Kali-yuga; the Dwapara-yuga having passed in between, the span of which is 8,64,000 years. Hence, it can safely be assumed that approximately nine lakh years have elapsed since the war between Ram and Ravana took place.

Valmiki begins his epic with the visit of Saint Narad one day to Valmiki's Ashram. Valmiki offered Narad the usual welcome and said to him, "O All-knowing Rishi, please tell me, who among the heroes of this world is the greatest and noblest in valour, virtue and wisdom." Narad replied "Ram, the son of late Raja

Dashratha of Ayodhya, is the hero that you ask for. He is at present ruling in Ayodhya and all his subjects are so happy and prosperous that even Indra's reign in Heaven cannot compare with it." Narad also narrated Ram's story briefly to Valmiki, who was himself quite familiar with it.

Walking along the river bank, Valmiki saw two loving Kraunch birds (a male and a female) on the branch of a tree. Actually they were engaged in the mating process, when a hunter's arrow suddenly hit the male bird, which fell down rolling on the ground. At this 'bolt from the blue' the female bird hovered round the dead body of the male bird, shrieking loudly. Valmiki was greatly moved by this sight and spontaneously expressed his grief in the form of the following couplet:

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः ।  
यत्क्रौञ्च मिथुनादेकम वधीः काममोहितम् ॥

O Hunter! You have killed this mating male bird; you may, therefore, not be able to have happiness and peace for a long-long time.

Later on when Valmiki recovered from his shock, he repented for the curse he had pronounced on the hunter. All the same, he marvelled at the rhythmic metre of the verse and asked his disciple to memorise it. During this time, Mahrishi Brahmaji came there and told Valmiki to narrate the character of Ram, saying:

यावत्स्थान्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ॥  
तावद्रामायण कथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

As long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow on this earth, the story of Ramayana will be cherished among the people.

Then, Valmiki made up his mind to write in such verses the story of the epic of Ramayana. He began to ascertain and collect the facts about Ram, with the help of his disciples. Mahrishi Valmiki had actually seen Ram, Sita and Lakshaman during their exile to Dandakaranya. Having known all the threads of the story, Valmiki wrote this epic in the beautiful verse, and it is only Valmiki's version whose authenticity seems unassailable.

# BAL KAAND



# Beginning of the Story

On the bank of the river Sarayu, there was a kingdom, known as Kaushala, with its capital Ayodhya, famous all over the world, and founded by Maharaja Manu himself, the first king of the solar dynasty (Surya Vanshi). The city of Ayodhya was well planned in its layout, and from what Rishi Valmiki has described the ancient Indian civilization found in this part of the country was of a very high order.

This kingdom was ruled by King Dashratha, in whose reign the people were contented, happy and virtuous,

It was well protected by a great and mighty army, there were forts and moats and no enemy could dare attack it. The name Ayodhya has been taken from the Vedas, meaning that which cannot be conquered in war.

There was plenty and prosperity in the kingdom, there being no household devoid of cows, horses, etc. Not a single individual was unadorned with ear-rings and a chain round his neck, all of gold and pearls. Rishi

Valmiki says that in the whole kingdom of Raja Dashratha, there was no thief, no miser, and none fond of any intoxicant. There was none who did not perform sacrificial fire (yajna-agnihotra) and none illiterate either. Besides, there was no adulterer; then how could there be any adultress?

Maharaja Dashratha had eight wise ministers in his cabinet, who were famous, honest and ever busy in the discharge of their duties. They were:

1. Dhrishti,
2. Jayant,
3. Vijay,
4. Siddharth,
5. Arthasadhak,
6. Ashok,
7. Mantrapal and
8. Sumantra.

Besides, Rishi Vashishtha and Vamadeva were his chief advisers in the matters of piety and religion. These ministers were all brave and noble, full of wisdom and statesmanship. Hence Kaushala was indeed an ideal kingdom.

But not withstanding all this eminence, Raja Dashratha had no son, who could carry on after him. One day as he sat thinking of some device of getting a son, the idea of performing the Putreshti-yajna came to his mind. He consulted Rishi Vishishtha about it, and Vashishtha told him that Rishya-Shringa was the most suitable sage to undertake this honourable task. Having decided to perform the yajna, Maharaja Dashratha gave orders to prepare a suitable piece of land on the bank of the Sarayu all at once. Then, he went to his palace to inform his queens about it. All the three queens, Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, were very happy to know about the decision.

Accordingly, sage Rishya-Shringa was duly invited to perform the said yajna. The sage readily agreed and told Raja Dashratha that he would get the Putreshti-yajna performed according to rites in accompaniment with the recital of Mantras from Atharva-Veda that would certainly fulfil his desire. Rishya-Shringa came and stayed in Ayodhya for about two years. During this period, he duly examined the king and the three queens and being well-versed in Ayurveda, treated them for their deficiencies, the treatment being all a part of the yajna. Their daily life routine was chalked out, including their diet, which was mainly of cow's milk

and products thereof. Besides, they were required to observe the life of brahmacharya and slay near the shed of the cows and tend them personally.

On the expiry of a period of sixteen months, Rishya-Shringa was satisfied about the capability of the queens to conceive. Then Garbhadan Sanskara was duly performed, at which a yajna somewhat different from their daily yajna was performed. Rishi Vishishtha prepared medicinal 'kheer' in a golden bowl. It was kept near the yajna-fire and soon after the yajna was over, it was given to Raja Dashratha to distribute among his queens. He accordingly went to his palace along with the three queens and gave half of the 'kheer' to Kaushalya; half of what remained, he gave to Sumitra and half of what was left was taken by Kaikeyi, and the rest was given to Sumitra again. Thus, they all conceived and became expectant mothers in good time.

### Sage Vishwamitra

After the pregnancy period was over, Kaushalya gave birth to Ram; Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharat and Sumitra gave birth to twins Lakshman and Shatrughan. On this auspicious occasion, there was great rejoicing in the kingdom with Sam-gan and Raja Dashratha gave alms to the deserving poor. At the end of eleven days, Naming Sanskara was solemnised and the babies were given names as mentioned above.

As the princes grew up in age, they were given all the training and education in the Ashram of Vashishtha Rishi, who was their Guru. Thus, they studied Vedas and became true Kshatriya princes, behoving their lineage. They were all brave, lovable, strong and virtuous; yet Ram was outstanding amongst them all. From the very childhood, Ram had attachment for Lakshman and Bharat had attachment for Shatrughan; indeed the two pairs were devoted to each other.

One day Raja Dashratha was in consultation with his ministers about some matters of the State, when Muni Vishwamitra came and spoke to the Gate-Keeper

to inform the King about his arrival. The Raja paid him obeisance, and asked about the welfare of his Ashram. Similarly, Muni Vishwamitra asked the King about the welfare of his kingdom. Raja Dashratha then told Muni Vishwamitra that his visit to Ayodhya was a matter of great happiness and honour to him; “Please, therefore, be kind and tell me what I can do for you. You need have no doubt and whatever you ask for will be accomplished.”

Vishwamitra was a king, but he had given up everything as he wanted to attain sainthood, which he did through austerities and penance. Hearing the words of Raja Dashratha, Vishwamitra said, “O King, who else but one belonging to the family of Ikshwaku, can speak such words. Now, I’ll tell you the purpose of my visit, and you fulfil your promise. I am engaged in performing a yajna that is nearing completion. But two Rakshasas are defiling it. Hence, I want the help of your brave son Ram, who will not only protect the yajna but will also be able to destroy the Rakshasas. I will also give him training in the use of many weapons and in the skill of warfare. You must entrust Ram to my care and fulfil your promise which you gave me on your own. By doing so, you will earn undying fame for yourself.”

On hearing these words, Dashratha was flabbergasted for a little while. When he recovered he said in a choked voice “I have a large army at my command; I will go with these brave soldiers and defend your yajna, fighting with the Rakshasas to the end of my life. Ram is hardly a young-man yet and is not so well-versed in the affairs of war. He is unaware of the wiles of the Rakshasas. However, if you insist on taking Ram with you, please allow us to accompany him along with the army. You know I have great love for all my sons, more so for Ram, as I got them in old age. Please tell me all about these Rakshasas.”

Vishwamitra told all about Maricha and Subahu, who were there at the instigation of Havana, grandson of Mahrishi Pulastya. On getting these details, Dashratha said, “Even I cannot face that wily Rakshasa Ravan. Be kind to me and my sons; I cannot send my son on such a hazardous assignment.”

At these words, Vishwamitra got enraged and said, “In spite of having been bom in the lineage of Raghu, you are now going back on your words; it is most unbecoming of your family. If such is your desire, I am going; may you live long with your kith and kin though you have swerved from the path of truth.”

While Raja Dashratha was persisting in refusal, and Vishwamitra was fulminating with anger, Muni Vashishtha intervened, speaking gently to the king “Maharaj! You are born in the lineage of the famous Ikshwaku and you are well known for your courage, valour and truthfulness. In the circumstances, you have no option to change your word. Therefore, please send Ram along with Lakshman with Rishi Vishwamitra. They will be well protected by him and you need have no anxiety about their safety.” The wise counsel of Vashishtha was duly supported by Queen Kaushalya, who was also present there.

Dashratha had to yield under pressure from all. He at once sent for Ram and Lakshman. At the time of handing over their sons, the queens and the king recited Swasti Mantras and Dashratha sniffed the heads of both the sons, thus entrusting them to the care of Vishwamitra.

Soon the three left Ayodhya; Vishwamitra leading the two brothers Ram and Lakshman, who carried their bows and arrows with them. Having proceeded for about seven and a half miles, they reached the south bank of the river Sarayu, where Muni Vishwamitra spoke to Ram sweetly, “Let both of you sip the water

and be ready to learn the secrets of the tenets of 'Bala' and 'Atibala'. With their influence, you will not feel tired and you will never be afflicted with any pain or suffering. Even while you are sleeping, or are not vigilant, the Rakshasas will never be able to do you any harm. Even hunger and thirst will not trouble you." Then, they received the requisite knowledge and training from Vishwamitra and spent the night there on the bank of the Saray.

तीव्रे तपसिलीनानामिन्द्रियाणां न विश्वसेत् ।  
विश्वामित्रोऽपि सोत्कण्ठं कण्ठे जग्राह मेनकाम् ॥

# Killing of the Rakshasas

Early next morning, Vishwamitra spoke to Ram and Lakshman thus: “Get up, O Princes, the day is about to dawn. It is time for your morning ablutions and Sandhya.” Both the princes got up immediately from their leafy bed and finished their daily chores including Sandhya and meditation with Gayatri-Mantra. Then they touched the feet of Vishwamitra and began their journey. They soon reached the confluence of the two rivers Ganga and Sarayu. There was a holy Ashram, seeing which the two brothers felt very happy. They asked Vishwamitra whose Ashram it was, and they wanted to know all about it.

Smilingly, Vishwamitra told them that it was the Shiva-Ashram: “We will be staying here for the night. Tomorrow we shall cross the river and resume our journey.” While they were talking, some Rishis came from the Ashram and expressed happiness at their arrival and happily escorted them into the Ashram, where they were treated as honourable guests. Before going to bed, Vishwamitra told the princes some interesting and edifying tales. All this was a part of their training.

Next morning, they set out on their onward journey and soon crossed the Ganga by a boat. On reaching the south bank of the river, they got down from the boat and proceeded onwards, where they saw a desolate forest, dense and fearful. It became all the more dreadful because of the reverberating sound of the wild beasts. Ram asked Vishwamitra about the forest.

Vishwamitra told the princes that the place had previously been quite prosperous, inhabited by the Malads and Karups. But, an uncouth and fearful looking Yakshini Tataka, wife of Sund, had devastated the land and turned it into a desolate place. Her son Maricha was very powerful and strong; and he was ever harassing the Rishis there.

Vishwamitra continued, “She lives about three miles away from this place. I bid you kill this cruel demoness and restore peace and security to the people of this area. She is responsible for all the atrocities on the people of this region. You should not feel hesitant to kill such a vile woman, as it is the duty of a Kshatriya prince to protect his subjects. Previously also many wicked women have been put to death for their crimes.”

To such encouraging words of Vishwamitra, Ram replied with folded hands, “With your orders, I shall kill this wicked woman and make the people of this region happy.” Ram then produced a shrill note by twanging his bow. It was such a loud sound that the wild animals began to scamper in fear. But the Rakshasi Tataka was filled with anger and she ran in the direction from which the sound had come.

Seeing the enraged dreadful-faced Rakshasi, Shri Ram said to Lakshman “O Lakshman!, the body of this woman is really amazing; the mere sight of her is enough to send tremors of fear down one’s spine. I will cut off her nose; ears and limbs, making her unfit for further mischief but spare her life.” These words made Tataka mad with rage and she charged on the two brothers with both the hands raised. At this point, Vishwamitra told Ram not to show any mercy and kill her before sunset. He warned him that at night the Rakshasas became stronger, as they could use their wiles more cunningly under cover of darkness. Ram took heed of Vishwamitra’s caution and shot an arrow straight towards her. The arrow pierced her body and the ugly monster fell dead on the ground.

Vishwamitra was filled with joy and told the two brothers that they were going to spend the night in that forest. Next morning, Vishwamitra told Ram about his happiness and in return gave him numerous powerful weapons; he also taught him their use. The readers may recall that Vishwamitra was a king, who had relinquished the throne only to be a Rishi. He was well-versed in the skill of warfare and had many kinds of rare weapons and Astras, which he gave to Ram and Lakshman, imparting them at the same time the knowledge of how to use them. These weapons were hundreds in number as narrated in his famous book Ramayana by Maharishi Valmiki. From this, it appears that the purpose of Muni Vishwa-mitra was to bring the two princes for giving them proper knowledge and training in the use of such arms and weapons that might be useful to them later in life in the war which they had to wage against Ravana and his clan. As a matter of fact, the Rishis had foreknowledge of the impending war with Ravana, and it was their plan to prepare Ram and Lakshman beforehand.

It may sound somewhat preposterous now because of the wrong ideas already embedded in the minds of the people that Queen Kaikeyi was wholly responsible for the exile of Ram for a period of fourteen years. In

fact, it was a well-thought out plan of the Rishis who had taken the help of Manthara Dasi and Queen Kaikeyi in implementing their plan. This is supported by a shloka that the readers will come across when Bharat goes to Chitrakoot to persuade Ram to return to Ayodhya.

Proceeding further, the three, i.e., Vishwamitra, Ram and Lakshman, arrived at Siddhashram (presently known as Buxar) where Mahatma Vishnu had done a great penance. On being asked by Ram, Vishwamitra explained (hat this was the place where he was staying and where the Rakshasas were creating trouble. It was here that he would have to kill them. “This Ashram is yours as well as mine,” added Vishwamitra.

Seeing Vishwamitra coming, many residents of the Ashram welcomed them. After resting for a while, the princes said to Vishwamitra with folded hands “Let the yajna may kindly be begun today itself, so that the name of the Ashram as well as the truth of your word may be preserved.” Hearing this, Vishwamitra started making preparations to commence the yajna as per rules.

The princes remained vigilant throughout the night. When the day dawned, they did Sandhya, Agnihotra and recited Gayatri Mantra; and then went and bowed at the feet of Vishwamitra. They asked Vishwamitra the time when they would have to look for the Rakshasas. The Munis in the Ashram replied “O Princes! you will have to protect the yajna for six days. Vishwamitraji has been initiated and would remain silent for the period.”

Both the brothers kept vigil at the Ashram and five days passed peacefully, but on the last and sixth day there was a very loud noise in the sky and the Rakshasas converged to the Ashram to disturb the yajna. Ram at once aimed an arrow at Marich, but he ran away. However, Ram killed Subahu and the remaining Rakshasas. Thus, the yajna was over without any untoward incident. Muni Vishwamitra praised the princes for their neat work and obedience.

Next morning, after finishing their usual daily chores, they proceeded along with some Rishis and crossed the river Ganga. It was on the northern bank of the river, where they spied a town, known as Vishala. Vishwamitra took the two brothers to the beautiful and attractive city Vishala, giving a brief account of the history of the city. It was ruled by a king, named

Sumati, who came to receive them. The three stayed for the night in Vishala.

Next day, they set off for Mithila-puri where, on the outskirts of the town, they saw a beautiful but uninhabited Ashram. Ram asked Vishwa-mitra whose Ashram it was and why it lay abandoned.

शुचिस्मितं समः सत्यं ब्राह्मणस्य विधिपूर्वकम्।  
शुद्ध, स्मरणशील, सत्य ब्राह्मण का विधिपूर्वक लक्षण है।

# Ahilya

Muni Vishwamitra replied, this place was the Ashram of Rishi Gautam, who observed austerity and penance along with his wife Ahilya for a long- long time. One day it so happened that Gautam went quite far away to some forests. Taking advantage of his absence, Indra came to the Ashram in the guise of Gautam and craved sexual favours of Ahilya. Ahilya recognised Indra, though he was in the guise of Gautam; yet she readily and gladly agreed to the request. The sexual act being over, Indra felt afraid of Gautam's wrath and tried to sneak out of the cottage. Precisely at this moment the Rishi returned and confronted Indra, who at once turned pale with fear.

Seeing Indra, in his guise, Gautam at once knew that Indra had visited his Ashram for the unholy act and in the heat of fury, cursed him, 'O Rascal, you have committed this misdeed in my guise; may you therefore be turned into a eunuch! ' Anybody who indulges in sexual orgy is bound to be a eunuch, as his name and fame get tarnished; besides such a man also loses his manliness at the same time.

Having cursed Indra, Gautam also cursed his wife Ahilya saying that in order to expiate this sexual indulgence she would have to reside there doing hard penance and leading a life of austerity, sleeping on the bare ground for long years.

Here it may be pertinent to describe the story of Gautam and Ahilya, because so much mystery shrouds the tale of Ahilya. Goswami Tulsidas in his famous book Ram Charit Manas has lent a mysterious colour to this episode, stating that Gautam turned his wife Ahilya to a slab of stone with a curse. And Vishwamitra asked Ram to touch that stone with his foot, so that she might be freed from the curse. Ahilya thus got redemption after Ram touched the stone-slab with his foot and she became the virtuous woman she once had been. The entire story as stated by Goswami Tulsidas is unnatural and against the laws of Creation. Moreover, how could Ram, a Kshatriya prince, do such a despicable deed as to touch a Rishika lady with his foot? Maharishi Valmiki has only stated that Ahilya, because of the curse of her husband Gautam, was living there all alone.

Vishwamitra narrated the entire story to the princes and asked them to enter the Ashram. Inside they saw that Ahilya, because of her austerity and penance, was

resplendant in her glory, and none could dare look at her. Ram and Lakshman both touched her feet and thus relieved her of the suffering that she was undergoing as a result of the curse.

Another supernatural tale that has been concocted about the episode is that Indra committed the sin with the help of the Moon. Indra asked the moon to become a cock and give a crowing-cry in the middle of the night near the Ashram of Gautam, so that the Rishi might awaken on hearing the crowing and hurry up to the river Ganga to take his bath, and in his absence Indra might be able to fulfil his desire with Ahilya. It was the Rishi's daily routine to take his bath in the river early in the morning. So the moon crowed and Gautam, thinking that dawn was near, went away to take his bath. In his absence, Indra committed the sin in the guise of Gautam. But when the Rishi went to the Ganga, the river asked him why he had come so early and also told him he was being deceived by Indra; so he must rush back to his Ashram. Accordingly, Gautam came back and saw Indra coming out of his cottage. The Rishi then gave a thrashing to the Moon with his drenched dhoti, as a result of which there are spots on the moon. He also cursed Indra and his wife as stated above.

Neither of the above stories as given in the previous paragraph or by Goswami Tulsidas appears to be correct. As a matter of fact, the reality is that Ahilya was a maiden of exquisite beauty and Indra wanted to marry her. But for some reasons, she fell to the lot of Rishi Gautam. Indra had still his eyes on her beauty and charm that is why he resorted to such a heinous crime. In her heart Ahilya also longed for cohabitation with Indra so she readily surrendered. In those days, Indra was a title bestowed on the king who was considered to be the mightiest, noblest and best amongst all the rulers of the world. That is why, we read so many such stories about Indra, who wanted to retain his title, by hook or by crook, like the rulers of modern times, who also want to be in the chair by fair means or foul.

As already stated, Ram, Lakshman and Vishwamitra visited her Ashram and Rishi Gautam in view of her long penance forgave her and the place that had become forlorn because of the crime, acquired its sanctity once again. Most of the people had given up visiting the Ashram because of the curse of Rishi Gautam. But when such great persons like Vishwamitra, Ram and Lakshman visited the place and touched

Ahilya's feet, the curse vanished. That is what we experience in our daily life also. There is nothing supernatural about it. The story of Ahilya is for all of us to ponder over and be ever vigilant in our journey of life, if we want our family life to be happy and peaceful.

श्रेष्ठं ब्राह्मणो विद्यान्तं ज्ञानं सर्वार्थसाधनम्।  
ब्राह्मण का सबसे श्रेष्ठ लक्षण विद्या है,  
जो सभी उपयोगों का साधन है।

### In Janakpuri

From the Ashram, Vishwamitra, along with Ram and Lakshman, proceeded in the direction of north-east and arrived in the yajna-shala of Raja Janak, who welcomed the guests with due reverence, along with his Purohit Shatanand and many other learned people. Raja Janak spoke warmly about Rishi Vishwamitra, stating that whatever deficiency there had been in the yajna had been amply compensated by their arrival and thus honouring the occasion. Raja Janak then asked the Rishi who were the two handsome princes who carried themselves so remarkably. Vishwamitra told Raja Janak that they were the sons of Raja Dasharath and related how they accompanied him to Siddhashram and had killed the Rakshasas. Raja Janak expressed happiness and thanked them again and again for their visit. Having ensured that proper arrangements would be made for their stay, he took leave of them, requesting them to visit the court again next morning.

Next day Raja Janak sent a messenger to bring Vishwamitra, Ram and Lakshman from the Guest House. He duly welcomed them again and requested to know how he could serve them. Vishwamitra thereupon told Raja Janak that the two Kshatriya princes wanted to see the splendid bow kept at his palace. Hearing this, Raja Janak related the story of his daughter Sita, “From the womb of my queen Yogini was born my daughter known as Sita. Since she had attained marriageable age, it was announced that Sita would be given in marriage to the prince who could string the bow. In this way, she has become ‘Virya-shulka’, i.e., one who could show his might as stated would win her hand. Many kings have come and tried, but failed. Many of these frustrated and cowardly kings got together and besieged Mithila. But in the end, they were defeated by me and fled away.

“The princes are welcome to see the bow and if Ram can string it, he will win the hand of Sita, my daughter.” Raja Janak asked his ministers to bring the bow safely kept in an iron-box. The box was immediately brought there and opened. Ram eyed the bow and said “O Brahman! With your permission, I now touch this bow with my hand and would try to string it.” So saying, he easily lifted the bow, catching hold of

it in the middle and strung it. But as soon as he pulled at it, the bow snapped into two pieces, emitting such a loud noise that all those present there were be-  
numbed, excepting Vishwamitra, Raja Janak, Ram and Lakshman.

Raja Janak became immensely happy and proclaimed that his daughter Sita would be given in marriage to Ram, as his vow had been fulfilled. I Thought permission from Vishwamitra to send messengers to Ayodhya, so that the news be conveyed to Dasharath. Muni Vishwamitra readily gave his assent and the messengers were sent to Ayodhya. The messengers, on reaching Ayodhya, told Raja Dasharath, “Muni Vishwamitra and our King Janak have sent you the happy news that your son, Ram has won I he hand of our princess Sita, by stringing the bow and fulfilling the condition laid down by the king. Our king is awaiting you all there eagerly to give them your blessings.”

Raja Dasharath was overjoyed and ordered the ministers to prepare for the journey. Thus, they all left Ayodhya for Janakpuri the next morn-  
ing, On arrival at Mithila, they were given a warm welcome by Raja Janak and his ministers. After exchange of courtesies,

Raja Janak told Raja 1 Jasharath, “The yajna is going to be over soon and it would be proper to have die marriage solemnised soon after.” To this Raja Dasharath replied, You are the bride’s father and it is for you to order as you like best.” Raja 1 in 4 was pleasantly surprised to hear such nice words.

Before proceeding any further, it would be proper to state that there are some unbelievable and unnatural stories about the birth of Sita. One of these join. Going round is that she was bom out of the earth. It so happened dial once during a famine, as Raja Janak was ploughing a field, a female child emerged from the ground. This child was named Sita and was duly brought up in his palace. Actually the story goes back to the time when Ravana wanted to tax the Rishis and Munis. But these sages had nothing to pay; they gave their blood instead, cursing Ravana that this would become the cause of his death. The blood was collected in a pitcher by Ravana’s men. They took the blood-filled pitcher to Ravana, who got terrified, fearing the curse of the Rishis and ordered that the pitcher be taken away and buried underground far away near the palace of Raja Janak. This was done by Ravana’s henchmen.

So, at the time of famine, when Raja Janak was ploughing the field, the blade of the plough hit the earthen pitcher from below and brought it into view. A female child was found in it and she was named Sita by Raja Janak. The story appears incredible to say the least, as it is against the laws of nature. However, there is another version, according to which the name of Raja Janak's queen was Dharini or Yogini. She was pregnant at the time and delivery was expected any time. When Raja Janak was ploughing the field, a female child that was later known as Sita, was born and the happy news was immediately conveyed to Raja Janak where he was ploughing the field. The priest Shatanand who was also with the king at the time, immediately said that the girl child be named Sita, as in Sanskrit the word Sita means the furrow caused by ploughing. This explanation is more plausible and must be accepted as true.

Raja Janak immediately sent some messengers to his younger brother, Kush-dhwaja, living in Samkashyapuri to convey to him the happy news and bring him along. The messengers went there post-haste and Kush-dhwaja arrived in Mithila soon. It was then that in consultation with his brother, Raja Janak decided that the four daughters Sita and Urmila, the two daughters of Raja Janak; and Mandavi and Shrutikirti,

the two daughters of Kush-dhwaja be given in marriage to the four brothers, viz., Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughan, sons of Raja Dasharath and thus be relieved of the onerous responsibility once for all. The proposal was formally made to Raja Dasharath, who readily gave his consent and the matter was settled.

At this juncture, we see that the marriages of all the four brothers were happily solemnised with all gaiety and mirth. The learned Purohits described the lineages of the two families, Muni Vashishtha of Ikshwaku family and Purohit Shatanand of Janak family respectively. Vedic verses were chanted and yajna with all the necessary rituals was solemnly performed. The couples took their vows before the people assembled there and thus the marriage ceremonies were conducted, with the divine blessings of all present on the occasion. Thus, the four brother were married:

- Ram to Sita,
- Lakshman to Urmila,
- Bharat to Mandavi, and
- Shatrughan to Shruti Kirti.

Raja Janak gave a lot of dowry on this occasion.

# Parashuram Episode

Soon after the marriage ceremony was over, Muni Vishwamitra took leave of the two kings Raja Janak and Raja Dasharath and went away to the Himalayas.

Raja Dasharath also took leave of Raja Janak and they all set out on their journey back to Ayodhya. On the way, Raja Dasharath saw Parashu Ram, son of Jamadagni of Bhrigu family, in a very furious mood. He was carrying his battle-axe and a bow with arrows on his mighty shoulders, and it looked as if Shiva himself had come to kill the demon Tripura. His present fearful mood reminded Rishi Vashishtha how he had killed many Kshatriya kings in order to avenge of the murder of his father by a Kshatriya king. The Rishi began to wonder whether he was going to start his cruel campaign again. His wrath had already been quenched with the destruction of kshatriyas.

However, they offered the customary water to honour him. Parashu Ram received the water from the Rishis and addressed Ram, “Son of Dasharath, I have heard about your unique valour; I have also heard about the bow that you have broken in Mithila. It was an amazing and incredible feat indeed. However, I have come here with another bow that belongs to ' Jamadagni; I dare you to show your prowess by stringing it. And if you are able to do so; I will fight with you.”

Hearing these words, Dasharath became sad and pleaded “O Parashu Ram Ji! You are an ascetic Brahmin and your anger has been satiated. Please calm down so that my sons may also feel secure and relieved. You have already taken a vow before Indra to renounce fighting and had gone to Mahendrachel to live there. What has enraged you now?”

Ignoring the pleas of Dasharath, Parashu Ram kept addressing Ram, “String this bow and if you are successful in doing so, I will have a fight with you.”

Hearing these words, Ram replied in a courteous but firm tone, “O Parashu Ram Ji, I have heard all about your deeds; I also know how you have avenged the

murder of your father. But it is not right for you to nurse the illusion that we are bereft of valour and the duties of a Kshatriya. You may see my prowess today.”

So saying, Ram took the bow and arrow from the hand of Parashu Ram and stringing the bow instantly, spoke somewhat angrily to him “O Bhargava, I revere you as you are a Brahmin. Besides, you are also related to Vishwa- Mitraji (Parashu Ram was the grandson of Vishwamitra’s sister). Hence, I do not want to rob you of your life by shooting this arrow at you. But the arrow cannot go in vain; therefore, please tell me whether it should destroy your physical movement or your fame. You have to lose one. It is for you to make the choice.

Turning instantaneously pale, Parashu Ram could only mumble these words: “O Ram, after destroying the kshatriyas, when I gave this land to Muni kashyap, he told me not to reside here, but shift somewhere else. To enable me to fulfil his wishes please do not destroy my physical movements. But you may destroy all that I have earned through austerity.”

Shri Ram let go the arrow. Parashu Ram, his glory bedimmed, bereft of his fame as a warrior of peerless acumen, paid due obeisance to S hri Ram and left for his

place. After Parashu Ram had left, Shri Ram bowed before the Rishis present and requested his father to order the resumption of the journey.

Ayodhya, in the meantime, had been decorated with flowers and flags and the entire city was strewn with fragrance. The streets were well watered and flower - petals were strewn all over. The citizens of Ayodhya were agog with happiness and it was in such an atmosphere that Raja Dasharath entered the city. People showered their blessings at the newlyweds and accorded them a very warm welcome.

Maharaj Dasharath along with his sons and their wives entered the palace, where Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi took their daughters-in-law to the inner apartments. In this way, four princes began their married life.

After some twelve years, Yudhajit, the maternal uncle of Bharat, came to ayodhya, with the intention of taking away Bharat to his place. Raja Dasharath readily agreed and Bharat along with Shatrughan left for Kaikaya kingdom after taking permission from the three mothers.

In Ayodhya, Ram and Lakshman were always acting according to the wishes of their father and mothers. All the citizens of Ayodhya were particularly happy at the behaviour and conduct of Ram, who was always very courteous to one and all and helped them as and when there was any need to do so. Thus, Ram had won the hearts of the people and they loved him all for his large-heartedness.

द्विजातयः सहस्राणि जनयेद्विद्यय  
द्विज (ब्राह्मणादि) हजारों को विद्या जन्म देती है।

# AYODHYA KANDA



## Decision of Ram's Coronation

Though Raja Dasharath loved all his four sons as if they were his own arms, yet he loved Ram most, since the charming qualities he possessed were unmatched by others. He never spoke any harsh words to any -is contented and happy. People of Ayodhya admired him for his compassion and sweetness of speech, for his serenity and wisdom and were eagerly looking forward to his becoming king, as he was expected to be a more competent and just ruler than even his father.

Observing all this, Maharaj Dasharath, in consultation with his ministers, decided to crown Ram as Yuvaraj, so that he might look after the matters of the state. On this occasion he invited all the other chiefs and kings of the neighbouring lands. But because of shortage of time, Raja Dasbaradi did not invite Kaikaya Raj and Janak, thinking that the good news would be known to them soon after.

Then, he called a meeting of the Raj Sabha in which many leaders from all around assembled. Addressing the august gathering, Raja Dasharath sad

you all know how well my ancestors have served this great kingdom. I have also followed the same path of service of the people for long year. Now that my body has become frail and feeble, I feel tired of carrying on the heavy responsibility any longer. Now I want to rest my j ?u think it proper, allow me to do what I am sure you all think it proper, allow me to do what I am sure you all think right at this juncture.”

Hearing the above words, all the assembled people acclaimed with; joy— So be it. So be it!” Knowing the views of Maharaj Dasharath, Vashishtha and many other Brahmins as well as the chiefs and king thought over and discussed the matter together and spoke to Raja Dasharath, “You have already become very old carrying on this heavy responsibility; therefore it is proper to entrust this to Ram in his capacity as Yuvraj and crown him accordingly.”

Hearing these nice words dear to all, Maharaj Dasharath said “O Kings! you have readily consented to crown Ram, on my proposal. This has created a doubt in my mind, that you may remove by answering correctly. When I have been serving the people well, why after all do you all want my son to be crowned?”

To this, they replied one by one praising the qualities and virtues of Ram. They said, “Ram is truthful and is always ready to help us under all circumstances. Ram shares the pains and pleasures of the people equally and talks with each and every one smilingly. He is very strict with himself and shines like the Sun amongst all. He is just in his behaviour and his conduct is praiseworthy. Hence, we all are very eager to see Ram crowned as yuvaraj without further delay.”

Hearing the above request from all, Raja Dasharath said “I am very happy. It is my good fortune that you all want to see my eldest son Ram being crowned as yuvaraj.” Then he told Vashishtha, Vamadev and other Brahmins present there that it being the auspicious month of Chaitra, in which the forest and trees look beautiful because of their flowering season, all preparations be made for anointing Ram as yuvaraj. As soon as Raja Dasharath finished his words, the assembly gave a joyous roar of approval. By and by when there was calm, Raja Dasharath requested Muni Vashishtha to order all the necessary things for the ceremony.

The king then asked Sumantra to call Ram, who till then did not know anything about it Sumantra immediately brought Ram, who bowed at the feet of his

father. When the king saw that Ram was standing nearby with folded hands, he blessed Ram and said, “You are a worthy prince, having all the virtuous qualities that endear you to the people. All the same, because of my love, I give you some advice on this occasion. You must give up all vices that arise out of passion and anger. You must inculcate the habit of supervising the State affairs personally. There should be plenty of provisioning of food grains and arms, weapons, etc. The king who keeps his people happy with his controlled behaviour, conduct and character, becomes successful.”

Hearing these words, Ram immediately went to the apartment of his mother, Kaushalya to give her the good news. Kaushalya became immensely happy and gave plenty of alms and cows to the Brahmins. Soon after Sumantra was again sent by Dasharath to bring Ram to him, as he wanted to convey his feelings to Ram in loneliness. Ram asked for the reason, but Sumantra being unable to say anything, only requested Ram to accompany him.

Ram immediately accompanied Sumantra to the palace of Raja Dasharath, where he was given a beautiful seat. Raja Dasharath then told Ram, “Now I

am old; during my reign, I performed hundreds of yajnas. There is nothing left for me to do, except to crown you as yuvaraj. But I foresee some impediments, as I had horrible dreams at night, I feel it would be better to complete this task soon, say tomorrow, in Pushya Nakshatra which is auspicious. You and Sita should get ready for the ceremony by keeping a fast tonight and sleeping on ground, spreading darbha grass thereon. Your trusted friends should look after your safety. To my mind, so long as Bharat is away at his maternal uncle's house, the time is particularly opportune for your crowning. Your brothers are all very gentle and obey you, but the minds of good people are fickle sometimes. Now you may go home.”

Ram returned to his palace, from where he went to Kaushalya's house. There he saw mother Kaushalya with Sumitra, Lakshman and Sita. Ram told Kaushalya about the latest orders of the King. With joyful tears in her eyes, Kaushalya said, “May you live long! May your foes be destroyed! May you be able to please one and all?”

Ram then bade farewell to his mother and Sumitra and went to his apartment. Vashishtha, as directed by the king, went to Ram's palace to prepare Ram and give

him the necessary instructions for the next day's crowning ceremony. He told Ram and Sita to observe a fast and recite mantras, seeking the blessings of God, to enable Ram to shoulder the heavy and onerous responsibilities bravely.

After Muni Vashishtha had left, Ram and Sita took a proper bath and praying to the Almighty, went to sleep as directed. They got up early in the morning next day and after finishing their daily routine, did their morning Sandhya. In the meanwhile, z.e., at night itself, the news of the coronation having spread everywhere in the town, people decorated the houses and streets with flowers, festoons and flags. The streets were crowded as people were in a joyous mood, full of enthusiasm and happiness. Thus the people waited eagerly for the grand ceremony to be performed the next morning.

## Manthara Counsels Kaikeyi

Queen Kaikeyi had a family maid-servant, who had accompanied her from her parents' house and always lived with her. The day the crowning of Ram was announced, Manthara happened to climb on to the roof of the palace in the evening. From there, she saw that the town was decorated, (the people were happy and the atmosphere was reverberating with the recitation of Veda-Mantras. She saw garlands of flowers and flags fluttering everywhere. Manthara was taken aback and enquired of another maid-servant the purpose of all this gaiety and decoration. Was some celebration on in the city? Kaushalya was distributing alms and gifts to the Brahmins what was all this going on? The people of Ayodhya were happy and in a joyous mood was there something unusual?

The other maid-servant happily told Manthara about the crowning ceremony of Ram to be solemnised the next morning. Hearing these words, Manthara was filled with anger and jealousy. She immediately got

down and woke up Kaikeyi, who was fast asleep at that time in her apartment. She said, “O foolish woman, why are you lying asleep? Get up and arise, a great misfortune has overtaken you. But you do not appear to be even aware of misery. The time for your ruin has come because Raja Dasharath wails to crown Ram as Yuvaraj. The evil-minded Dasharath has sent me to your parents’ house and now tomorrow morning he wants to perform the coronation ceremony of Ram.”

Hearing the above words of Manthara, Kaikeyi with her beautiful and smiling face, got up from the bed. She gave a valuable ornament to Manthara and said, “Tell me, for this happy news, what else may I give you as a reward? I do not see any particular difference between Ram and Bharat. I am fully contented if the king gives the kingdom to Ram.”

On this, Manthara threw away the ornament and spoke with anger and sorrow, “O Fool, why are you laughing with joy, instead of being sad? I pity your foolhardiness. Can any woman be happy at seeing the advancement of the son of her rival wife? Bharat has the same claim to the throne as Ram. That is why Ram is afraid of Bharat. Ram is an adept politician and acts timely. Seeing the danger from Ram to Bharat, I tremble

with fear. Definitely, Kaushalya is fortunate, as tomorrow morning her son will be duly crowned as Yuvaraj. You along with us will have to wait on Kaushalya with folded hands. Thus, you will also become a maid-servant like us and your son Bharat will have to serve Ram like a slave.”

Kaikeyi heard all this in wonder and was lost in silence for some time. Finally she said, “Manthara, don’t you know Ram’s virtues like nobility, truthfulness, humility, bravery, etc. Besides, he is the eldest son and the worthiest successor to the crown. I love Ram as much as Bharat, because Ram looks after me more than his mother Kaushalya. The coronation of Ram will be that of Bharat also, because Ram regards all his brothers like his own self.”

Hearing the above words of Kaikeyi, Manthara became sorrowful and taking a long breath said “O Fool, you do not realise the calamity that is in store for you and your son. I can definitely say that Ram, on being crowned, will either banish Bharat or get him killed. Ram will not do any harm to Lakshman, as both of them are very close. But Ram will not hesitate to harm Bharat. Therefore, in my opinion, it is in your interest that Bharat should flee from his maternal

uncle's house to seek refuge in the forests. Moreover, you have been insulting Kaushalya and she may now take revenge from you for your bad behaviour. Therefore, Kaikeyi! You ought to be realistic and discreetly decide the line of action, so that your son Bharat could be crowned somehow, while Ram was exiled to the forests.”

The evil counsel of Manthara had its effect at last. Kaikeyi's face flushed red with anger and spitting fury with her breath, she said, “I shall manage to get Ram exiled to the forests today and soon get Bharat crowned. Therefore, O Manthara! Think of some plan so that Bharat may be crowned instead.”

The sinful Manthara immediately came out with her plan, reminding Kaikeyi of the war between the gods and the demons, in which Raja Dasharath had taken part on the side of Indra. “Do you remember how ashvathama was badly wounded in the war and lost consciousness? But you were with him and with great effort; you were able to save him. Being pleased with you at that time, Raja Dasharath granted you two boons, which you said, you would ask for when needed. I was not aware of all this episode and you told me all about it on return. Against one of these boons you may ask for

the coronation of Bharat and against the second IMXMI Ram may be sent into exile for fourteen years. During this long period, people are likely to forget Ram and your son's supremacy will be established firmly. In order to get these two boons granted you should wear dirty clothes and lie down on the ground in the 'Kopa-Bhawan'. When the king comes, ignore his presence and be deaf his entreaties and keep lying on the ground in a miserable condition with a saddened face.

“You have been very dear to Dasharath all the while and he will do anything for you. Only you must not yield to any persuasion of the king. I'm firm on your two boons and when Maharaj coaxes you, gets a promise that he would grant you the two boons you ask for. Then only you tell him what you want.”

Thus encouraged by Manthara, the beautiful Queen Kaikeyi went to the sulking-room (Kopa-Bhawan). In the meantime, she had already torn out all the ornaments from her person and thrown them on the ground. She had put on shabby clothes and her loosened hair were tied just with a string. She looked as if some damsel had fallen from the skies. Lying in that state, Kaikeyi said to Manthara, “O Kubej, either you will have to convey the message of my death to the king or Ram will have to go

to the forests and Bharat will be crowned instead.”

Here it may be pertinent to let the readers know about the plan of the Rishis. When Raja Dasharath disclosed his idea of crowning Ram, the same evening the Rishis and Munis had a meeting at which Muni Vash- ishtha was the president. At that meeting, it was decided that somehow the idea of making Ram Yuvaraj was to be thwarted and he was to be sent to the forests so that Ravana and his tribe be crushed, as the Rakshasas were increasing their influence and expanding their kingdom, thereby disturbing the peace of the world. In order to implement this plan, they had taken the help of Manthara and Kaikeyi both, who in the interest of Vedic culture as also because of patriotism had agreed to help them.

The idea of the above plan of the Rishis is confirmed by two things:

- Kaikeyi had asked Ram to be sent to Dandak forest in the South, where Ravana’s Rakshasas had established their base. Panchkuti is in the Dandak forest. It was at Panchkuti that Shurpankha, Ravana’s sister, came to Ram and Lakshman and the seed of discord was sown in

Dandakaranya. Kaikeyi did not ask for simple exile to any forest or place, but specifically Dan-dakaranya.

- While Ram, Lakshman and Sita were staying in Chitrakoot and Bharat along with a large number of people, Rishis, Munis, Ministers, troops and many others went there to persuade Ram to return to Ayodhya, there ensued a great discussion between the two brothers: Bharat coaxing Ram to return and accept the responsibility of reigning the kingdom by giving hundreds of arguments and Ram refusing to return, being quite firm in his resolve to proceed to Dandakaranya. At long last, the Rishis and Munis intervened and Valmiki lias stated:

Then the Rishis, who wanted Ravana to be slain, spoke in one voice to Bharat, “O Bharat, you are bom in a great family. You yourself have fame and excellent character. If you want your father to be true to his word, then you accept what Ram is saying, i.e., let him go to Dandakaranya and you accept the responsibility of reigning the kingdom.”

The two facts stated above make it abundantly clear that Ram's exile to Dandakaranya was not just because of Kaikeyi and Manthara's conspiracy, but a well-thought out plan of the Rishis who had started preparations for the same as early as the time when Vishwamitra took away the two princes for giving them proper training in special arms and weapons, so that they might acquire such expertise in the art of warfare as would enable them to vanquish the powerful Ravana and his Rakshasa tribe. The Rishis had always this in mind and possibly Ram had some inkling about it also.

शमदानादि धर्माणि सर्वलोकप्रियाणि च॥

शम, दान और अन्य धर्म क्रियाएं सभी लोगों को प्रिय हैं।

## Kaikeyi Asks For The Two Boons

It may be recalled that Raja Dasharath had apprehensions about Bharat's claiming his right to be crowned as Yuvaraj. It was well known at all that Raja Dasharath had married his third wife Kaikeyi\* with the Not ipulation with her father that the son bom to her would become the hcir- .ipparent. Raja Dasharath had given this promise as the two queens i uishalya and Sumitra had failed to bear a child. Kaikeyi was thus known. Rajya Shulka. Obviously the situation that arose later had not been visualised at the time of the marriage with Kaikeyi.

We find, therefore, that Raja Dasharath thought it wise to crown Ram while Bharat was away at his maternal uncle's house.

Raja Dasharath had made a veiled reference to this while talking to Ram and had hurried the ceremony, without informing either Ashwapati, father of Kaikeyi or Raja Janak, father of Sita. While persuading Kaikeyi, Mantthara too had argued that Raja Dasharath did not have confidence in Bharat and that was why, he had not

even informed him and wanted to like advantage of his absence. In this connection, Maithili Sharan Gupt has stated:

भरत को करके घर त्याज्य; राम को देते हैं नृप राज्य ।  
भारत - से सूत पर भी सदेह; बुलाया तक भी उन्हे जो गेह ॥

Manthara tells Kaikeyi that the king has sent Bharat away and in his absence he wants to crown Ram. The king doubts a son like Bharat even, n i he has not been invited even to attend the ceremony.

Raja Dasharaih, after ordering his ministers to make proper iiiTangement for the crowning ceremony of Ram next morning, went into his inner apartments to inform the queens. As usual, he went first of all to the apartment of Queen Kaikeyi, but he could not see her. He, therefre, made enquiries of a maid-servant, who spoke slowly with folded hands “O Maharaja! The Queen has gone into the sulking-room, being very angry.”

This disagreeable news made the king miserable. Entering the sulking- room, he saw Kaikeyi lying on the ground, with dirty clothes and dishevelled hair. Such a

sight distressed the king and he began to caress her body with his hands. Then the doting husband spoke to Kaikeyi “O Devi! I do not know the reason of your anger. Has anyone slighted or insulted you? Why are you lying on the ground like a sick person, darling? What is your ailment? Please let me know what is the matter without any delay and hesitation.”

Kaikeyi sighed deeply, but did not give any reply. At this the king began to implore all the more, saying with a flattering voice “O Devi! You just let me know your wish and it will be fulfilled. Do you want anybody to be punished or anybody to be exempted from punishment? I swear by all my noble and virtuous deeds that I will do as you say. You need have no fear.”

Being importuned by the king, in this way Kaikeyi felt somewhat assured. She began to say the most painful words to the king”O King! I am not sick, nor have I been insulted by anyone. But I have a desire, which I want you to fulfil. In case you are prepared to do as I wish, give a solemn promise. Then only, shall I state what I want.”

Raja Dasharath stroked Kaikeyi's hair fondly and said "O Fortunate One! Do you not know that none is so dear to me as you are, except Ram. I swear by Ram, that the moment you speak out what you want, I will fulfil it without delay."

Being pleased with these words of the king, Kaikeyi told him her story thus— "O Rajan! try to recall the old happenings of the war between the gods and the demons, in which you became unconscious. At that time, I saved your life. Do you remember that on regaining consciousness, you granted me two boons, which were kept with you in deposit by me, to be taken at my will? I want these to be granted now. Let the preparations made for the coronation of Ram, be utilised for the crowning of my son, Bharata. This is my first wish. My second wish is that Ram should be exiled in the forest as an ascetic for a period of fourteen years. All I ask of you is to be true to your word and grant me the two boons. I want to see Bharata going to the forest today itself."

Hearing such terrible words of Kaikeyi, the king was so much upset that he became unconscious. After some time, when he came to his senses, he spoke to Kaikeyi with a troubled mind and with anger —"O

Woman of ill umduct, you want to destroy our family. What have Ram and I done to V'H'' Ram has always treated you like his own mother. Why are you bent upon harming him? When all the people are praising Ram for his good and Hibk qualities, on what charge can I banish him? I can survive without i m .lialya, Sumitra and even the whole kingdom, but I cannot live without Hnm. who is so faithful to me. It is possible that the earth may continue to be stable without the Sun and the plants may survive without water, but -i body cannot hold life without Ram. You may, therefore, give up your i imacy; I bow my head at your feet. Do not think ill of Ram.

“You have often told me that you love both Ram and Bharat equally. How then do you now want the same noble Ram to be banished for fourteen years? Ram serves you even better than Bharat does. Just think IHI H moment, who other than Ram will serve and obey you so well. I am old and my end is near. I am in a miserable plight. Have pity on my condition. I touch your feet with folded hands; you become the in- id of Ram and save me from the sin of a broken vow.”

Kaikeyi became angry at the above words of Raja Dasharath. She Said O Rajan, if you are repenting after granting the boons, who will can you a truthful man? Not to talk of Man, even inert things like the sea do not transgress their ordained bounds. You should not violate your solemn promise and deviate from the path shown by your ancestors. You want to crown Ram and rejoice in Kaushalya's bliss, least caring about your words. But let me warn you, if you do not fulfil your promise I shall swallow poison and lay down my life in your very presence. I swear in the name of Bharat and by myself that I shall not rest contented till Ram is sent. to the forest.”

With these words, Kaikeyi became silent. The king continued his lamentations as well as entreaties but she gave no reply. Recalling to mind the harsh decision and her solemn oath, Maharaj Dasharath uttered the words 'HaRam!' and taking a long breath, he fell on the ground like a tree felled by an axe.

But he mustered courage once again and in a piteous tone said to Kaikeyi “Who has corrupted your mind? What offence have Ram and I done to you? I know that Bharat will not accept the crown, because I know him to be even more righteous than Ram. Have

you thought even for a moment what the people who have gathered here on this occasion will say about it? What will Ram's mother Kaushalya say to me and what justification shall I give her for such gross injustice to her son? The whole world will laugh at me. I cannot remain alive without Ram. Hence have pity on me. Once again I touch your feet to press my imploration". So saying, the king fell down on the ground unconscious.

ब्राह्मणः क्षत्रियः विशां श्रेष्ठो वैश्योऽपि विपश्चितः।

ब्राह्मण, क्षत्रिय, वैश्य और विपश्चित  
(शूद्र) में भी ज्ञानी ब्राह्मण श्रेष्ठ होता है।

## Dasharath's Lamentations

On gaining consciousness Dasharath resumed his lamentations, saying that if he asked Ram to go to the forests, Ram would certainly obey the command. But it was certain that without him, he, Kaushalya and Sumitra would not remain alive. When Kaikeyi saw that the king did not seem inclined to fulfil her wish, she spoke again in a stern tone “O King! You claim to be truthful and firm on your word; then why don't you grant the two boons?”

The king cried out in anger “All right then, let Ram go to the forests, and I die. You may then enjoy this kingdom with your son, Bharat But I fail to understand why you are bent upon destroying us and what good you want derive by such a wicked plan?”

Thus, the night, though with a full moon, could be of little solace to the king. Addressing the night, the feeble king said “O Night! you stay on; I do not want the dawn to come, as I will have to bear the unbearable sight of Ram proceeding to the forests. At least you may

have some pity on me.” Raja Dasharath then spoke to Kaikeyi “O Queen! Have some pity on me. Complete plans about the coronation ceremony have already been proclaimed and if the ceremony is not held, I stand to lose the respect people have for me. Please forgive the harsh words that I have uttered in anger and anguish to you. But do not force me to banish Ram.”

But Kaikeyi still remained adamant. She showed just no signs of relenting in the least. On the contrary, her tone became still harsher as she spoke thus - “I only want you to put into practice what you have said; my desire being to see you true to your word. If you too value adherence to your word, you should not resort to making excuses. It is but right that you send Ram to Dandakaranya immediately. Shall I repeat it to emphasise that there can be no change in my decision?”

“O Rajan! If you do not keep your promise and break your vow, I will give up my life here before your eyes.”

Hearing these harsh words spoken by Kaikeyi, the king was perplexed. His face became pale and his condition all the more precarious because of sorrow and anxiety. By now he had become so weak that he

appeared to have lost his vision. Somehow, he said more in anger than in sorrow “At the time of our marriage, before the Yajna fire, with the chanting of Vedamantras I accepted you as my wife. Today I renounce you as my wife. I renounce Bharat, your son, also at the same time; I will have no relation with either of you.

“O Devi! The night is about to end and the sun is about to rise. Soon, the people and the Gurus will ask me to proceed with the coronation ceremony. But now it appears that with the material collected for Ram’s crowning, my cremation will be done. Remember that if you put obstacles in the way of the coronation ceremony of Ram, you and your son, Bharat will have no right to perform my cremation rites. Only Ram should do this.”

Thus, Raja Dasharath was suffering from great mental agony, because of his love and affection towards Ram. But he had not the mental strength to go back on the pledge that he had given to Kaikeyi. She continued tormenting him with her harsh words and did not let him rest even for a while. The king did not know what to do. His condition was worse than that of a fish out of water, who gasps for life every minute.

The king nursed some false hope thinking that perhaps Ram might not obey his command, as he was not bound by his pledge, and might insist on his right to the throne being the eldest son in the family. And yet he knew at heart that Ram cared little for imperial glory. Thus vacillating between hope and despair, he kept tossing about on the ground throughout the night.

At last, the night began to wane, the stars began vanishing from the sky and twilight appeared on the eastern horizon. Rishi Vashishtha left his Ashram for the town along with his disciples. He saw streets and the houses gaily decorated and the people thronging the streets in a jubilant mood.

In the palace, he met Sumantra and asked him to inform the king of his arrival. Sumantra entered the inner apartments singing praises to the Lord, ignorant of what had transpired in the meanwhile. But when he saw the wretched condition of Raja Dasharath, his eyes red and face death-pale, he was taken aback and stepped a few paces backwards. At this point, Kaikeyi said “Sumantra! The king has kept awake the whole night. He is feeling tired and sleepy. Will you hurriedly go and bring Ram?”

At this, Sumantra replied “O Queen! How can I go without the orders of the king?” Hearing these words of the Minister, Dasharath said “Sumantra! I want to see Ram; please go and bring him here.” Thus, Sumantra went away to the palace of Ram.

शूद्रः सुद्रातिको यत्र तत्र तिष्ठेत् परं पदम्॥

जहां शूद्र सुद्राति कर रहा हो,  
वहां परम पद को प्राप्त होता है।

### Ram's Encounter with Kaikeyi

After a little while, Sumantra saw Ram in his palace with Sita, both gaily dressed for the occasion. He told Ram that Raja Dasharath wanted to see him in the apartment of Queen Kaikeyi, where he was at the time. Immediately Ram took leave of Sita and proceeded towards the king's palace, along with Lakshaman, who was also with Ram at that time.

Entering the palace, Ram saw Dasharath sitting on a beautiful throne along with Kaikeyi. But his face had lost colour and he appeared to be in a wretched condition. While Ram had gone inside, Lakshaman waited; outside at the door. Ram bowed his head at the feet of his father and thereafter with great care; he touched the feet of mother Kaikeyi. Seeing Ram, the king could utter only 'Ram' and his eyes welled up with tears, his throat was choked and he was unable to speak further.

Seeing such a condition, Shri Ram became sad. He was also perplexed by the total silence of the king.

Dasharath had also appeared to be pained instead of being gladdened to see Ram. This was rather strange. Ram, therefore, spoke to Kaikeyi, “If unknowingly I have done some wrong which has made father unhappy, you may please tell me all and assure him on my behalf that I would make amends for it. I do not want to live any longer after displeasing him.”

Leaving all decency aside, Kaikeyi said, “The king is neither angry with you, nor is he suffering from any ailment. He has something in his mind, which he is not saying out of fear. In case you agree to what he says irrespective of whether it be right or wrong, then I can tell you all about it”

Ram felt hurt at these words and said, “O Devi ! it is not proper for you to doubt my obedience. On orders of the king, I can jump into the blazing fire, drink poison and drown myself by jumping into the sea. There is nothing in this world that I cannot do at his bidding. Therefore, whatever is dear to his mind, tell me and I promise that I shall obey him. Also remember the fact that Ram adheres to what he says and acts accordingly.”

Kaikeyi at this stage came out with the story of her two boons: one of which was that Bharat be coronated

and the second was that Ram be sent into exile to Dandakaranya for a period of fourteen years. “Therefore, O Ram!” said Kaikeyi, “in case you want that your father and you be truthful, then listen to what I say. According to the orders of your father, you should immediately go to the forests. Whatever material has been collected for your coronation may be utilised for the coronation of Bharat instead. This is the reason why the king is in a piteous condition; he is sad, miserable and cannot look towards you.”

But Ram was not even surprised at these harsh words of Kaikeyi, nor did his face show any feelings of unhappiness at the sudden change of fortune from coronation to exile. But the king felt all the more agony at the gnawing thought of separation from Ram. With complete calmness, he said: “Mother, it will be done. In order to fulfil the promise of the king, I shall proceed to Dandakaranya today without delay. But one thing troubles me is why the king does not speak to me.”

At this Kaikeyi said, “You need not worry about it. But hurry up to proceed to the forests. So long as you do not go, the king will neither take a bath nor eat anything.” Hearing these words from the mouth of Kaikeyi, Raja Dasharath mumbled “Curse be on you,”

and taking long breaths, fell unconscious on the golden bed. Ram tried to pick him up. Ram then turned to Kaikeyi and said, “O Mother! Even if my father does not say anything to me about it, I am prepared to go to the forests at your bidding also. But you do not know my nature, you told such a trivial thing to him that had caused him immense pain and suffering. I am now going to Mother Kaushalya to seek her permission and then from there will proceed to Dandakaranya, as desired by you. You may look after father during my absence and see that Bharat administers the kingdom well.”

The king began to weep bitterly. Ram touched the feet of his father and Kaikeyi, before getting out of the apartment. Outside, he met Lakshman, who had been waiting for him, and together they walked to Kaushalya’s apartment. Though Ram was going to the forests, leaving behind him, his mind was cool and composed. His face showed no trace of any inner turmoil or discontent.

### **Kaushalya's Permission**

Entering mother Kaushalya's apartment, Ram saw her performing a yajna. He bowed at his mother's feet. Kaushalya embraced him and in her y happiness, she asked him to be seated comfortably. Just then Ram said Io Kaushalya, "O Mother.' you are not aware of the sad news that may upset you, Sita and Lakshaman. Now I am going to Dandakaranya and have, nothing to do with palatial joys and comforts. There I have to spend fourteen years, living on roots and fruits of the forests. The king wants to give the title of Yuvaraj to Bharat and I have been asked to go to the forests."

The suddenness of this shocking news proved too much for Kaushalya, who at once fell on the ground. Ram picked her up, but she clung to him and wailed at the very thought of parting. "My heart seems to be very hard," she said, "as if made of iron, or it would have burst with pain. It proves that even death does not come before time."

It was at this juncture that Lakshaman intervened “I do not like that just because the king wants to please his young wife, Ram may have to go to the forests, without any fault of his. What crime or sin has he committed, for which he is being punished in such a cruel manner? This is down-right injustice. It appears to me that the doting old king has lost all senses of propriety. How could a father ask his son, who is so loving, simple and obedient to relinquish the kingdom? It is childish on the part of the king to order Ram to go to the forests, as no son could accept such a whimsical and arbitrary command.”

“O Brother!, before this news spreads amongst the people, let us take charge of the kingdom ourselves. I am like death incarnate and will protect you in all events. Let me see who dare oppose you. I shall kill all those who side with Bharat and will not be lenient to any whom Kaikeyi tries to prod against us. Single handed I shall put down all opposition, you have just to order me and see my power and strength.”

Hearing these words of Lakshaman, Kaushalya said to Ram, “O son, you have heard what Lakshaman says. Now you may do as you like. You should not leave me behind at the mercy of your step-mother

Kaikeyi. You should stay here with me, as I have equal right on you and I do not want you to go to the forests. In case you decide to go, I shall go with you, for if you leave me behind; I shall have no recourse but to starve to death.”

Ram had calmly listened to the outburst of Lakshaman. He now spoke to Kaushalya, “Mother, how can you go with me to the forest, leaving behind your husband? It is your duty to serve the king and share his sorrow. I may also tell you that I feel myself unable to disobey the king. Therefore, I only want your permission, without displeasing you either.”

Having spoken thus to his mother, Ram now turned to Lakshaman and said, “I know of your intense love for me. I also know about your power, strength and valour. My mother little understands the secrets of Dharma and because of her love for me; she is plunged in the sea of grief. I'm you, who fully realise the essence of Dharma, are not expected to I - Irnvc in this undesirable manner.

“It is my solemn duty to obey my father and I am determined not to co back on the pledge I have taken. Therefore, do not get excited unnecessarily. The king is

helpless, as he had to keep his word. He is heart-Iwoken because of his love for me. He also feels that he has done some in limp, very grievously wrong to me. But this aspect does not bother me. My only concern is that he must keep his promise and as a son I must obey it.”

After explaining the whole thing to Lakshaman, Ram again turned to his mother Kaushalya and bowing his head, said, “O Mother, now permit me to go to the forests. Do not trouble your mind on my score and recite iin Sw.isiivachan Mantras for my safety. Do not forget that you have to console father as well. At the completion of the fourteen-year period, I shall return home. We all have to obey the king as it is our duty to do so. Therefore, you may please instruct me about my stay in the forests, giving me due permission without much delay.”

Then Ram saw that Lakshaman had not yet been reconciled to the turn of events from coronation to exile. He, therefore, called Lakshaman to his side and told him solemnly, “O Brother, you must now give up your anger and sorrow and accept this sudden change happily, considering this as a matter of fate or ill-luck. We are all helpless, as none can fight misfortune. On reviewing the entire episode, I do not feel much difference between

coronation and exile. In fact, for me, it may prove a blessing in disguise. There is certainly no occasion for regret.”

To this, Lakshaman replied, “Why are you extolling fortune or luck? Only cowards blame the stars; brave and courageous people overcome all difficulties by fighting them. You have just to tell me and soon you will see that our ill-luck has given way to good luck. I am capable of crushing all opposition single-handed; my hands are not for decoration; my sword, bow and arrows are there to vanquish all our enemies. But I am your humble servant and look up to you for orders.”

Ram consoled him again and again, saying that he was all for obeying the command of our parents, as to him, this was the best path to follow in life.

When Kaushalya saw that Ram was determined to obey the orders of his father, she spoke in a choked voice, “O son, how can I live here without you? Does not a cow follow her calf? Similarly I shall follow you wherever you go.”

Hearing the above words, Ram said to Kaushalya, “Mother, you know Kaikeyi has deceived the king. If you also leave him, it is certain that he will not remain alive. To abandon her husband is a great sin and heinous crime for a woman. Hence, you should never think of such an action. So long as the king is alive, it is your duty to serve him. O Mother! Both of us, i.e., you and I, should obey father, as he is your husband and the king of all of us. According to the scriptures, the greatest virtue for a woman lies in serving her husband.”

On hearing the above words of Ram, with tearful eyes, Kaushalya said, “Dear Ram, since you have decided to go to the forests, I have no power to restrain you. Truly, time is all-powerful. You may go to the forests; your virtuous qualities will shield you in all circumstances. You may have no fear from Rakshasas, wild animals or cannibals. May your path be auspicious and the earth underneath as well as skies overhead give you all the protection that you need.” So saying Kaushalya solemnly recited the Swastivachan verses; circumambulated Ram again and again and clasped him to her heart. Ram touched Kaushalya’s feet and from there, he went to the apartment of Sita.

## Sita and Lakshaman's Accompaniment

So far Sita was not aware of Ram's going to the forests. She was rather thinking about the coronation and waiting for the return of Ram. Just then Rani entered with his head down. Seeing Ram without the royal insignia, which he had discarded soon after the encounter he had with Kaikeyi, Sita at once got up from her seat and said, "O Lord, what has happened?"

Ram told Sita about his father's orders for him to go to Dandakaranya for a period of fourteen years, adding that he had come to see her before proceeding on his journey to the forests. "During my absence, you will have to look after my father and my mother, who are full of grief and old. Besides, you have also to give proper regard and respect to the other mothers, who are just equal to mother Kaushalya. Treat Bharat and Shatrughan as your sons and never do anything against Bharat, as he is now the king and master of the family. I am going to the forests and you have to stay here in Ayodhya. My only instruction to you is that you behave

and conduct yourself in such a manner that none may be displeased with you.”

At this, Sita spoke somewhat angrily, “The way you are talking to me makes me laugh. O Aryaputra! all other relations father, mother, brother, son, daughter-in-law-all these get pain or pleasure in life according to their deeds. But it is only a wife who shares equally with her husband, being called ‘Better-Half’, his pains and pleasures. Therefore, the orders for your exile include my exile as well. A woman's life is inseparably bound with her husband's. So, if you are going to the forests, I shall accompany you. You need not worry about me in the least for I shall be content with roots and fruits that grow in the forests. I also promise to observe Brahmacharya throughout your stay in the forests.

“It will be a wonderful opportunity for me to enjoy the beauty of Nature, as in the forests under your protection and guidance I shall be able to see the lakes, rivers and mountains. In this way, even if I have to spend my whole life in your company, I consider this better than heaven itself.”

Considering the difficulties that one has to face in the forests, Ram was not prepared to allow Sita to accompany him. Consoling Sita, who had tears in her eyes, Ram said, “Sita, you were born in a royal and noble family; hence do as I say. You cannot even imagine what hardships one may have to come across in the forests. Besides the crocodiles in the rivers, the forests are infested with wild animals like tigers and lions, whose frightening roars send chills of fear down one’s spine. It is very painful to walk, as the paths are full of wild bushes and thorns, and tired of hard work, one has to sleep under a tree on a bed of leaves on the hard ground. Many times, one cannot get anything to eat. The bark of the trees will have to be used as clothes to cover the body. There in the forests one is exposed to a constant danger both from large pythons and Rakshasas. Insects like scorpions and mosquitoes are one’s constant companions. You are not meant for a life in the forests. Hence you should give up the idea of going to the forests with me.”

Hearing such discouraging words, tears came to Sita’s eyes. In a low but firm and determined voice, she said, “O Ram! I know about all these already. The comfort of your company is adequate compensation for these inconveniences. The hardships you have

mentioned are trivial. They can casuse pain only to those who have not controlled their senses. In case you refuse to take me along with you, I shall kill myself by taking poison, iimg myself in fire or drowning myself in water. It is a fact that I cannot live without you. A wife's place is at the side of her husband.”

Even then, Ram did not agree io Sita's request and began to tell her once again that it was not proper for her to go with him. At this, Sita spoke somewhat in love and sarcasm, “O Ram, had my father known that you are a men only in form, but a woman at heart, he would never have given me to you in mairiagc. I regret to say that people, because of their ignorance, liken your glory to the sun's splendour. All this talk of your glory is a myth. O Arya, what are you afraid of that you do not want your wife to accompany you? Whatever you do and wherever you be, I consider my presence with you proper and right. I shall happily face all the difficulties that you speak of and shall never yearn for palatial pleasures. Without you here it is all hell-like for me. I may tell you that I cannot bear even a moment's separation from you, what to talk of fourteen years.”

Sita embraced Ram firmly and began to cry bitterly. Realising the situation, Ram said, “O Devi, seeing your sorrow, I now feel that you may accompany me. I did not know about your strong feelings earlier. It is wrong on your part to think that I cannot protect you. Hence, if you are made to follow me, I also cannot leave you behind as a man of character cannot leave his fame behind. Seeing your firmness, I now give you permission to accompany me to Dandakaranya. Get ready soon, as I want to go to the forests immediately.” Hearing these loving words, Sita became very happy and, as told by Ram, began to give alms to the Brahmins, sages and saints.

During all the discussion between Ram and Sita, Lakshaman had been present there. Now with tearful eyes, he clasped the feet of Ram, and said, “In case you have decided to go to the forests inhabited by wild beasts, I will go as a pilot before you with my bow and arrows in hand. Without you, I do not want even salvation, not to talk of the pleasures of this world.”

Shri Ram tried to persuade Lakshaman not to accompany him. But Lakshaman remained adamant. Ram told Lakshaman that he was as dear to him as his own life, besides being his brother and friend. “In case

you accompany me, who will look after Kaushalya and Sumitra? Therefore, you should stay back and serve our parents. This will not only be a great service to me, but will get you popular approval as a dutiful son of your parents.”

Lakshaman at once replied, “I am sure that Bharat will look after the needs of Kaushalya and Sumitra and serve them well. Make me your servant and I will bring fruits and roots for you to eat in the forests.” The affection and sincerity reflected in Lakshaman’s sentiments moved Ram and he told him to seek the permission of his mother and others.

Lakshaman came back soon after obtaining the permission. Then Ram told him that he wanted to give all the wealth that he had to the Brahmins and ascetics and sought Lakshaman’s help in doing so. Then both the brothers distributed the wealth amongst the poor. There was one Brahman of Garg Gotra, named Trijat. His wife was quite young and they had many children. So, his wife told him to go to Ram. Accordingly he immediately rushed there and said, “O famous Prince! I am a poor Brahmin with a large family. Have pity on me also.” Ram said somewhat jocularly, "I have not yet been able to give cows in alm; you throw your stick and

you can have all the cows from here to where your stick falls.” Trijat revolved his stick and hurled it with all the strength at his command, so it fell quite far away. Ram embraced the Brahmin and all those cows were sent to his Ashram. Then he told Trijat that he was only joking to him, for which he should not take any umbrage.

This incident clearly shows how important a cow was in our life. As a matter of fact, cows were a great economic factor and because of this wealth, it was said that in our country rivers of ghee and milk flowed in ancient times. People used to give milk instead of water to any one who called at their doors. The situation has become worse after Independence, as the Government has not cared much about this most important point that can make our country self-sufficient in food also.

From this jocular mood of Ram, it becomes quite clear that Ram was in the least worried about his exile; he was rather pleased as it gave him an opportunity to destroy Ravana and other Rakshasa.

### To Dandakaranya

After giving alms, the three, viz., Ram, Lakshaman and Sita, went to see the king in his palace, to bid him final farewell. Every place around the palace was crowded with anxious masses since people had by now come to know of the sudden change of events. And since they had a genuine affection for Ram, they were very critical of the king and Kaikeyi.

At the gate of the palace, Ram saw Sumantra and told him to inform the king about their arrival. Sumantra, accordingly, went inside and told Dasharath in a faltering voice that the two princes were waiting to see him. Dasharath asked Sumantra to bring them in and soon all three were ushered in. The king was surrounded by women of the palace. But seeing Ram, he got up and rushed to meet him; but before he could reach Ram he fell unconscious on the ground.

Ram and Lakshaman both got hold of his hands and made him sit on the bed. After a few minutes, when the king became conscious, Ram told him with folded hands, "Maharaj! I have come to seek your permission

to go to Dandakamya. Also allow Lakshaman and Sita to accompany me. I have tried to persuade them from going, yet they want to go. Giving up all your sorrows, now order us as a king.” So saying, Ram began to look towards the king. Dasharath said moaningly that he had been duped by Kaikeyi. “Therefore, Ram! you take me as a prisoner and become the king.”

Ram replied, “I do not want you to break your pledge. O King! After spending the fourteen years’ period, I shall again be present here to serve you.” Bound by his pledge, Dasharath said, “Ram, you are firm on truth and your mind is set on righteousness; no body can dissuade you from your resolve. Hence, go without any fear; May your path be auspicious! But son ! You may stay here for the night, so that I may be able to see you for some more time. I know, you are bent upon undertaking a hazardous task for my sake, as you want to prove your father’s truthfulness.”

Ram spoke humbly, “The pledge calls for my departure today itself. Therefore, I consider it best to go as soon as possible. O King! I have no desire, but to see you prove true to your word and for this reason, I do not want my departure to be delayed even for a minute. I am going just now and you please give the throne to

Bharat.”

Hearing the above words, Raja Dasharath embraced Ram but soon he became unconscious again and fell down on the ground. Seeing this, all (he women present there began to cry bitterly.

Sumantra tried again to plead with Kaikeyi. He spoke to her some harsh words also, but they had no effect on her. He even went on to suggest that Kaikeyi and her son might reign there in Ayodhya, while all of them went in pursuit of Ram and lived with him in the forests. Raja Dasharath heaved a deep sigh and told Sumantra—“Let an army accom-pany Ram to the forests to protect him from any unforeseen dangers. I ic sides, his entourage should carry sufficient provisions, so that Ram does not feel the want of anything in terms of men, money or material.”

This suggestion, however, infuriated Kaikeyi and she spoke in anger, “Do you want to give this empty throne to Bharat, taking all its wealth away? Bharat will not accept such a throne bereft of all its men and material.”

Maharaj Dasharath could only say, “Fie upon you!” and sank into silencc. All the people present there felt ashamed at the words of Kaikeyi. Kaikeyi demanded of Dasharath that he should banish Ram as King Sagar had banished Asmanja. At this a minister known as Siddhartha told Kaikeyi that there could be no comparison between Ram and Asmanja; the latter was wicked and evil-minded, as he used to throw the children playing on the bank of Saryu River into the water, but Ram was very gentle. He had committed no sin to deserve banishment No moral flaw could be pointed out in him. It was a downright sin to banish such a noble person. “There fore Queen! you must desist from such a cruel act and save your honour.”

Kaikeyi, however, stood unmoved. At this juncture, Ram spoke to Raja Dasharath, “O Rajan, I have given up all the pleasures of Ayodhya and decided to live on the fruits, etc. that grows in the forests. What use would there be in sending all these things with me? I have to make do in the forests, for which I need a spade and a basket. Only get me a dress made of the bark of trees.”

Immediately Kaikeyi brought the forest dresses and both the brothers Ram and Lakshaman wore them,

taking off their costly royal costumes. Sita was in a fix as she did not know how to wear a bark dress. Ram put it round her neck and tied it well. Seeing this Guru Vashishtha told Sita not to put on the bark dress and told Kaikeyi that she should not allow Sita to be dressed like that. But Sita did not take off the bark dress, as she wanted to be like her husband.

Seeing no end of his sorrows, Maharaj Dasharath sat there with his head lowered in misery. Ram said, “Father, my mother Kaushalya is worthy of all the reverence. You kindly look after her, so that she may not feel the agony of my separation.”

With tearful eyes, Raja Dasharath told Sumantra, “Bring a chariot with fine horses yoked to it and take them to the outskirts of the town.” Accordingly, a chariot was immediately brought to the doorsteps.

Kaushalya then hugged Sita to her bosom and after sniffing her head, said, “Such women are given due respect by their husbands, but who are negligent of their husbands in the latter\* hour of need are unchaste and characterless. They blame their husbands during hard times in many ways. Such women are heartless. They are sinful and soon betray their husbands. But in the

case of noble and virtuous women, their husbands are everything to them as they have faith in the scriptures and the Vedas and conduct themselves accordingly. During exile, you should serve Ram with single-minded devotion and never think of slighting him there in any way.”

With folded hands, Site replied, “O Mother, I will certainly act according to your advice. I know very well how to behave with my husband, as I have learnt this from my parents as well. Therefore, you should not compare me with bad women. I may assure you that as the light of the moon cannot be separated from it, similarly I cannot leave my duty towards my husband. I know that all other relations give limited pleasures only, but unlimited pleasures flow from the relation between a woman and her husband. I have learnt all this and revere my husband as god. How can I show any disrespect to him?”

Then all three bowed at the feet of Raja Dasharath and there after Ram and Lakshaman touched the feet of Kaushalya. Lakshaman then touched the feet of his mother Sumitra, who told Lakshaman, “Son, you should not be lazy in serving Ram in the forests, as he is your protector and it is your duty to obey him. In case you

happen to miss mother and father, think of Ram as your father Dasharath and Sita as my self; and Ayodhya will be the forests for you. My blessings shall always be with you.”

Sumantra then requested Ram to get into the chariot. Sita got in first followed by the two brothers. Sumantra began to drive the chariot with due care, as large crowds had gathered all around. While the people shouted to Sumantra to drive slowly, Ram told him to proceed as fast as possible.

In the meanwhile, Raja Dasharath along with the queens got out of the palace, insisting that he would see his son. But as he and Kaushalya followed the chariot on foot, Ram told Sumantra to drive the chariot faster, because in his opinion it would be more painful to stop than to go on ir.ving and be out of sight. When the chariot had gained speed, the servant of the palace and some other people returned, though their minds were still with Ram. Raja Dasharath with Kaushalya stood still and kept on looking at the dust raised by the wheels of the chariot. But when even the dust had settled, he collapsed on the ground.

The king was raised and the party returned. While entering the precincts of the palace, he said in a pathetic tone that he wanted to go to palace of Kaushalya, where he was taken and laid on a bed. But his mind was not restful. For him, this night was like a death-night and he said to Kaushalya, O Devi; I am unable to see you, as the scene of Ram's deperists in my eyes. You may, therefore, touch me with your hands." Kaushalya did so and sat beside the king, weeping and sighing.

The residents of Ayodhya were still following Ram's chariot, requesting all the time for his return. But Ram told them in sweet words, "You people should now show more respect and love towards Bharat, in case you want to please me. Bharat is a man of excellent character and he will do all in his power to promote your well-being and happiness."

In the throng, there were all types of people, old and young. Seeing the predicament of the old people, Ram got down from the chariot and all the three—Ram, Lakshaman and Sita walked on foot till the people overtook them. They told Ram that some old Brahmins were also following them, carrying with them packets of yajna-samagri. The study of the Vedas no longer

engaged their minds. Thus all these people were trying to obstruct Ram from going to the forests. Soon they saw the bank of the river Tamasa, which appeared to be stopping Ram from going further. On the banks of the river, Sumantra unyoked the tired horses from the chariot, made them roll on the ground, fed them with grass and water and left them for grazing there.

Staying on the bank of Tamasa river, Ram spoke to Lakshaman, looking at Sita, “This is the first night of our pilgrimage to the forests. Back in Ayodhya, our father and mothers must be all worried about us. But when I think about Bharat, who is so good and kind, I feel there is no need to feel worried for our parents. O Lakshaman! You have indeed done a good deed by coming to the forests with me. If you had not been here, who would have helped me to protect Sita from various dangers. Though there are plenty of fruits here in the forest, yet I wish that we abstain from all food tonight and drink only water.”

Ram then told Sumantra to look after the horses. When the evening approached, they offered prayers and sat for a while in meditation. Then with the help of Sumantra, Lakshaman prepared a bed of leaves on the ground for Ram to sleep. In this way all of them went to

sleep. At midnight, Ram said to Lakshaman, “All these-people have followed us, leaving their hearth and home; see how they are sleeping under the trees. Seeing their love, I feel it would be better if we leave them here sleeping and proceed further.”

Lakshaman gave his assent and Ram told Sumantra to be ready with the chariot, as they wanted to proceed to the forests immediately. Sumantra at once brought the chariot and requested Ram, Lakshaman and Sita to get in. Shri Ram then told Sumantra to drive the chariot northwards for some distance and turn it round carefully, so that those people might not be able to know the direction we had taken.

Sumantra did likewise and then all the three climbed in, crossing the river in no time. When the night was over, the people rose from their slumber and cursing themselves for their sound sleep, they all walked towards north following the tracks of the chariot’s wheels. But after some distance, they could not make out and with saddened thoughts returned to Ayodhya, where many people were similarly feeling saddened by the departure of Ram. They had no alternative, but to accept the happenings as they had transpired.

### Meeting with Guha

Ram along with his companions was able to go far before the day broke. In the morning, they all stopped for a while for their daily morning routine including Sandhya, etc. Thereafter crossing the river Besawa (Veda- Shruti), they proceeded southward. On the way they crossed the Gomati as well as the Sai.

Proceeding further, Ram pointed out to Sita the land that was given by Maharaj Manu to his son Ikshwaku, a vast stretch of land enfolding many kingdoms within its bounds. They then came to the river Ganga, and Ram told Sumantra that they would like to spend the night there. Sumantra accordingly drove the chariot near to the Ingudi tree and Ram along with Sita and Lakshaman got down.

In Shringberpur, a dear friend of Ram was ruling whose name was Guha (of Nishad community). When he heard about Ram's arrival, he along with his brothers, etc. came to receive Ram. Seeing the Nishadraj coming from some distance, Shri Ram went to meet them along with Lakshaman. Seeing Ram in the

dress of a Muni, Nishadraj felt pained and embracing Ram, said, “Think of this town like your own Ayodhya and tell me of what service I can be. There cannot be a more honourable guest than you.”

Guha’s men had brought many kinds of delicious foods. But Ram said, “I have been greatly honoured by your coming here. I am really very happy to see you all quite healthy. I accept the things that you have brought for me lovingly. But I cannot partake of them, as I only take fruits and roots. You may regard me as having been initiated into the forest life. Only whatever is worth eating by the horses that you may leave.”

Nishadraj acted accordingly. Ram, Lakshaman and Sita then sat for the evening Sandhya. Thereafter they, i.e., Ram and Sita, went to sleep under the tree, while Guha, Lakshaman and Sumantra kept watch for the whole night. Guha repeatedly asked Lakshaman to go to sleep since he was keeping a watch along with his men. But Lakshaman thankfully declined saying that “I must be conscious of my duties as well.”

In the morning, Ram expressed his desire to cross the river Ganga. Guha at once replied that the boats were ready to ferry them across. Ram, Lakshaman and

Sita proceeded towards the bank where the boat was moored. Sumantra came forward and said to Ram, “Now kindly tell me what your orders are for me.” Ram told Sumantra to go back. Sumantra began to weep, saying that because they were leaving the residents of Ayodhya behind, it was nothing short of death to them.

Ram then told Sumantra sweetly, “You are a great well-wisher of our family. Therefore, think of some way so that my father may not get much saddened by our departure to the forests. You all will be able to see me back after spending fourteen years in exile. Please console our mothers as best as you can.”

Sumantra, however, said, “What will I be able to tell the people, King Dasharath and your mother Kaushalya when they see me returning with the empty chariot? My wish is that I may accompany you and on expiry of the period of exile, I may take you to Ayodhya in this chariot back.”

Ram intervened and said, “Sumantra I I know your love towards me. I am I have a purpose in sending you back to Ayodhya. Seeing you back there, mother Kaikeyi will be assured that I have gone to the forests. She would be satisfied and there would not be any doubt

of father not having kept his pledge.”

In this way, Ram took leave of Sumantra, telling him again and again to look after his parents. Turning to Nishad, he said, “It is not proper for me to live in such a forest where my people may easily come to meet me. We should now proceed further in search of some secluded spot where we can live in a hut. Bring some milk of a banyan tree so that I may be able to twist my hair like a Muni.

Guha immediately brought some milk of banyan tree, with which the two brothers twisted their hair in a matted form to give themselves the look of two young Rishis. Ram took leave of Guha and got into a boat with Sita and Lakshaman to the tune of Vedic verses appropriate to the occasion. Soon the boat took them to the southern shore, where they left it and proceeded onward.

Their next halt was in the region known as ‘Vatsaa beautiful place, rich in natural wealth. They rested under a tree and as the day was about to end, sat for the evening sandhya. Then Ram talked to Lakshaman about Dasharath’s condition and wanted Lakshaman to return to Ayodhya to look after him and Kaushalya and Sumitra. Lakshaman tried to console him, saying that he should not worry about these things, as it might make them unnecessarily tense.

Next morning, they resumed their journey towards the place where Bhagirathi Ganga and Yamuna meet. At the end of almost a day's journey, they felt that they were nearing Prayag, as they could hear the gurgling sound of the waters of the two rivers. They soon reached Maharishi Bharadwaj's Ashram, situated at the confluence. Both the brothers bowed to the Maharishi with folded hands and introduced themselves and explained why they had come to the forests.

They were offered water, a concoction made from honey and curd and many kinds of fruit. Proper arrangements were duly made for their stay at the Ashram. After they had finished their food, etc., Maharishi Bharadwaj said, "O Princes, I am seeing you again in this Ashram after a long time. I have already come to know of your exile. It is a beautiful Ashram with plenty of open space. You are welcome to stay with us." Here I may tell the readers that Ram and Lakshaman had visited Bharadwaj's Ashram before also to get proper training in the use of various arms and weapons. Maharishi Bharadwaj was a great scientist of his times and Ravan and Kumbhakaran were also his disciples. Once again, Ram and Lakshaman had an opportunity to get more training in warfare, as they were actually preparing for the ultimate showdown with

Ravan that was to take place during the last year of their exile.

Having spent some time in the Ashram, Ram decided to move on and requested Maharishi Bharadwaj to suggest some lonely place where they could go. Maharishi Bharadwaj suggested a place about twenty miles from there and they were given a warm send-off with Swastivachan verses by Maharishi Bharadwaj and his disciples who even walked with them through a part of the distance. When Maharishi Bharadwaj had returned to his Ashram, Ram talked to Lakshaman about the good and kind nature of Bharadwaj.

Discussing the advantages of staying in the forests, they reached the place from where they had to cross the river Yamuna. The two brothers collected many long pieces of wood and prepared a raft on which they crossed the river. On the other bank of the river, they saw a big Banyan tree, under which they spent the night.

### At Chitrakoot

Early next morning, Ram having got up, awakened Lakshaman, extolling the beauty of the landscape, which was being enhanced by the chirping of the birds. He suggested that it was time to resume their journey. Lakshaman immediately got up and then they bathed in the sacred waters of the Yamuna. Here I may make an observation on the mistaken belief of the people that during the period of the fourteen years' exile, Lakshaman neither slept nor did he take any food. This belief is not borne out by Valmiki Ramayana. It is, however, possible that Lakshaman slept and ate scantily, as he was determined to serve Ram and Sita as best as possible, which could be done most satisfactorily as an ascetic brahmachari.

In this way, the three walked on till they reached the hill known as Chitrakoot. The place was very attractive because of its natural beauty. Ram said to Lakshaman, "This place is full of trees laden with fruits and many Rishis, Munis, sages and saints also reside here. It is indeed a nice place to live in. We can definitely spend some time here. Rishi Valmiki's Ashram was also there. All the three went to his Ashram and paid

obeisance to him. Rishi Valmiki welcomed them. Ram told the Rishi about their exile.

Ram also asked Lakshaman to collect some wood for preparing a cottage for living. Lakshaman at once obeyed and brought some logs of wood of different lengths and prepared a hut, the roof of which was covered with the leaves of the trees. The Malyavati River was flowing at the foot of the hill; it had sweet and pure water. Seeing all this Ram was pleased and thought the place most suited for their residence for some time to come.

Sumantra had already begun his journey back to Ayodhya and reached there the next day. Seeing him, the residents of Ayodhya crowded around him and asked him where he had left Ram. Sumantra told them that on reaching the bank of the Ganga, Mahatma Ram had ordered him to return. Then he hastened towards the king's palace. Soon after reaching there, he bowed

before Raja Dasharath and conveyed to him the message given by Ram. The king listened to all quietly and fell down unconscious. With the help of Sumitra, Kaushalya picked him up and put him in bed. The king gained consciousness after some treatment.

Raja Dasharath called for Sumantra and asked him to take him where Ram was staying, because he felt his end was near. What could be more painful than that he?

Could not even see Ram at the time of his death? The king lamented, saying Ha Ram!

Ha Sita! Ha Lakshaman!’ Thus he became unconscious again. Seeing his condition, Kaushalya was afraid lest he may collapse and die. She then told Sumantra that she might also be taken to where Ram, Sita and Lakshaman were, as it was not possible for her to survive without them.

In a somewhat delirious condition, Kaushalya then began to taunt Dasharath, “You are famous for your magnanimity, large-heartedness and sweet words, but you have done a cruel turn to me by sending my dear ones to the forests. How could you so ill-treat such a noble son if you are a righteous man? For a woman, the

first support is her husband, the second a son and the third a near relative. Among these supports, you are not mine any more; you have sent my second support Ram to the forests. I cannot go to the forests leaving you; thus you have destroyed me completely.”

The king felt immensely pained to hear such reproachful words. All of a sudden, his mind wandered back to a past incident in which he had unwillingly killed an ascetic with an arrow shot in the direction of sound. Remorse caused by the memory of that incident together with the pangs of the separation from Ram made him sad and distressed. He folded his hands and lowered his head and said in a remorseful voice, “O Kaushalya! I want to see you happy. You are kind-hearted as you love even your opponents, not to talk of your own people. For a woman, her husband is all-in-all. You understand all about good and evil of this world. Then why are you tormenting me in this way?”

Hearing such piteous words of the king, Kaushalya’s eyes were filled with tears and she placed the folded hands of the king on her head. She then spoke in a perplexed and pathetic tone, “O king, I entreat you not to feel offended by my words. Your begging of me is more painful than death to me. Please forgive me for

my harsh words and punish me for uttering such words. I know you are truthful, but whatever I said was prompted by my grief. Grief destroys tolerance; it subverts the knowledge of the scriptures; it destroys all. There is no greater enemy of man than sorrow.”

The sun was setting and soon it was night. The soft and sympathetic words of Kaushalya made the king’s mind somewhat restful and he sank into sleep.

सत्यं ब्राह्मणस्य प्रमाणं श्रद्धा वेदविनिश्चयः।  
ब्राह्मण का प्रमाण सत्य है, और उसका  
श्रद्धा वेदों में स्थित निश्चय है।

### Death of Raja Dasharath

On that fateful night Raja Dasharath remembered the sinful incident he had once committed and in a doleful voice, he said to Kaushalya, “O Kaushalya! One has to reap the reward of whatever a man does, good or bad. I have also committed some follies and now when I have to reap the reward in the form of separation from Ram, I have to repent of the grievous error.

“When I was young, I wanted to be a famous archer who could shoot by the sound of the target. It was in those days that I committed a grave sin, for which I have to suffer, now like a child who eats poison because of his ignorance. I was a bachelor and it was rainy season. In such a pleasant weather, I went to the bank of the Sarayu river with my bow and arrows. It was a dark night. Since wild animals came to the river to drink water, I wanted to kill some wild elephant, hearing the gurgling noise of the water when an animal drinks.

“At that moment, I heard some gurgling noise, created by the water being filled in a pitcher. But I thought it to be the sound made by an elephant I had not seen the elephant; I had only heard the noise. So, I took out a poisoned sharp and shining arrow and shot it towards the source of the sound. As soon as I shot the arrow, I heard the voice of some ascetic, who spoke ‘Hai, Hai. I was much aggrieved to hear this and went there, where the ascetic was lying wounded. His hair was dishevelled and he was lying smeared with blood all over, wriggling with acute pain.

“I was both frightened and sad. The ascetic stared at me, his eyes spitting fire, as if he would scorch me, and said, “O Rajan, what wrong had I done to you here living in the forest? You have with one arrow killed not one but three of us—myself and my parents, old, blind, thirsty and waiting for me to take water to them. Go at once to my father and inform him of this incident. Try to placate him, so that he may not curse you. Do not be sad, but pull out the arrow. Seeing his pitiable condition, I pulled out the arrow and he collapsed immediately.

“Picking up the pitcher full of water, I went to the Ashram of the Muni, as directed by the dying young ascetic Shravan Kumar. There I saw the two old blind

parents. Hearing the noise of my footsteps, the Muni said, “Where were you detained, my son. I am dying of thirst. Give me some water immediately.” Seeing the Muni, I was much afraid and spoke in a faltering voice, “O Mahatman! I am a Kshatriya, known as Dasharath; I am not your son. Your son has inadvertently been killed by me. I mistook the gurgling sound made by his pitcher dipping in water, as the sound made by an elephant and shot an arrow in that direction. I feel pained to say that your son is no more.” The Muni said, ‘O Rajan! you have done this in ignorance. Take us both to the spot, where our son lies dead. We want to see him’. I took them there and both of them touched the body of their son. They fell down on his corpse with grief. They began to lament, tears rolling down from their blind eyes. Then they gave a bath to their son’s body and the Muni said, “As I am today suffering because of the separation of my son, similarly you will also die parted from your son.”

“Thus, cursing me, both of them sat on the pyre prepared for the cremation of their son’s body and burnt themselves also. O Devi! The result of that sinful act that I committed in my folly is now before me. I am now dying. I cannot even see you with my eyes. O Kaushalya! Please touch my body with your hands. I am

losing my memory also. What greater agony can there be that I do not see my noble son Ram during the last moments of my life.” Thus lamenting, the king breathed his last, lying near Kaushalya and Sumitra.

Touching his body and knowing that the king was no more, Kaushalya and Sumitra began to cry. Then Kaushalya kept his head in her lap and wailed along: “Oh Cruel Kaikeyi! The king is no more alive; you may now enjoy the kingdom. Ram has gone to the forests and the king to the heavens. I have no wish to live anymore.”

Soon the ministers, who had already come there, separated Kaushalya from the body of Raja Dasharath. They kept the corpse in a tank of oil and then began to carry on the work according to the orders of Muni Vashishtha. Considering their duty at such a time, the ministers did not think it proper to do cremation in the absence of his sons. The whole day thus passed and the dusk fell, enveloping the world with the darkness of the night.

In the morning, many people including the Brahmins and ministers came to the palace. Markandeya, Maudagalya, Vamdeva, Kashyap,

Katyayana, Gautam and Jabali, besides many other learned men, bowed their heads before Muni Vashishtha and said, ‘The king is no more; Shri Ram is in the forests and Lakshaman is also with him. Princes Bharat and Shatrughan are in Kaikaya with their maternal uncle. Someone from Ikshwaku family has to be appointed to take the responsibilities of ruling over the country, so that our kingdom may not go waste without a ruler.’”

Here Valmiki has described the wretched condition of the States where good governments are not functioning, people have to suffer mis-rule and dacoits, robbers, and other similarly undesirable elements take advantage of the situation and loot the subjects. There is no peace, but a state of anarchy prevails, life becomes so much disturbed that no constructive activity is possible. Only bad and wicked people thrive, while good and gentle folk have to hide their heads to save their life and property somehow. Both the fronts of production, viz., agriculture and industry suffer and business comes to a standstill. The ultimate result of which is that such a country is not able to maintain its self-sufficiency any longer. There can be no sense of

security, and without a good ruler, law and order is the first casualty. The kingdom is virtually reduced to a savage State. “Might is Right’ becomes the order of the day.

Thus they all emphasised the importance of installing a ruler, without undue delay. Vashishtha at once called for the messengers with fast horses. On their arrival he told them that they should soon proceed to Kaikaya (Rajgrihapur) without betraying any sign of sorrow and give this message to Bharat, “The Purohits and Ministers have sent for you immediately, because of some urgent task awaiting you.” Nothing about what had transpired at Ayodhya was to be disclosed to Bharat. He also sent silken clothes and beautiful ornaments for Ashwapati Kaikayaraj and Bharat.

The messengers at once set out on the journey to Kaikayaraja long journey—and soon reached there. The night, the messengers entered the town; Bharat had a very bad dream, which greatly perturbed him. Many friends and colleagues of Bharat there tried to divert his mind away from the bad dream he had had, but his anguish did not lessen in any way. When someone asked him the reason of his sadness, Bharat told them about the bad dream he had last night and predicted that the death of some dear and near one was imminent.

When the above conversation was on, the messengers from Ayodhya entered the town. They met the King Ashwapati and prince Yudhajit and said to Bharat, “Muni Vashishtha and the Ministers have asked for your welfare and want you soon in Ayodhya because of some very urgent matter.” They gave the clothes and ornaments to Bharat to be given to Yudhajit. Bharat asked about the welfare of everyone individually. The messengers briefly said that everything was well, but his presence in Ayodhya was urgently required. Bharat then sought the permission of his grandfather, who readily agreed.

सज्जनो धर्मकीर्तिस्तु ब्राह्मणानां विशेषतः॥  
ब्राह्मणों की विशेषता में धर्म की प्रशंसा होती है,  
जो उन्हें धार्मिक गुणों की प्रशस्ति प्रदान करती है।

## Bharat in Ayodhya

Kaikayaraj Ashwapati gave many precious gifts to Bharat. But Bharat did not feel happy and began to hurry up for beginning his journey to Ayodhya. He, therefore, bade farewell to his grandfather and maternal uncle Yudhajit, along with Shatrughan and both of them got into the chariot standing ready to take them to Ayodhya. They commenced the journey eastwards and after about a week arrived at the outskirts of the town.

Somehow Bharat had a feeling that there was something wrong somewhere and it obviously appeared to him that this was not the town that he had left. There was sadness in the atmosphere and sensing some strangeness, Bharat asked the charioteer the reason. But he kept silent. Soon the chariot entered the gate of the city, bereft of any noise of the crowd of the people or the chanting of the verses from the Vedas, as was customary in those days. Many doubts entered Bharat's mind, as he could not see even the flags and buntings on the doors of the houses. There was no hustle and bustle in the streets and it seemed as if all business had been stopped. There were a few people with dirty clothes on, tears in eyes and with sad faces.

Disturbed by such bad omens and scenes, Bharat entered the palace of Raja Dasharath. The king was not there; Bharat, therefore, hastened to the palace of his mother Kaikeyi, hoping to see both of them together. seeing her son returning after a long absence, Kaikeyi got up from her 'Idcn seat and tried to embrace him when Bharat bowed to touch her feet, she enquired about the welfare of her parents, brother, etc. and Bharat replied that all was well there.

Bharat now asked his mother to let him know about the whereabouts of his father, as he wanted to go and touch his feet. Kaikeyi told Bharat, "My son, your father has gone to the other world, like all other good people."

Hearing this, Bharat uttered a cry, saying "I am dead" and fell down suddenly on the ground. Lying on the ground, his eyes were filled with tears. Bharat said to his mother, "I began the journey in the hope of seeing some Yajna being performed by father or the crowning ceremony of Ram. But, here I see nothing but signs of disorder and devastation. The news of father's death has almost broken my heart. What was his ailment that he expired before our arrival? Shri Ram and others were virtuous in that they performed his last rites.

"Now tell me about our noble-minded brother Ram where is he? An elder brother is like father and at such a time he alone is my support. I want to touch his feet what orders father gave for us in his last message?"

To the above questions of Bharat, Kaikeyi gave brief but factual replies: "Your father died, uttering the names of Ram, Lakshaman and Sita. He kept lamenting till the last moment of his life. His last words were, "Those people who are able to see Ram, with Sita and Lakshaman, returning from the forests, will have their wishes fulfilled."

This gave a further jolt to Bharat, who asked his mother, "Mother, where have Ram, Sita and Lakshaman gone?" Kaikeyi replied, "O Son, Ram wearing the robes of an ascetic has gone to Dandakaranya along with Sita and Lakshaman."

Bharat at this reply became somewhat suspicious about Ram's conduct. Fearing some incident that could stain the fair name of his ancestors, he asked his mother, "O Mother, had Ram seized the wealth of any Brahmin? Or had he killed some innocent rich or poor person? Did Ram look at any woman with evil intent? What was Ram's fault that he was banished to the forests?"

Kaikeyi replied, "Ram has not committed any of the crimes stated by you. He is very gentle. But when I heard about the news of Ram's coronation, I asked your father to crown you and send Ram into exile.\*' Your truthful father accepted my request and banished Ram. Sita and Lakshman accompanied Ram to the forests of their own accord. Maharaj Dasharath subsequently died because of the grief of not seeing Ram any longer. Now Son! You accept the throne as I have done all this for your sake. Therefore, you may now perform the last rites of your father with the help of the Brahmins, Vishishtha, etc. and get yourself coronated thereafter."

Knowing the whole episode, Bharat said to Kaikeyi, "Deprived of my father and elder brothers' love and companionship, I have been totally destroyed. In such a deplorable situation, I have no interest in coronation, you have killed Maharaj Dashrath and sent Ram to the forests, making me so miserable and now you are sprinkling salt over my wounds. It was all your folly. Ram always behaved with you and served you like his own mother Kaushalya. Similarly Kaushalya treated you like her sister. How can I look after the kingdom, without the help of Ram and Lakshaman? Even if I am able to do so, I will not allow your wish to

he fulfilled. The tradition of Raghuvansha is that the eldest brother is the rightful heir to the throne and all the younger brothers' work under his guidance.

“Tell me, what Maharaj Dasharath and noble Ram done to annoy you. You have sown the seed of a bad name for me in the world. You want to destroy our family. I will go to the forests and request Ram to return to Ayodhya to be crowned and I shall go to the forests in his place.”

Speaking in anger mixed with sorrow, Bharat fell down on the ground sighing deeply like an elephant. Hearing the voice of Bharat, Kaushalya said to Sumitra, “It appears that Bharat has come. I want to see him.” Thus, she began moving slowly towards Bharat and Bharat with Shatrughan began moving towards Kaushalya's apartment Both the brothers got hold of the feet of mother Kaushalya and began weeping bitterly. Kaushalya embraced Bharat and said, “You wanted the throne and Kaikeyi had got it for you. She has sent my son to the forests; she should now get me also sent there soon, where my son is residing. Otherwise I will go with Sumitra, taking Agnihotra-yajna with us to where Ram is.”

Kaushalya spoke in this vein in a very taunting and sarcastic manner to Bharat, who fell at her feet and in a piteous tone said, “O Mother, why are you blaming me, an ignorant person about Ram’s exile. You know well how much I love Ram.” Bharat then swore, saying that he may be considered a sinner like:

1. The one whose mind is never in accordance with the scriptures;
2. One who is a slave of low and evil masters;
3. One who urinates and excretes with face towards the Sun.
4. One who kicks the sleeping cows;
5. One who does not pay reasonably well, after getting the work done;
6. One who revolts against a good and noble king;
7. An unjust king/ruler, who charges taxes, but does Not protect his subjects;
8. One who does not give proper Dakshina to the Brahmins after the yajna is over;
9. One who runs away from the battle field, though Well armed;
10. One who forgets the scriptures;
11. May die and be not able to see the coronation of Ram;
12. One who eats without performing Panch-Yajnas;

13. One who does not give proper respect to his Guru;
14. One who rebels against his friends;
15. One who is a traitor;
16. One who is ungrateful?
17. One who eats alone and does not give to his sons and servants;
18. One who has an unfaithful wife; may have no children and die without doing any righteous deeds;  
One who kills a king, woman, child or an old man;
19. One who abandons a blameless servant;
20. One who sells meat, liquor, fish or poison;
21. One who begs with torn clothes or in the skill of dead;
22. One who drinks, gambles, is immoral and characterless;
23. One who gives alms to undeserving people;
24. One who sleeps at the time of twilight;
25. One who sets fire;
26. One who is an adulterer;
27. One who may not get the reward of his service to parents, Guru, etc.;
28. One who may not be considered gentle;
29. One who has many children; is poor; remains sick;
30. One who does not give to a poor beggar;
31. One who practises fraud, a sycophant, a back-biter, dishonest.

32. One who does not give food to a starving Brahmin;
33. One who poisons drinking water;
34. One who does not give water to a thirsty person;  
and
35. One who gives a biased decision in a discussion between two pundits if he was a party to the conspiracy to deprive Ram of his legitimate right to the throne.

Bharat assured Kaushalya in many ways about his ignorance and fell on the ground because of acute anguish. Kaushalya then said to Bharat, “Your assurances make me feel guilty and pained, though it is a matter of great consolation to me that you are true to your faith and you will certainly get an honourable position in life.”

Maharishi Vashishtha told Bharat to end his sorrow, because it was time that they began the last journey of Maharaj Dasharath. Bharat at once got up and all arrangements for the King’s cremation were made. The body was taken out of the oil tank and with due care it was kept on a diamond studded palanquin. In the cremation ground, a pyre was prepared with sandal wood and with many scented materials, on which Raja Dasharath’s body was placed and with the chanting of Mantras, the cremation took place.

## Bharat Sets Forth to the Forests

On the fourteenth day after the King's demise, the ministers called on Bharat and said, "Our revered King has gone to the heavens, after sending Ram and Lakshaman to the forests. Therefore, O Prince I you be our king; get yourself crowned and look after the welfare of us all."

Bharat then told them, "In our family, the eldest prince is entitled to the throne. Shri Ram is the eldest, he will be our king and I will go to the forests for fourteen years in his place. Be ready with all our Army and I will persuade Ram to return to Ayodhya. Get the roads repaired well."

Next morning, when, as customary, the bards began to sing songs in praise of Bharat to awaken him, Bharat got it stopped. "I am not the king," he remonstrated them. He then told Shatrughan how much wrong his mother Kaikeyi had done.

Muni Vashishtha entered the Assembly Hall and asked the messengers sitting there to call Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Ministers and Commanders of the Army, as also Bharat, Shatrughan and all well-wishers of the King's clan. Soon all these people arrived and took their seats. Raj Purohit Vashishta then spoke sweetly "Dear Bharat, Maharaj Dasharath has left for his heavenly abode, leaving his kingdom for you to reign. Ram has gone to the forests to keep the pledge of his father. Hence, you now come forward and get yourself coronated."

Hearing the above words, Bharat began to lament woefully and said, "How can I snatch the kingdom from Ram, who is learned, noble and virtuous. I cannot commit such a great sin that may tarnish the bright image of our family. I will do my best to get Ram back from the forests." Hearing such nice words of Bharat, the eyes of all those present there began to flow with tears.

Bharat told the assembly that he had already ordered the roads to the forests to be repaired. He then asked Sumantra to get this message announced in the town and Sumantra gladly gave the directions to all others, as desired.

Next morning, Rajkumar Bharat and Shatrughan left for the forests in a beautiful chariot to see Ram. Before their chariot, Purohits and Ministers rode in their chariots, yoked with strong horses. The three queens - Kaushalaya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi-also followed in the chariots, along with groups and clusters of all types of people, talking about Ram during the journey. Thus, they reached near Shringberpur on the bank of the river Ganga, where Nishadraj, the good friend of Ram, was living.

Here Bharat told the Ministers to camp for the night according to their liking. Seeing such a large army, Nishadraj got suspicious and told his people to be ready, as he would allow Bharat to cross the river only if he were going with good intentions to Ram. Guha then went to meet Bharat with many gifts and said, “O Lord! This country is so near to your town that it serves as an orchard for you. But you did not give us advance information of your coming. Hence, we have not been

able to give you suitable welcome. However, this entire place is yours and we are your servants. Please make yourself comfortable at this place.”

At this request of Nishadraj, Bharat said, “You are a friend of my elder brother and want to be a host to such a large force. This is a very noble idea and our purpose is served by your hospitality. But tell us the way by which we can go further on to the Ashram of Bharadwaj.”

Guha said with folded hands, “O Famous Prince, you need not worry about it. My people who are well acquainted with each and every place will accompany you and I will also follow you. But my mind has become somewhat suspicious on seeing your large force. I wonder with what intention you are going to Ram?”

Bharat politely told Nishadraj, “You should not suspect me of such a vile and sinful act, as I regard my elder brother Ram just like my father. O Guha, I am going to persuade Ram to return; you need not have any doubt on this score.”

Hearing such nice words from Bharat, Nishadraj became happy and said, “O Bharat, you are blessed; I

cannot see anybody else on this earth like you, who wants to give up such a vast and wealthy kingdom. You are going to request Ram to return; this noble deed will make your name live forever in this world.”

Thus, night fell and Bharat, being satisfied with the talks he had with Guha, ordered his force to rest and went to sleep along with his younger brother Shatrughan. Getting up in the morning, Bharat thanked Nishadraj for his hospitality and asked him to get them across the river. One large beautiful boat, decorated with flags and buntings, with carpets and rugs spread, was brought by Guha himself for Bharat, Shatrughan and the three mothers and some other women of the palace.

The large force thus crossed the river safely, from where they proceeded towards the forest of Prayag. On arrival there, Bharat asked them to stay suitably and he along with Shatrughan, Vashishtha and other Rishis went on foot to the Ashram of Maharishi Bharadwaj to see him. Reaching near the Ashram, Bharat asked the Ministers to wait there and went in with Vashishtha. Seeing Vashishtha ji Maharaj, Rishi Bharadwaj got up from his seat and asked his pupils to bring water to welcome them.

Maharishi Bharadwaj met Vashishtha halfway and could understand that the prince accompanying him must be Bharat, who bowed before Bharadwaj. Then Maharishi Bharadwaj duly welcomed them and asked about their welfare. Muni Vashishtha and Bharat also asked about their welfare and the smooth functioning of the Ashram. After this, Bharadwaj asked Bharat, “O Prince, you are reigning over a kingdom. What is your purpose in coming over here? I am becoming somewhat suspicious about your intentions.”

Bharat was immensely pained to hear these words and said, “Bhagwan, I am going to see Ram to bring him back to Ayodhya. Please tell me where he is now?”

Thereafter Vashishtha and others requested Maharishi Bharadwaj to tell them the whereabouts of Ram. He then told Bharat, “O Brave Man, you are born in an illustrious family of Raghu; therefore service of the old, control of senses and following the gentle people - these three qualities must be in you. Though I knew of your ideas, I questioned you only to confirm and to enhance your fame before all these people. Your brother Ram, with Sita and Lakshaman, is residing on

the Chitrakoot hill now. You may go there tomorrow after spending the night here along with your ministers. Thus, Bharat accepted to stay in the Ashram for the night.

As soon as the day broke, Bharat went to Maharishi Bharadwaj to take leave of him and when Bharadwaj finished the morning yajna, he found Bharat standing before him with folded hands. Bharat thanked him again and again for spending the night in the Ashram and requested him to let him know how far Ram's Ashram in Chitrakoot was and the straight and simple path there to.

Maharishi Bharadwaj told Bharat that it was about 15 miles away from that place and he also told him the path to the Chitrakoot hill. Bharat at once ordered his forces to proceed and in this way they traversed the path full of weeds and bushes. It was a very large Army, with horses, elephants and chariots, besides many people walking on foot.

At last they reached the place but the hill was spread over a large area. So, Bharat asked a few soldiers to go and find out exactly the place where Ram was. They went into the forest and soon they saw smoke rising to the sky, from which they presumed the

presence of people. They gave this information to Bharat, who asked them all to stay behind. He along with Sumantra went ahead.

There on Chitrakoot, Ram, who loved the natural surroundings of hills and rivers, was showing Sita the beauty of Nature, sitting on a hill, when they saw the dust clouds in the sky raised by the feet of the animals and wheels of the chariots of the Army, with the tumultuous noise that made the wild animals and elephants of the forest run helter skelter. Hearing this noise, Ram became inquisitive and asked Lakshaman to ascertain from where that fearful noise like that of the roaring of a cloud was coming. Lakshaman at once climbed up a Sal tree nearby and looking in all directions, he saw on the northern side elephants, horses, chariots and armed soldiers with flags fluttering. He then said to Ram, “You should extinguish the fire; Sita ji should go and sit in a cave and you should wear the armour and be ready with your bow and arrows.”

Hearing this, Ram said, “Look at the insignia of the flags and let me know whose army you think it is.” At these words of Ram, Lakshaman said, “It is clear that after the coronation, Bharat, the son of Kaikeyi, is

coming to kill us both in order to rule without any fear. Let both of us stand on the hill and we will face Bharat today, who is responsible for all our troubles. O Raghav! I do not see any blemish in killing Bharat, as he has forsaken the right path. After killing him, you enjoy the reign of the entire globe. I shall kill all those who have come to fight on his side. I have been restraining my anger and now I will burn them all as fire destroys dried leaves and wood.”

Seeing Lakshaman ready for battle, Ram tried to calm him down, “Lakshaman, what is the use of all these weapons, when Bharat is coming himself? After promising to fulfil the word of my father, what will I do with this kingdom, if acquiring it brings bad name to me. Wealth that is obtained through killing my own kith and kin is not acceptable to me. I consider it worth abandoning like poisoned food. O Lakshaman! I swear that whatever I want, I want for the good of my brothers. Even the desire to rule a kingdom is only as a means to secure the happiness of all. It is not difficult for me to be the monarch of this entire earth. But I do not want even the position of Indra by injustice or unrighteousness.

(Here it may be pertinent to state that ‘Indra’ was a title conferred on a king who was honoured and respected by all the other kings and rulers of the world).

“In my opinion after his return from his maternal uncle’s house, Bharat must have come to know about our exile and decided to meet us. There can be no other purpose behind it. It is also possible that he may be angry with his mother Kaikeyi and has come here to offer me the throne after obtaining the consent of father. Bharat is desirous of meeting us and it is just not possible that he has any bad intentions towards us.

“Has Bharat done any harm to you before that you doubt his sincerity? You should not speak so harshly about him. Now if you say anything against him, I shall regard it as being said or done against me. Consider for a moment, Lakshaman! Whatsoever may the situation be, a father cannot kill his son nor a brother his brother. In case your words are aimed at acquiring the throne for yourself, I will tell Bharat on his arrival that it may be given to you. O Lakshaman! Bharat will at once say ‘yes’ on my asking.’

Lakshaman felt so much ashamed that he shrank within himself. He said, "It now' seems to me that Maharaj Dashrath has come to see you himself." Seeing Lakshaman ashamed, Ram accepted the suggestion that Maharaj Dashrath might be coming to see them.

"Look at the big elephant named Shatrunjaya, slumbering in front of the Army. I do not see the white State umbrella of Father over it. Father may not have come personally. O Lakshaman! Now you come down from the tree." Lakshaman got down and stood beside Ram with folded hand.

आचार्याद्येन प्राप्तं ज्ञानं ब्राह्मणस्य साधनम्।  
आचार्य और अन्योँ से प्राप्त ज्ञान ब्राह्मण के  
लिए साधन है।

### Bharat Meets Ram

Bharat sent a message to Guru Vashishtha that he might kindly follow them along with his mothers, while the three, viz., Bharat, Shatrughan and Sumantra went to Ram's hut that had been beautifully prepared. They saw Ram sitting in it as an ascetic. Bharat felt pained to see Ram in that condition. In a state of shock, he ran towards Ram and lay prostrate at his feet. He uttered the word "Arya" but could not speak further as his voice was choked. Shatrughan also touched Ram's feet. Ram embraced both the brothers and Sumantra.

Ram then asked them to sit and said to Bharat, "Where has our father gone that you have come here? It is not proper for you to come here when he is alive. I hope Maharaj Dasharath is well. Similarly, all the three mothers are also well. You must be doing all your duties as a ruler, in consultation with your ministers and the learned people. Do you get up early in the morning and do Yajna-Sandhya and plan your day's work? Are you able to execute your decisions without any undue delay? You must be keeping your subjects all happy and satisfied with your just rule. You must be attending to

the complaints with alacrity. Do you look after the welfare of the cows and various other animals? Is the position of your treasury good? Do your soldiers and other servants get their salaries in time? Do you punish the criminals and anti-social elements and give reward to those who are patriotic, noble and righteous in their conduct?”

Ram put many other similar questions in order to know how Bharat was ruling. Hearing all these political-social instructions from Ram, Bharat gathered some courage and said, “Of what use can this be to me who has been responsible for breaking the family tradition? In our family, only the eldest son gets the throne. Therefore, I request you to come with me to Ayodhya and get coronated. O Brother! When I was in Kaikaya-desh and you came here, our father expired, unable to bear separation from you.”

Hearing about the death of his father, Ram was immensely aggrieved and wept bitterly. He bemoaned, “What will I do by returning to Ayodhya now? I could not even do his cremation and he died of the anguish of our separation.”

Ram then told Sita about the demise of his father. Sita's eyes were bedimmed with tears and she was not even able to see well. In the meanwhile, Guru Vashishtha came there with the three queens. Ram got up and touched the feet of all the mothers and so did Sita and Lakshaman. Ram and Lakshaman both touched the feet of Guru Vashishtha as well.

Now Ram enquired of Bharat why he had come to the forests with matted hair and wearing the clothes of an ascetic. To this Bharat replied, "Ram, as you know very well, our father had asked you to come to the forests on the insistence of my mother, Kaikeyi. She committed this sin and in reward she got only widowhood. Though I am her son, yet I am your sincere servant. Therefore, please get yourself coronated today. All the people are present here and the crowning ceremony can be held here. I bow my head at your feet."

With tearful eyes Bharat tried to coax Ram to accept his request. But Ram would not agree. He said, "O Bharat, how can I commit such a sin? I do not see anything wrong in you. You should not deprecate your

mother, Kaikeyi. We all have to respect the words of our father. Then how can I do something against it? Therefore, you should return to Ayodhya and prove to be a good ruler.”

Thus, the first night passed. In the morning, all the brothers and other people went to the river Mandakini and finished their bath, Sandhya, yajna etc. They all returned to the hut and sat silently near Ram. Bharat said, “O Brother, Father gave the kingdom to my mother, who gave it to me. But as it is yours, I am offering it to you. I do not deserve it, nor have I got the capability to rule over it.”

Bharat implored Ram again and again, with piteous tone and tearful eyes. But Ram said, “O Bharat, man is not free to change the destiny; he can do his best, but the result is in the hands of Almighty God. The seed of death is sown in birth. Whatever is past cannot be undone. Time passed cannot be recalled. The water of the Yamuna once flowed to the sea cannot come back. Therefore, you need not worry on this score, nor should you give way to grief on the demise of our father. One

day, death will claim us also. You should go back to Ayodhya and do your duty as was ordained by our father, while I shall stay in the forests in accordance with his wishes. I have neither courage nor desire to defy his orders.”

When Ram became silent after expressing his feelings, Bharat said, “O Brother, you are a Kshatriya and it is your first duty to get coronated and rule your kingdom. In our scriptures, Grihastha-Ashram is described to be the best. Then why are you abandoning it? You kindly wash the stain of sin that my mother has committed and save our father also from the sin. I bow my head again and again at your feet to accede to my request and return to Ayodhya. In case you ignore my request and stay in the forests, then I will also follow you.”

Bharat repeatedly importuned Ram, but Ram was firm and was in no mood to be persuaded. He wanted to keep the word of his father at any cost and even argued with Bharat to honour father’s pledge. Ram told Bharat, “O Bharat, when father married your mother, he had promised your maternal grandfather that the son born from the womb of Kaikeyi would be coronated. Besides, according to the two boons that our father granted to

Kaikeyi, both you and I are bound. According to these you are to sit on the throne and rule, while I am to go to Dandakaranya. Thus, it is your bounden duty to return to Ayodhya and sit on the throne. Hence, you go and be the king of the people, and I will be the king of the living beings in the forests.”

When Ram was trying to tell Bharat as above, a learned Brahmin, named Jabali, interposed and said, “O Maharaj, of what consequence are human relationship in this world. Alone are we born and alone do we die. Therefore, Ram, any individual who is infatuated with the idea of relationships is just mad. It is a pity that at such a young age, you have decided to abdicate the throne and live in exile. It is not proper for you. Kindly, therefore, return to Ayodhya and according to the request of Bharat accept the kingship.”

Ram did not like the line of argument given above and spoke somewhat sharply, “Whatever you have said to please me, does not convince me. Nobody, who acts against the spirit of the scriptures, can win respect in good society. Character is the only measure of a man. How can I compromise the way you suggest? If I follow a wrong path, others may follow the same, as generally ‘As is the king, so are the subjects’. All the learned

people, Rishis, Munis, sages and saints revere truthfulness. Truth is God, in whom all wealth inheres. Because of the greed of throne, I cannot disobey my father, as I am also a truthful man. I have promised to father to go to the forests and I cannot go back on my word.”

Ram spoke these righteous words in anger. Jabali at once became regretfully polite and said, “O Ram, I am not an athiest but I said all that only to persuade you to return to Ayodhya.” Observing Ram’s indignation, Mahrishi Vashishtha said, “O Ram, Jabali believes in the transmigration of soul. He has said these things only to persuade you to return to Ayodhya and sit on the throne to rule the country. You may like to consider the wishes of the people as well. You will not get a bad name because of your not fulfilling the pledge of your father, about which you are so apprehensive.”

Sliri Ram replied to his Guru, “It is not possible for any child to pay fully the debts of his parents, who not only bring him into this world, but look after him, sacrificing their needs and comforts for the sake of his future. Hence, whatever orders my father Raja Dasharath gave me cannot be defied.”

When Bharat heard Ram's firm resolve, he became sad and asked Sumantra to spread some 'Kusha' grass on which, he said, he would sit in silyagraha' as long as Ram did not accede to his request. "I will lie down at the door of this cottage without eating anything like a brahmin."

Sumantra looked towards Ram to see his reaction. Bharat went forward and spreading 'kusha' grass, sat before Ram in protest. Seeing this, Ram spoke to Bharat, "O Brother, what misdeed have I committed in which you are protesting in this manner? Such a mode of protest is adopted only to stop the evil-doer. The present situation does not call for such a step. Kindly give it up and proceed to your capital Ayodhya."

Bharat then requested the people thronging there to persuade Ram. The people replied, "We all know very well that what you have said is correct. But what can we do? Ram is firm on his father's orders and we find ourselves unable to persuade him."

Hearing this, Bharat got up and touching water said, "O ye the members of the Sabha and Residents listen to me. I never asked father to give me the throne nor did I agree to Ram's exile. I never had any

consultation with my mother. In case according to father's orders it is essential for Ram to be in the forests, then I will act as a representative of his and live in the forests for fourteen years.”

Ram was amazed to hear Bharat and said, “How can I or Bharat change what our father has pledged. I do not want anybody to act as my representative in fulfilling the promise of going to the forests. Whatever mother Kaikeyi asked was right and whatever father did was also right. I know Bharat is noble and righteous and has got all the qualities to rule. I can only say that on return from exile, I shall share the burden of ruling the kingdom with my brother. O Bharat! I have only done what father promised to mother Kaikeyi and you should also act according to the boons and thus save our father from falsehood.”

Listening to the discussion that took place between the two brothers, all the people including the Rishis present were greatly surprised. All the Rishis spoke in one voice, having in mind the desire to see Ravan killed, “O Bharat, you are venerable and in case you want your father to remain truthful, then do as Ram says. We want from the core of our hearts that Ram should obey his father and thus pay his debts.”

Hearing the opinion of the Rishis, given in support of Ram's stand, Bharat said in a trembling voice, "O Ram, I alone cannot rule the kingdom, nor can I dare to do so. All the people are looking towards you to accept this vast kingdom and give it to anyone whom you consider best." So saying Bharat fell at Ram's feet.

Ram lifted Bharat and told him, "The politeness and humility that you have revealed by offering the throne to someone else, makes it clear that you can rule the whole world. Now you manage the affairs of the State in consultation with the ministers. You should not have any ill-feelings towards your mother and give her the due respect."

Bharat said, "O Arya, put your feet in these sandals, as these sandals will now look after the welfare of the people." Ram put his feet in the sandals and then taking them off, gave to Bharat. Accepting the sandals, Bharat said, "I shall keep these sandals on the throne and manage the affairs of the kingdom on your behalf. Besides, I shall lead the life of an ascetic for fourteen years. In case I am not able to see you the next day after the period of fourteen years is over, I shall jump into fire and immolate myself."

Ram embraced Bharat, saying, “Very well; you look after mother Kaikeyi and never be angry with her.” Thus, Ram took leave of Bharat and Shatrughan, with tearful eyes. Bharat and Shatrughan got into the chariot, with all the people following them on their own coaches, horses, elephants, etc.

On returning to Ayodhya, Bharat spoke to Guru Vashishtha, “I shall go to Nandigram, for which I seek your permission. Somehow I have to bear the sorrow of Ram’s separation.”

Bharat asked for a chariot to be ready to take the two brothers to Nandigram. Soon they arrived there. Bharat then told the Rishis, “My brother has asked me to manage the affairs of the kingdom and with his sandals on the throne, I shall look after it as entrusted to me until he returns from the forests. On his return I shall put these sandals before him to wear on his feet, thus becoming free from the charge and wash the stain of blame in this way.”

With the help of ministers and learned ones, Bharat thus ruled the kingdom, carrying on the task that had been entrusted to him by Ram, doing penance at Nandigram. As the readers may see, the penance that I Hi.mu undertook was self-imposed.

Before the chapter is concluded, one point may be of interest to the readers. While both Ram and Bharat argued, Ram remaining firm on the pledge of Raja Dasharath given to Kaikeyi, it is surprising why Kaikeyi did not come forward to absolve Ram. That alone could have solved the problem. Iiom this, it is obvious that this was a planned affair of the Rishis and none thought about it or it was deliberately ignored by all concerned. Otherwise, the whole plan of the Rishis could have been reduced to naught.

### Departure from Chitrakoot

After Bharat's return to Ayodhya, Ram felt that the Rishis were feeling insecure with fear and were thinking of migrating to some other - place. These people appeared to be apprehensive on account of Ram. Noting this, Ram asked an old sage of the place whether there was anything in their behaviour that made the people suspicious. The old sage replied that the Rakshasas had begun to harass them all the more after the arrival of Ram in the forests. "These Rakshasas create fear in our minds and they generally disturb our yajna. Therefore, we people want to leave this place. Nearby there is another forest with plenty of fruit trees and we all intend to go there. If you want to accompany us you are welcome." Ram tried to persuade them to stay there it self, but the Rishis did not agree. Thus, all the Rishis in that forest left for some other Ashram nearby.

After the Rishis had left the place, Ram thought over the situation and decided to move to some other place, because the forest had become somewhat barren and dirty by the trampling of horses, elephants, etc., and their excreta. So all the three left the place and reached

the Ashram of Atri Muni. Maharishi Atri gave them a warm welcome and asked his wife, Anusuya, to take Sita with her to the inner part of the Ashram. She praised Sita for being indeed a virtuous wife for accompanying Ram to the forests and instructed Sita about her duties to her husband. Sita told Anusuya that her advice was really proper and that she was given a similar advice by her mother at the time of marriage, as also by mother Kaushalya when they set off to the forests.

Anusuya was pleased to hear such nice words from Sita and told her to ask for any boon that she might desire. Sita was surprised to hear this and replied that all her wishes had been fulfilled because of her pleasure. Anusuya insisted on giving some gifts to her and Sita gladly accepted some clothes, garlands, etc.

They spent the night in the Ashram. In the morning, as usual they finished their daily routine of bath, yajna, Sandhya, etc., and asked the Rishis' permission to leave. The Rishis told Ram that the forest further on was infested with Rakshasas and whenever they get any opportunity, they pounced on a lonely person and killed him. They requested Ram to kill these Rakshasas. They pointed out the direction to

Dandakaranya and Shri Ram, Lakshaman and Sita entered the forest, while the Rishis and Munis chanted Swastivachan wishing for their safety and welfare.

शृण्वन्तु शृण्वन्तु ब्राह्मणा वदन्त्वहर्निशं श्रुतं च श्रुतम्।  
दास्यन्तु भुवि वेदान्तं विद्वद्भिर्विमलं वपुः॥

# ARANYA KAND



## Ram's Vow to Destroy Rakshasas

Entering Dandakaranya, Ram saw many groups of Ashramas, in which all the living beings took shelter. They were clean and were full of deer and birds of many kinds, besides trees and various kinds of flower plants. There were plenty of vegetables and fruits. Pieces of wood, suitably hewn for yajna, could also be seen lying here and there. Both the brothers took off the strings of their bows.

When the Rishis saw Ram, Lakshaman and Sita coming, they rushed to welcome them and happily took them as their guests to their cottage. They gave them water, roots and fruits to eat. They said, “O Ram, you are a Kshatriya and our king and we are your subjects. You should protect our lives, whether we dwell in the forests or the towns.”

The three spent the night there and early next morning they took leave of the Rishis and resumed their journey. Soon they were confronted by a great Rakshasa. Seeing Ram, Lakshaman and Sita, he attacked them and lifted Sita physically. As he was running away with Sita, he said, “You ascetics with

matted hair! How dare you enter this forest? You are apparelled like ascetics. Then why are you living with a woman? Both of you are sinners and are spoiling the sanctity of the society of Munis.

“I am Viradh and wander in this forest. This beautiful woman would be my wife. I shall kill you both in battle.” Sita was afraid. Seeing Sita in his clutches, Ram too felt sad and expressed his anguish to Lakshaman. This brought tears in Lakshaman’s eyes too. But he said, “Why are you perplexed, when I am here as your servant? I shall kill him soon.”

Viradh told them to run away, leaving Sita behind. This angered Ram and soon he attacked the Rakshasa with arrows. Viradh put Sita down and ran towards Ram and Lakshaman with a trident in hand. Ram at once cut the trident into two with an arrow and the two brothers challenged him with their swords, attacking him with all their strength. He caught hold of the two brothers with his hands and lifting them wanted to go. Sita got very much terrified and weeping bitterly cried, “This dreadful Rakshasa is taking away Ram and Lakshaman and now the wild animals of the forest will eat me up.”

The two brothers then wrenched off his arms and threw him on the ground. As the Rakshasa fell on the

ground, he felt immense pain and became unconscious. The two brothers tried their best to kill him. He was badly wounded but would not die. Ram then said to Lakshaman, “This Rakshasa is not being killed by any weapon; hence let us bury him in the ground. Dig up a large pit here.” In the meanwhile, Ram kept his neck pressed with his foot and Lakshaman dug a pit large enough to bury him, just close to the place he was lying. When the pit was dug, he was pushed into it.

Ram then embraced Sita and proceeded towards the Ashram of Sharbhang. When Ram reached his Ashram, the Rishi was doing yajna. Ram and Lakshaman touched his feet and said, “We want to live in this forest. Please guide us to some suitable place.” Sharbhang said, “O Ram! a Rishi known as Sutikshana lives at a little distance in this forest; he will arrange some place for you. Walking up along the river Mandakini, you will soon reach his Ashram. But stay for a while as I want to give up this old body of mine.” So saying, the Rishi Sharbhang kindled a big fire and with ghee performed a yajna chanting the verses from the Vedas and then jumped into it. Soon the fire consumed his body. Ram, Lakshaman and Sita were amazed to see this.

After the demise of Rishi Sharbhang, many ascetics living there came and collected in large numbers near Ram and said, “O Ram! you are the king of this earth and we have all come to you to beg something for which we seek your forgiveness. A king, who charges taxes and does not give proper protection to his subjects, is a sinner. But one who, looks after the people like his own children, gets name and fame. A king who protects the Rishis, Munis, sages and saints who spend their time in the forests living on roots and fruits, gets one-fourth of the virtue earned by them. Here we the Brahmins, Vanprasthis are living like orphans and the Rakshasas are killing us day and night we are unable to continue in this manner. You should protect our lives.”

Ram replied, “It is not proper for you to request me, as I am at your command. You should think that I have come to the forests only for doing your work. I shall kill the Rakshasas in the battle-field. Soon you will see the valour of my brother Lakshaman also.” Thus Ram assured them of his protection. Then all of them proceeded towards the Ashram of Sutikshana.

Going far away from the Ashram of Sharbhang and crossing many deep rivers on the way, Ram saw the Ashram of Sutikshana at a lonely place. They went into the Ashram and Ram bowed at the Rishi's feet, announcing his name. Sutikshana got up and embraced Ram and said, "O Ram! you may all live here in this Ashram, as I do not want to live here any longer." After the evening sandhya, yajna, etc., the Rishi gave them roots and fruits to eat. Thus the three spent the night in the Ashram.

In the morning they did their usual routine and Ram then spoke to Rishi Sutikshana, asking his permission to proceed on their pilgrimage. They bowed at his feet and took leave of him. On the way, Sila said to Ram, "O Ram! you are going to commit a very terrible sin by killing blameless people, as you have taken a vow to kill the Rakshasas of Dandakaranya to protect the Rishis. You are going to Dandakaranya with Lakshaman with this aim. I do not like the idea as I do not think it proper to kill anyone without any fault. The duties of a kshatriya are quite distinct from the duties of

an ascetic. You may, therefore, give up the idea of killing the Rakshasas till you become a kshatriya on return to Ayodhya. So long as you are in the forests, you should live like an ascetic. I have said all this according to the variable nature of women. Otherwise, who can tell you what is right and what is wrong? However, you may do as you think best.”

Ram replied, “O Sila, whatever has been said by you is reasonable. It is just like you to have spoken such wise words. You have just said that a kshatriya dons weapons to establish justice, so that the strong may not trouble the weak. And so many ascetics living in the forest have appealed to me with one voice that I along with my brother Lakshaman should protect them and I have accordingly promised to do so. I cannot do other wise because truth has always been dear to me. Even without their asking, I should protect them, but now I have given them a promise as well. Nonetheless, your words reveal your affection for me, and I feel grateful.”

With these words\* Ram, Lakshaman and Sita went forward into the forest. Going quite far away, they saw a place where many Brahmins and Rishis were living. There were many Ashrams and cottages of the Rishis and the three spent a few months with one and a few

months with another. In this way, ten years passed. Then they returned to the Ashram of Sutik- Shana and spent some time there again. While they were with Sutikshana, Ram asked him about the whereabouts of Mahrishi Agastya's Ashram. Knowing the details, they took leave of Sutikshana and proceeded towards the Ashram of Rishi Agastya.

When they had covered some distance enjoying the beauty of nature, they saw smoke of yajna rising io the sky and also the garments of the Rishis spread on the trees for drying up. Ram said to Lakshaman, "Dear Brother, we are now nearing the Ashram of Mahrishi Agastya and our stay here would be of great help to us. You may, therefore, go ahead and inform the Rishis of our arrival."

Lakshaman hastened to the Ashram with quick paces. On reaching the Ashram he told a disciple of Mahrishi Agastya to inform the Rishi about their arrival; he said "I am the younger brother of Ram and my name is Lakshaman; Ram and his wife Sita are coming and we have come to the forests on the orders of our father. We all want to to see the Mahrishi."

The disciple went into the yajnasala and informed the Rishi about their arrival. The Rishi said, “It is our good luck that Ram has come to see me after many years; I too had a great desire to see him. Now, go and bring them here with due respect.” The disciple went out at once and got them in with due reverence. Ram and Lakshaman touched the feet of the Rishi, who welcomed them and offered them water, etc.

Rishi Agastya now spoke to Shri Ram, “A man who does not offer food to his guests and ascetics, but eats alone, eats his own flesh in the next world. You are the monarch of the earth, and a great warrior and have come to my Ashram as my dear guest.” He then gave them roots and fruits to eat. Thereafter, the Rishi gave them some arms and weapons, which were unique in character and gave training to both the brothers in their usage. The Rishi also gave his blessings, “O Ram, May you be victorious in war and put these on like Indra.”

Ram said to Muni Agastya, “I consider myself fortunate and am greatly obliged to you that you are happy and fully satisfied with me. Now please tell me a suitable place where we may set up an Ashram for ourselves to spend a part of our exile.” Hearing these words of Ram, Muni Agastya thought for a while and

then said, “O Son, about ten miles from here, you will find a place known as Panchvati. It is full of fruit trees and there is plenty of water also. There you may build your Ashram and spend the remaining period of your exile.”

Both the princes took leave of Agastya Rishi and along with Sita left for Panchvati. On the way, they saw a giantly figure and considering him to be a supporter of the Rakshasas, asked him who he was. Very politely, he told Ram, “O Son, consider me a friend of your father. My name is Jatayu. I was the ruler of Gridhrakoot State. My State was forcibly seized by Ravana and I was ousted. My people too were dislocated.”

Shri Ram paid due respect to him, considering him a friend of his father. Jatayu told Ram that he would help them during their exile, in case he wanted. He said that it was a very dreadful forest and many wild animals and Rakshasas roamed about. He also offered to look after Sita’s safety when he and Lakshaman were away. Shri Ram, Lakshaman and Sita accompanied by Jatayu went to Panchvati, where Lakshaman, after they had selected a suitable place, built an Ashram that appeared quite good. Thus, they began to live at Panchvati.

It is right to point out here for the benefit of the readers that Jatayu, who was a king, has been shown as a bird by some writers. It is incorrect and inconceivable, as a bird cannot talk and play the role that Jatayu played in trying to stop Ravana from abducting Sita. Moreover, he himself says that he is a friend of Raja Dasharath. This should convince all, as names like Jatayu are still found everywhere. Ramayana is a historical epic and we should try to understand it in the proper spirit.

ब्राह्मणस्य शिखा श्वेता रक्तं लोहितशालिनी।  
कृष्णं पीतं च वस्त्रं तु सर्वदेहीनां द्विजातीनाम्॥

## Shoorpanakha Episode

Mahatma Ram, with Sita and Lakshaman, spent the whole of Sharad Ritu living in Panchvati. Then came in its order the Hemant Ritu, which is immediately followed by Basant, i.e., spring season. One day when Ram was going to the river Godavari for a bath, Lakshaman and Sita following, Lakshaman said, “\*0 Ram, your favourite season has come and the forest, with its vegetation, appears to be decorated. In this season there is plenty of cow-milk, curd etc. but because of winter the skin becomes somewhat dry and tanned as well.”

Lakshaman continued, “There in Ayodhya, brother Bharat is also doing severe penance because of separation from you. He has given up all pleasures and lives on roots and fruits. Besides, he sleeps on bare ground, taking to a life of penance and asceticism. How must he be passing his days of hardship in this severe winter? He is leading an austere life follow—ing your

example and has willingly given up all the comforts of life that are available to a ruler. But it is difficult to understand how mother Kaikeyi became so cruel-hearted, when her husband Raja Dasharath and her son Bharat are so gentle?”

Lakshaman uttered these sentiments because of his love for Ram, but it became difficult for Ram to tolerate the slandering of Kaikeyi and he said, “O Lakshaman, you should not say such things about mother Kaikeyi though you may praise Bharat as much as you like. Though I have decided to stay in the forests for fourteen years, yet when I think of Bharat’s love, I feel unhappy.” Thus talking the two brothers and Sita reached Godavari, where they had their bath.

After bath, the three returned to their Ashram and performed Sandhya, yajna and related the many stories of sages and saints, Rishis and Munis.

When they were thus talking, a Rakshasi, named Shoorpanakha, came there. She was the sister of Ravana. Her husband having been killed in a war, she was now a widow. She was very young and beautiful. She had long nails; that is why she was known as Shoorpanakha, meaning a person who has long nails.

Seeing Ram who was very handsome in all respects, she fell in love with him as if Cupid had worked on her. Love-stricken, she came to Ram and asked, “In the garden of ascetics, duly armed, and accompanied by a woman, why have you come here into the region of Rakshasas?”

Shri Ram as usual began to tell her the story of his exile. “I am Ram, the son of Raja Dasharath. This is my younger brother Lakshaman, and the woman is my wife, Sita. Please let us know about you: who you are whose wife you are and with what purpose you have come here?”

To the questions posed by Ram, the Rakshasi replied, “O Ram, I shall give you my introduction correctly. My name is Shoorpanakha and I roam about in the forest according to my own whim and fancy. Ravana, well-known throughout the world, is my brother. One of my brothers is Kumbhakama and another one is known as Vibhishana. The other two brothers are great warriors Khar and Dushan. I have fallen in love with you at first sight I do not care for anything except that you be my husband. Sita is no good for you. Considering my exceptional beauty, I am more suitable to you than Sita. Hence you may regard me as your wife.

Hearing this, Ram said, “O Devi, I am married and this wife is very dear to me. Moreover, it will be very painful to you to live with a co-wife. My younger brother, Lakshaman, is very handsome and brave and at this time wifeless. He is young and considering your beauty, he will be an ideal husband for you.”

Hearing these words of Ram, Shoorpanakha immediately went near Lakshaman and said, “O Lakshaman, my looks are as good as yours. I am worthy of being your wife. Having made me your wife, you can live in this forest happily.” Lakshaman replied, “O Beauty, why do you want to become a slave by becoming my wife, as I am a servant of my elder brother? In case you become the wife of my elder brother, you will be the second wife of Ram and all your wishes will be fulfilled.”

On being directed by Lakshaman thus, she again approached Ram and said, “O Ram, you are not giving any respect to me, because of your first wife, who is so ugly. I shall kill and eat this woman just now and then we will live happily together.” Saying this, she pounced

upon Sita with burning eyes; Ram stopped the Rakshasi with an angry shout and said to Lakshaman, “O Lakshaman, we should not jest with such uncivilized persons; we should now think of protecting Sita. You make her ugly by maiming her.”

At these words of Shri Ram, Lakshaman at once took out his sword from the scabbard and cut off the nose and ears of Shoorpanakha.

Here for the information of the readers, it is pertinent to point out that some writers have written that when Shoorpanakha approached Lakshaman at the behest of Ram, Lakshaman addresses her as mother, saying that since she intended to marry his elder brother, she was like his mother; and in such a situation it was impossible for him to marry her. Well, Valmiki has not mentioned this. About the episode of mutilating her by cutting off her nose and ears, some people think that this action should be interpreted metaphorically. Cutting off (a person's) nose is a proverbial way of saying that he has been insulted. So Shoorpanakha was merely insulted. But Valmiki has written about her mutilation, i.e., her nose and ears were actually cut off with a sword by Lakshaman.

There have been quite a many interpolations in Ramayana and it may be that Ram and Lakshaman never disfigured Shoorpanakha, but only drove her away insulting her. Since she had attacked not Ram and Lakshaman but Sita, they might have thwarted the attack and driven her away without in any way harming her bodily. This version appears to be more in consonance with the dignity of Ram and Lakshaman, who were Kshatriya princes.

Shoorpanakha ran away from Panchvati Ashram of Ram weeping bitterly and fell down on the ground on reaching the place where her supporters Rakshasas were living. On being questioned by Khar, she narrated the entire episode, she did not tell them about her amorous advances. She simply said that she had been disgraced and insulted by the two princes at the instigation of a woman with them. She told them that it was their duty to avenge the insult they have dared to heap on her. Khar at once ordered fourteen Rakshasas to go well armed and kill Ram, Lakshaman and Sita. They immediately went to the Ashram of Ram, accompanied by Shoorpanakha.

Seeing them, Ram gave them a warning, “In case you want to fight, stand where you are. Otherwise, you may run away and save your life.” Hearing this, they spoke out angrily in unison, “You have offended our master and we are going to kill you.” They raised their weapons to attack Ram, but Ram killed all of them in no time with his arrows. Shoorpanakha was aghast at the spectacle and went back crying to Khar. She described to him how Ram had killed the fourteen Rakshasas sent to avenge her insult. “I have come here again to say that if you cannot kill even these two men Ram and Lakshaman, you better leave Dandakaranya and go some where else,” she added in indignation.

When Shoorpanakha gave such a harsh rebuke to Khar before other Rakshasas, he said angrily, “I do not care for Ram. He will have to pay for this audacity with his life. Now stop crying and get ready to drink the hot blood of Ram.” Shoorpanakha expressed joy at these words. Khar said to his commander Dushan, “I order you to raise an army of fourteen thousand Rakshasas for the battle, as I want to lead this great army to kill Ram.”

In this way, Khar and Dushan started with their Rakshasas for a showdown with the two brothers, Ram and Lakshaman. Seeing this large army of Rakshasas, Ram told Lakshaman, “It is now time for you to go with your bow and arrows to a mountain cave with Sita. I do not want to listen to anything. Just hurry up. Undoubtedly, you can kill all these, but I want to kill them myself.”

Lakshaman accompanied by Sita went into a mountain cave. Ram was happy at this and got ready with bow and arrows. When Khar arrived there, he saw Ram ready to fight. Khar ordered the driver of his chariot to take him before Ram, where Khar used all his skill to torment Ram with his arrows. Ram cut all his arrows and killed the vast army, consisting of elephants, horses and foot soldiers of Rakshasas. Seeing this destruction of the Rakshasas, Dushan attacked Ram and many Rakshasas also converged on Ram, attacking him from all sides. But Ram was so agile that an infinite number of arrows appeared to be heading in all directions from his bow, thus killing the Rakshasas in large numbers.

Ram now thought of killing Dushan and he destroyed his chariot along with the driver and the horses. Dushan picked a mace to attack Ram, but Ram immediately cut both his hands with two arrows and the Rakshasa fell down on the ground. Seeing Dushan dead, Khar became very angry and shouted at his generals to surround Ram and kill him. They acted accordingly, but Ram killed all the Rakshasas in no time, thus annihilating fourteen thousand Rakshasas. Some people may doubt how one man can kill such a big army. But to my mind, Ram may be in possession of a particular weapon, the release of which could cause destruction of all.

Only Trishira and Khar remained alive. When Khar wanted to come forward to fight with Ram, Trishira requested Khar to allow him first and give him the opportunity to kill Ram. So, Trishira went ahead and there ensued a fierce battle between the two. Ram at last destroyed his chariot along with the driver and horses, not allowing Trishira to jump out but killing him also. Khar was afraid to see this destruction, but came forward to fight with Ram and there ensued a terribly fierce battle.

Khar, with the skill of his hand, cut the bow of Ram close to the point where he was holding it. Ram at once took out the famous Vaishnav bow given to him by Mahrishi Agastya and darted arrows towards Khar, destroying his chariot, horses and the driver. Khar took up a mace in his hand and got ready to fight. Ram then reproached Khar for his devilish tendencies and tormenting the Rishis, Munis, sages and saints, committing heinous crimes and enormous sins. He said that he had been sent there by Raja Dasharath to rid the Dandakaranya of the Rakshasas and he was going to kill them all.

Khar was angered by the harsh words of Ram and attacked Ram with his mace, but Ram cut it into pieces with a counterblow.

Khar then uprooted a tree, and hurled it at Ram with great force, but Ram aimed his arrows in such a way that the tree was cut to pieces in midway. Ram now shot some arrows at Khar, wounded him badly and he began to bleed all over. Khar in rage ran towards Ram,

but Ram took a few paces backwards and aimed an arrow at his chest that killed him instantaneously. Khar thus fell down dead. The Rishis and Munis were pleased with this and told Ram that the Dandak forest was now free of the Rakshasas and they would be able to live there in peace.

The Rishis and Munis showered flowers on Ram, as they were surprised to see that Ram was able to kill the fourteen thousand strong army of the Rakshasas only in an hour or so. Lakshaman accompanied by Sita came out of the cave and reached the Ashram. Sita was immensely pleased with this act of Ram and embraced him.

### Ravana Informed

A Rakshasa named Akampan went to Lanka immediately and told Ravana, “O Rajan, all the Rakshasas living in our Janpad Base in Dan-dakaranya have been killed in a battle. Somehow I was saved and come here to inform you.” Hearing these words from Akampan, Ravana, with eyes red with rage, said, “Who has destroyed my beautiful Janpad Base? Does he not want to live any more?”

Akampan was frightened and asked for amnesty in order to tell him all the details. Ravana granted him amnesty and Akampan began to speak thus, “Maharaj! a handsome young man Ram, son of Raja Dasharath, has killed Khar and Dushan and all the Rakshasas.” Ravana said, “I shall go to Janpad Base and kill the two Ram and Lakshaman myself.” At this Akampan told Ravana that Ram was very powerful and brave; he was so skilled in warfare that he could stop the flow of a river.

He said that he was afraid he might not be able to vanquish Ram in a battle. There was only one way to kill him. Ram's wife Sita was most beautiful, young and charming. If somehow Ravana abducted her, Ram would die because of separation of her.

Ravana liked the idea and told Akampan that he would do so. Accordingly Ravana rode in a chariot and after traversing a long distance reached the ashram of Marich, who welcomed Ravana by offering him water and then asked him the purpose of his coming, saying that Ravana's sudden and hasty arrival had made him apprehensive. At this, Ravana said, "Ram has killed all my Rakshasas in Janpad Base and has destroyed the place. I will abduct Sita, the wife of Ram, and you help me in this act"

Marich said, "Whosoever has given you this counsel cannot be your friend, but an enemy in the garb of a friend. I am certain that it will spark a fire that will annihilate the entire race of the Rakshasas. Remember that none can face Ram in a battle. You should return to Lanka in case you want to live in peace." Ravana returned to Lanka on being told by Marich about the ruinous course he was going to adopt,

Shoorpanakha seeing that the fourteen thousand strong army of Rakshasas including Khar, Dushan and Trishira had been destroyed by Ram single-handed, was perplexed and rushed to Lanka. She went to Ravana's palace and said, "O Ravana! Intoxicated with power, you are oblivious of the danger threatening your kingdom. Your messengers do not keep you informed well. How can you rule with so many people being against you? Has it come to your knowledge that Ram alone has killed Khar, Dushan and Trishira with their fourteen thousand strong Rakshasa army? A king who is negligent of his duty soon finds his rule coming to an end."

Ravana angrily asked her who Ram was. Shoorpanakha then related the whole story, saying, "Ram is accompanied by his younger brother Lakshaman, who is very brave and is his right hand. Besides, Ram's wife who is exquisitely beautiful is also with him. She is marvellous in beauty and there is none that can match her in any respect of loveliness. She is suitable to be your wife. When I tried to bring her for you, Lakshaman cut off my nose and ears. In case you heed my advice, then you seize Sita and make her your wife."

Knowing the details from Shoorpanakha, Ravana consulted his ministers and having decided the course of action, set off to the Ashram of Marich.

Some people think that the modern Bombay was the place where Marich was living; that is why it is called Mohamayipur. Marich was surprised to see Ravana back again so soon and asked Ravana the reason thereof. Ravana then said to Marich—“As I told you before also, Ram has killed Khar, Dushan and Trishira, with their fourteen thousand Rakshasas. He is cruel and characterless, foolish and greedy besides being proud of his strength as without any reason whatsoever he cut off the nose and ears of my sister. In revenge, I want to abduct his beautiful wife Sita and you help me in this act. There is none equal to you in valour and strength, as also in conjuring up and changing your form and voice skilfully. Therefore, listen to what I say, “You become a golden deer and go before Sita. Seeing you, Sita will definitely request Ram and Lakshaman to catch hold of the deer. When they go out of the Ashram to catch hold of you, I shall abduct Sita.”

Marich was afraid of death on hearing of Ravana’s plan he said, “People who talk sweetly are available in plenty in this world, but it is hard to come by such people who say and listen to unpleasant and beneficial

words. You do not know Ram, who has got all the qualities of a noble and virtuous man. He has not been ousted by his father for any lapse on his part; he is neither greedy, nor characterless. He is not cruel. On the contrary he tries to do good to everybody. He is not foolish either. All your prattle about him is baseless. He is truthful and none can match him in valour. Why do you want to do this useless drama? You cannot save your life in case you face him in battle. If you want to live happily in peace, never think of opposing Ram.”

The pleading of Marich with Ravana was in vain, as he was not prepared to listen to any advice. In fact, he spoke harshly to Marich, “O Marich, whatever you have said against my wish is like sowing seed in a fallow land. You cannot stop me from fighting with that foolish fellow Ram. You will see that I shall abduct Sita, as it is my decided view that cannot be changed. I have not asked you for any advice in this matter. I only say that you help me in this task. In case you are unwilling to do so, I shall kill you just now. You will have to help me even if against your wishes.”

When Ravana gave this royal order, Marich fearlessly told him, “O Ravana, who has shown you the door to death? T feel certain that some sinful individual

has given you this evil counsel and it will result in the annihilation of the entire Rakshasa race. I know I will die, but I do not feel sorry about it. But the fact that you and all the Rakshas as are going to die, makes me sad indeed. Ram will kill you without delay, after killing me.”

Having said these harsh words, Marich told Ravana, “Come, let us go.” Ravana was pleased to hear this and embracing Marich said, “This is now like you. Before this I considered you an ordinary Rakshasa, but now you have come in your true colour. Come with me to the aeroplane.”

Thereafter Marich and Ravana proceeded towards the Ashram of Ram in Dandakaranya. Reaching there, they saw Ram’s Ashram and getting down at a suitable place, Ravana took Marich’s hand in his own and said, “You see Ram’s Ashram there half hidden behind a cluster of trees; do the work for which we have come here.”

Marich turned himself into a golden deer and began to stroll at the gate of Ram’s Ashram. Just at the same time, Sita came out to pluck some flowers and saw the golden deer, who was nibbling nearby in the bushes. Sita was surprised to see such a beautiful deer.

## Abduction of Sita

Sita, seeing the deer, called out loudly to Ram and Lakshaman to come out with their weapons. Both the brothers reached the place where Sita was and saw the beautiful deceptive deer. Lakshaman had some doubts about the identity of the deer. He said, “O Brother, to me it appears that Rakshasa Marich has come in the form of a deer. Such a deer has never been seen before in this world. I am sure it is some kind of pretence.” Sita, being bewitched by the deer’s beauty, intervened and said smilingly, “O Aryaputra, this beautiful deer is very attractive; you catch hold of it alive and we will play with it. I have never seen such a deer before. What a charm it is lending to the peaceful forest! It is incomparable and its beauty and loveliness has charmed me greatly. If caught alive, we will take it to Ayodhya, where it will be an attraction in the inner apartments and a source of amusement to us. In case, it is killed, its skin can be used for the purpose of sitting.”

Shri Ram also liked the idea and said to Lakshaman, “In my absence, you look after Sita with your arms and weapons carefully.” Ram then took his sword also, with bow and arrows and ran after the deer. Seeing Rain coming towards him, Marich went in hiding for a few moments and again came out. Thus, playing hide-and-seek, the deer took Ram quite far away from the Ashram. When Ram saw that he was being deceived, he thought of killing the deer and aimed an arrow at him. Hit by the arrow, Marich fell down on the ground. He made a loud noise and gave up his garb of deer. Then he remembered the order of Ravana. Imitating the voice of Ram, he called out loudly—“Ha Lakshaman! Ha Sita!” in a piteous tone. Hearing this, Ram was afraid and he immediately turned back towards the Ashram.

There when Sita heard the piteous cry in the voice of Ram, she said to Lakshaman, “Please go to see if all is well with Ram. You should go at once to help him as he seems to be in trouble.” But when Lakshaman did not stir out of the Ashram, because of the strict instructions of Ram, Sita became angry and said to

Lakshaman, “You are an enemy of your brother in the guise of a friend, as you are not going to help him even in such adverse circumstances. You are greedy and want to get me. I do not think you love your brother. In fact you wish that he may die.”

Finding Sita afraid like a doe, Lakshaman said to her, “Oh Sita! None can ever defeat Ram; hence leave all your worry and keep your heart sound. Your husband will come back soon after killing the deer. The piteous voice was not that of Ram; it was a decoy. I cannot leave you alone here as Mahatma Ram has left you in my trust.”

Sita’s eyes became red with anger on hearing the above words of Lakshaman, and she spoke harshly to him, “Oh Lakshaman! your intentions seem to be bad. But I will frustrate your evil intention and will die by drowning myself in the Godavari or in any other way. I cannot live on this earth without Ram even for a moment.”

Lakshaman then said to Sita with folded hands, “I cannot reply to all that you have said, as I revere you like my mother, but I cannot tolerate such a blame also. I have no desire to go, yet because of your insistence, I

am going to see Ram. May the gods protect you and look after your safety.” So saying, Lakshaman went in the direction in which Ram had gone in pursuit of the deer Marieh.

Here I may tell the readers that it is commonly believed that before departing, Lakshaman had drawn a line around Sita in order to ensure her safety, telling Sita not to stir out of the line. The line was of such a nature that none could enter the enclosure by crossing it, as it would instantly explode and kill the intruder. But Sita could come out crossing it, without any harm. However, we find no mention of it either in Valmiki Ramayana or in Ram Charit Manas of Tulsidas. How did this idea of the ‘Laksha- man-Rckha’ got into circulation? All the same, there can be two versions of it:

- This line had some scientific explosive substance that had some place for exit and none for entry. In Mahabharat also, if I remember aright, Bhagwan Krishna did something similar around the battle-field of Kurukshetra, in order to ensure that the poisonous gas of the arms and weapons did not leak out.

- The right advice given by Lakshaman to Sita that Ram was invincible and Sita need not have any fear and there was no question of his going to help Ram, has been construed in an allegorical language as “Lakshaman-Rekha” which Sita crossed and came to grief as a consequence thereof.

As soon as Lakshaman left the Ashram, Ravana came out of his hiding in the garb of a Sanyasi and approached Sita, reciting Veda-Mantras. He said to Sita, “Oh beautiful lady, who are you and from where have you come to this Dandak forest and for what reason? Why are you here all alone at a place frequented by Rakshasas?” Seeing Ravana as a Sanyasi, Sita behaved with him as if he was an honourable guest and replied, “I am the daughter of Raja Janak. My name is Sita and I am the wife of Shri Ram. When we were married, my husband was twenty-five years old and I was eighteen. We spent twelve years in Ayodhya thereafter. At the beginning of the thirteenth year, Maharaj Dasharath in consultation with all others, thought of crowning Ram as Yuvaraj, but mother Kaikeyi, seeking fulfilment of two boons from Maharaj Dasharath, asked that Bharat be crowned instead and Ram be exiled for fourteen

years. Thus, Ram, his younger brother Lakshaman and my self are here and keep wandering in the forest, you may take rest in the meanwhile as my husband and his brothers are likely to come back soon.”

Sita then asked Ravana his introduction. At this Ravana said to Sita in a somewhat harsh tone, “O Sita! I am the king of Rakshasas, whose fear is instilled in the minds of all. I am well known all over the world for my prowess. I have been bedazzled by your beauty and charm. I have many beautiful women in my palace and you will be the chief amongst them all. My Lanka situated atop a hill is surrounded by sea. When you enjoy the comforts and luxuries of that place with me, you will not like to live here with Ram.”

Sita spoke courageously because of her purity and told Ravana disdainfully, “I am the wife of Ram, who is like Indra in all respects. You are like a jackal and wish to get a lioness. It appears that your death is near. You are desirous of happiness but you are reaching out for poison. You do not understand me and my husband. That is why you are talking in this manner.”

Ravana got enraged at such insulting words of Sila and said, “Oh Beauty, I am the brother of Kuber and the whole world trembles with fear at the mention of my name. All Gods including Indra run away when they see me. Across the seas, there is my beautiful Lanka, full of brave Rakshasas. Come along with me and live there enjoying all that you deserve because of your beauty, charm and youthfulness. You will forget these ordinary people in no time. Why should you live with one who has been exiled? Isn't it your good fortune that though a monarch I have been love-stricken by you and have come to you personally. You should accept me.”

Sita became furious, her eyes red with anger and she replied, “You are doing such a sinful act, even though you are the brother of Kuber! In case you persist in your misadventure, you with all your kith and kin shall die. Your death is near at hand and Ram will never spare you.”

Seeing the obduracy of Sita, Ravana caught hold of Sita from her hair with his left hand and lifting her bodily took to the chariot-aeroplane. At that time, Sita piteously cried, loudly “Hai Ram! Hai Ram!” Ravana at once took off to the skies, Sita crying loudly “Oh Ram! Oh Lakshaman! where are you, whilst I am being taken

away forcibly by this demon?” Sita saw Maharaj Jatayu, sitting in the shade of trees, somewhat sleeping. She called out to him, “Oh Arya Jatayu! see, this cruel Rakshasa Ravana is taking me away. You may possibly be not able to prevent him from doing so, but tell Ram and Lakshaman all about it.”

Hearing the piteous cries of Sita, Jatayu got up and challenged Ravana, “Oh Ravana! How come, you are committing such a despicable sin? You want to abduct the wife of Ram. A king like you should not commit such a heinous crime. Rather, it is your duty to protect the women of Royal families. You are the grandson of Pulastya Rishi and forgetting the reputation of your forefathers, you are bent upon doing such crimes that may cause your destruction. Though I am old and you are young, and though you are in your chariot, well-armed, I will not let you proceed, as I cannot allow Sita being taken away forcibly before my eyes. Hence, stay a while if you are a brave warrior and fight with me.”

Ravana could not tolerate these piercing words of Jatayu and attacked him with his sword. For a little while, both of them had a tough fight, but ultimately Ravana cut off both the shoulders, arms and feet of Jatayu with his sword. Jatayu fell down on the ground

like a dead person and seeing this Sita began to cry more piteously, called loudly “Hai Ram! Hai Lakshaman!” and Ravana continued his journey in the sky with Sita crying all the while.

Sita said to Ravana, “Oh you mean rascal! You do not feel ashamed,, abducting me like a thief. What bravery have you shown, about which you were bragging before? Fie on your character that you are spoiling the name of your family! You cannot remain alive if Ram and Lakshaman see you.” Sita saw some people sitting on a hill-top. She immediately took off some of her ornaments, tied them in a silken cloth and dropped the bundle down, with the hope that these people would tell Ram about her abduction. Ravana could not see this and soon he was in Lanka. He straight went to the inner apartments where he kept Sita as a prisoner.

### Ram's Ashram Desolate

Having kept Sita in the inner apartments, Ravana called eight brave Rakshasas and said to them, "Oh Rakshasas equip your selves with arms and weapons; go soon to the Janshan and kill Ram somehow." Thus, Ravana thought that he had been successful in his mission. Remembering Sita, Ravana entered the apartments where Sita was lodged. He saw Sita sitting in the midst of Rakshasis. He then showed Sita, against her wish, the beauty and splendour of Lanka, the pillars of which were made of gold and studded with jewels. There were enchanting pools and fountains, with beautiful flowers and birds chirping.

Ravana then told Sita that there was none in the world who could equal him in bravery and valour. What was the use of her pining away for Ram, who was wandering in the forests? He told Sita that her youthfulness « was transitory and it. Was time for her to eat, drink and be merry, enjoying all that she could well in time? He told her that she should give up all hopes of Ram ever meeting her as it was impossible for him to be

there in Lanka, across the seas. He also told Sita about the Pushpak Viinan that he possessed in which they could roam about all over the world.

Sita covered her face and began to weep bitterly. Ravana told Sita that there was nothing to be ashamed of, as according to the scriptures, his love towards Sita would consummate in marriage. Ravana cajoled Sita in many ways and thought that Sita was then completely in his possession.

Sita picked a piece of straw and keeping this in between, spoke fearlessly, “Oh Rakshasa, your death is near at hand. As a sinful person cannot touch the yajna-vesseis, similarly you dare not touch me. You may cut and eat up my body, as I do not want to protect it any more.”

Ravana got enraged and gave an ultimatum to Sita saying that if she did not accept him within a period of twelve months, her body would be cut into pieces and cooked for his breakfast. Havana then ordered the Rakshasis to break Sita’s pride. They immediately surrounded Sita. While going, Ravana told them take Sita to Ashok Vatika and persuade her somehow to accept him. The Rakshasis took Sita to Ashok Vatika.

There in Dandakaranya, Ram immediately walked back towards his Ashram. While walking, he thought that as Marich had called out loudly imitating his voice, “Ha Lakshaman! Ha Sita!” Lakshaman would be coming to him, leaving Sita alone because of her insistence. It appeared to him that the Rakshasas wanted to kill Sita. With such thoughts, Ram was quickly returning to Jansthan, but on the way he saw Lakshaman coming towards him. When Lakshaman neared Ram, he got hold of Lakshaman's left hand and said, “O Lakshaman, it is very bad on your part to have left Sita all alone. It will not be good for the well-being of Sita. I have little doubt that she should either have been eaten or killed by Rakshasas.”

Hearing these words of Shri Ram, Lakshaman sorrowfully said to his afflicted brother, “I have not willingly come here leaving Sita alone. I was forced to leave her because of her sharp and poignant words. You had loudly called out “Ha Lakshaman! Ha Sita!” which she heard and hearing your piteous call, she began to cry with fear and told me to go to your help immediately. I told Sita that this could not be your voice, as there was none who could defeat you. In spite of this, she, with tears in her eyes, told me that I had sinful intentions towards her and wanted to get her after

your death. She said that I was accompanying you at the instigation of Bharat. That was why I was not going to help you. Such words of Sita. Angered me and I came out of the Ashram.”

Distressed, Shri Ram told Lakshaman that it was not good for him to leave Sita alone, knowing full well that Ram was quite competent to destroy the Rakshasas. Ram then added, “I am not happy with you about it, as your action is quite contrary to prudence, in that you have disobeyed my orders, because of the insistence of Sita.”

Talking thus, both the brothers reached the Ashram and found it empty and the mats, deer-skin and kushasanas lying scattered on the ground. Seeing the empty Ashram, Ram began to wail, “Sita has been misled or killed or eaten up, perhaps she is hiding somewhere or has gone out into the forests. She may have gone to pick flowers or to bring water.” When with all their search, they could not find Sita, Ram’s eyes became red with sorrow and he appeared to be a crazy person. He would go from tree to tree and from bush to bush, asking about the whereabouts of Sita. Ram even asked the deer, the birds and the beasts in the forest to give him some clue about his beloved Sita.

Ram said to Lakshaman, “O Lakshaman, I must have committed some grave sin in my previous birth or even many sins, as a result of which one calamity after another is befalling me. First the crown was seized followed by separation from my people. Then occurred the death of father and now this death blow has been dealt to me. I thought that having come to the forest, I would be able to enjoy peace, but because of Sita’s disappearance, all my sufferings have again been renewed.”

At this juncture, Lakshaman counselled Ram with timely advice, “O Arya! Leave your sorrow and have patience. We have to search Sita with courage and courageous people never lose hope even in dire circumstances.” But Ram gave no heed to Lakshaman’s advice and began to cry bitterly. Lakshaman’s consolation had little effect on Ram.

When Ram saw a herd of deer, he addressed them asking about Sita in a piteous tone. They raised their face skyward and ran towards the south. At this Lakshaman suggested that they should proceed southwards in search of Sita. Possibly, they might be able to find Sita or get some clue. Ram readily agreed to the suggestion and both of them proceeded south ward.

Soon Shri Ram saw the large footprints of some Rakshasa and then the footprints of Sita as if she had tried to run hither and thither with the Rakshasa following her. A little further on, they came across a broken bow and a quiver as well as some broken fragments of a chariot. They also saw the fragments of broken golden ornaments of Sita lying scattered, as also pieces of golden armour.

Soon they saw Jatayu lying on the ground in a pool of blood and Ram cried out, “Lakshaman, there is no doubt now that he has eaten up Sita. In the guise of an ascetic, it is a Rakshasa roaming in the forest. I shall now kill him.” They then proceeded onwards to see him closely. Seeing Ram coming, Jatayu with blood oozing from his mouth, spoke out, “Dear Princes, Sita, for whom you are searching like a medicinal herb in the forest, has been taken away by Ravana, who has also killed me. I have seen Ravana forcibly taking away Sita in your absence. I fought with him in order to save Sita, but could not be successful. His bow and arrows are lying broken, but I got tired and Ravana cut away my hands and shoulders. He then flew away with Sita in the sky. I am already dead, killed by the Rakshasa. It is not proper for you to kill me.”

Hearing the sad tale of Sita from Jatayu and seeing his pitiable condition, Shri Ram began to weep and he embraced Jatayu. Both Ram and Lakshaman lay prostrate on the ground all the time weeping bitterly. Ram lamented in many ways, cursing his luck and saying that even his father's friend Jatayu had been killed because of him. He then asked Jatayu the full details of the abduction of Sita and his fight with Ravana. Seeing Ram in such a pitiable plight, Jatayu spoke in a very feeble voice, "The son of Vishrava, brother of Kuber, Ravana, the king of Rakshasas, has taken away Sita forcibly in an aero-chariot. When I got tired fighting with him, he cut my hands and shoulders and flew away with Sita southwards."

With these words Jatayu breathed his last. Seeing Jatayu lifeless, Ram said to Lakshaman. "O Lakshaman, I am now more troubled with the idea that my father's friend Jatayu lost his life only because of me. He is as revered and respectable to us as our father. Therefore, collect some dry wood, so that we may perform his cremation samskara." Thus, they collected the necessary wood and performed Jatayu's cremation samskara accordingly.

In Ramayana, Ram has been portrayed as an ideal man. But if we closely read Ramayana, we will find many characters in the epic whose conduct and behaviour have been exemplary. From Jatayu's laying down his life for trying to save Sita from Ravana's abduction, we should take a lesson that whenever we see a helpless person in danger, it is our duty to P.O to his help even at the cost of our own life. Nowadays such happenings are on the increase and if people in general come to the rescue of the helpless victim, the evil-doers can come to grief.

Thereafter, the two brothers continued their search, sometime sitting and taking rest and finally reached the forest where the Ashram of Matang Rishi was located. Wandering here and there, they came across a horrible Hiking Rakshasa, known as Kabandha, who caught hold of the two brothers with his hands. They became helpless and were in a very pitiable condition. Kabandha wanted to know their identity and asked them how they had strayed into such a dangerous forest. Ram at this juncture told Lakshman not to be afraid and lose courage, but be prepared to cut the Rakshasa's hand on his side, while he would do the same on his own side. Both of them immediately took out their swords and severed his hands. Kabandha smeared with blood

fell to the ground. He asked them again about their name, etc. and Lakshaman told him all about Ram and his own self. He also told Kabandha about the calamity that had befallen them, as Ram's wife Sita had been abducted and they were searching for her.

Hearing all this, Kabandha told Ram that as he was about to die, they might cremate him. "But before I die, I may tell you that under these circumstances, it would be proper for you to seek the friendship of Sugriva, brother of Bali, who lives with a few of his followers on the beautiful mountain Rishyamooka. Sugriva is a wise man, but he has been ousted from the kingdom by his elder brother Bali, who has disgraced him. Sugriva is truthful, humble and brave. He will be your friend and will help you in searching out Sita. Therefore, you should go westward where you will find a cluster of trees full of flowers."

After performing the cremation rites of Kabandha, who had died soon after, the two brothers proceeded towards the Pampa-pond, as directed by Kabandha and soon they came to the Ashram of Shabari. It was a beautiful Ashram, full of flowers and plants. Shabari was the daughter of a Rishi, who was born of Shudra parents. She was the disciple of Rishi Bharadwaj and

was well-versed in the art of battle and knew the secrets of intricate weapons. She was now very old and when the two princes touched her feet, she gave them blessings, as also offered them water and fruit to eat. According to the common belief, Shabari had kept some tasted plums that she offered to Ram and Lakshaman to eat. It is not correct. Of course, she gave them fruit to eat and that is all. She also gave them some arms and weapons that she had kept especially for them, the training of which she had taken from Bharadwaj Rishi. She then lit a pyre and entered the raging fire, as was the custom in those days when old people, more so Rishis and Munis, living in the forests wanted to end their lives.

The two brothers then left the Ashram and proceeded towards the Pampa-pond, from where they decided to go to the Rishyamooka Mountain, where Sugriva with his followers was living, in order to seek his hand of friendship.

# KISHKINDHA KAND



## Friendship-Treaty with Sugriva

On reaching the Pampa-pond, the two brothers Ram and Lakshaman were enchanted with the beauty and attraction of the lotus flowers and the grove of the trees laden with multi-coloured flowers and leaves. Close to the pond were high-rising mountain peaks that made the beauty of nature very lovely more so as it was spring time. Ram began to Miss Sita all the more and he expressed his thoughts to Lakshaman.

The entire forest appeared elegant, with many kinds of birds chirping, beautiful feathered peacocks dancing. Ram told Lakshaman that to him the forest was no less than heaven itself but his mind was not at rest because of the separation of Sita. Sorrowfully Ram said, “O Lakshaman, when we return to Ayodhya and mother Kaushalya asks me about the whereabouts of Sita, what reply shall I be able to give? You may return to Ayodhya now and see brother Bharat as I cannot live without Sita.”

Lakshaman tried to console Ram, saying that he need not feel sad, as Ravana could not escape in any case. He was sure to be killed. There- Ram should not lose courage and patience. “We must work hard and in liicve the desired end. Nothing is impossible for a courageous and brave 111.HI in this world. We are sure to get back Sita. Give up your sorrow and have faith in your valour,” said Lakshaman. Ram was thus consoled by Lakshaman.

When the two brothers were roaming there duly armed, Sugriva got frigliienced to see them. He said to his Ministers, “These two warriors have certainly been sent by Bali; they have come here in disguise.” Hanuman immediately brushed aside this idea of Sugriva, but Sugriva was still in doubt. He, therefore, asked Hanuman to go and find out all about them.

Hanuman rushed towards the two princes, disguised as a brahmin. He greeted them and began to praise their appearance, handsome face, broad chest and such other attributes that made them resemble gods. He

also asked them why they were attired as ascetics, though fully armed with weapons, bows and arrows. Hanuman then told them about Sugriva and his plight, saying that he had been sent by Sugriva, who wanted to befriend them both.

Shri Ram was very happy to hear these words of Hanuman and said to Lakshaman, “O Lakshaman, he is the Minister of the Vanara-King Sugriva, whom we wanted to meet. He has come to us on his own. You may talk to him sweetly. Hanuman seems to be a very learned man, as none, who is not conversant with the Vedas, can talk in this manner. He should also be well-versed in grammar, since he has not committed even a single error. He knows how to converse and his voice is pleasing. He is a competent messenger.”

Lakshaman then told Hanuman that they knew all about Sugriva and were searching for him. Therefore, as desired by Sugriva, they will also like to be friends with him. On being asked by Hanuman about their identity, Lakshaman narrated the entire episode from beginning to the point where Sita was stolen by Ravana and their wanderings in the forests in search of her.

Hanuman was immensely happy to know that the two princes of Ayodhya were eager to seek friendship of Sugriva and told them that Sugriva too was in need of friends like them, as he had been disgracefully turned out of the kingdom by his elder brother Bali who had become his enemy. Bali had also seized Sugriva's wife and Sugriva because of the fear of Bali had to wander in the forests seeking refuge somehow. He assured them that Sugriva would help them to locate Sita.

The three then went to Sugriva and Hanuman told him about the abduction of Sita by Ravana. He said, "These two brothers, Ram and Lakshaman, are great warriors. They are desirous of your friendship. You should welcome them duly." Sugriva was very happy to hear all this and told Ram that he himself was an ordinary man of Vanara community and it was indeed a great honour that they were desirous of his friendship.

Sugriva then said, "In case you like my friendship, here is my hand stretched; please take this in your hand so that we may be united in a firm bond of friendship." Hearing these words of Sugriva, Ram gladly pressed the hand of Sugriva with his own. He also embraced Sugriva. In the mean while Hanuman brought two wood-pieces (aranis) and rubbing them together

produced fire. Ram and Sugriva circumbulated around the fire, thus consummating the bond of friendship.

Ram then told Sugriva that they were now friends and would equally share the pains and pleasures of each other. Sugriva's eyes began to flow with joyful tears and he told Ram how Bali had deceived him, and seized his wife by force. Being ousted by Bali, Sugriva was in a pitiable condition but he harboured strong resentment against him. Ram assured Sugriva that he need not worry any more, as Ram would kill Bali soon.

Sugriva, in turn, assured Ram that he would be able to find out the whereabouts of Sita and get her restored to Ram. Sugriva then told Ram that it was probably Sita, who was being taken away by some cruel Rakshasa by air. She was weeping bitterly and seeing them sitting there, she had dropped a bundle of ornaments. Ram became eager to see the bundle and Sugriva immediately brought it from within the cave and showed it to Ram. The sight of the ornaments brought tears to Ram's eyes. He asked Lakshaman if he could recognise them. Lakshaman told Ram that he was

unable to say anything about the ear-rings and bracelets, but could clearly recognise the anklets as he used to bow at her feet daily. He confirmed that the anklets belonged to Sita.

From the above, it is clear that Lakshaman had never seen Sita fully in the face, as he regarded Sita like his mother. Ram asked Sugriva about the direction the Rakshasa had taken or if he could tell where this Rakshasa lived, as they would have to kill all the Rakshasas because of his evil deed.

When Ram said such words, Sugriva with tearful eyes said, “I am quite unaware of that sinful Rakshasa’s abode, nor do I know anything about him but I promise that I will try my best so that you may be able to get Sita back. We will find out all about Ravana and kill him. You need not succumb to sorrow as it does not behove a person like you. Sorrow corrodes a person’s vitality.”

Hearing the sweet and consoling words of Sugriva, Ram told him that they should try to find out the whereabouts of Ravana and he would do any task that Sugriva might desire him to do. He assured Sugriva that

whatever work he might have in mind would be accomplished by him. Sugriva was very happy to get this assurance from Ram and began to praise the value of friendship. Ram told Sugriva that all his troubles were over in that he would kill Bali the same day.

Ram asked Sugriva the reason of his enmity with Bali as he wanted to know it all in detail. At this, Sugriva narrated the whole story: “We are two brothers, Bali and I. Bali being elder was respected by all. After the demise of our father, Bali was duly coronated unanimously. So, Bali began to rule and I served him well sincerely. After some time, an Asura, named Mayavi, came one night when all people were asleep and challenged Bali to a duel. Bali accepted the challenge and came out of the palace, followed by me. Seeing us, the Asura fled with fear and we both followed him. The Asura then entered a labyrinthine cave. Bali asked me on oath to stay there till his return after killing the Asura. There on the mouth of the cave, I waited for some days.

“At one point, I felt apprehensive that Bali had been killed. After some time, I also heard some terrible voices from inside the cave. I got frightened and decided that as Bali had been killed, the Asura might

come and kill me also. I covered the mouth of the cave with a heavy boulder and returned to Kishkindha. The ministers, after some deliberations, coronated me and thus I began to rule.

“Having killed the Asura, Bali returned to Kishkindha and seeing me on the throne, his eyes became red with rage. I tried to please Bali, but he would not listen and in anger he ousted me from Kishkindha. So, I have been deprived of my home and even my wife has been seized by Bali. This place being out of bound for him, I am living here.”

Ram smiled at what Sugriva had to say, but he assured Sugriva that he would kill Bali and soon Sugriva would get the throne and his wife too. From the above, the readers will see that it was haste on the part of Sugriva to have presumed that Bali had been killed by the Asura and got crowned so soon, without waiting for a reasonable period for his return.

### Bali Slain

Sugriva eulogised Ram for his bravery and valour. But he also told Ram how powerful his brother Bali was. Bali had uprooted many large trees in the forest and had pushed far back a large and heavy bison, catching hold of him by his horns. The bison had the power and strength of many elephants but Bali had remained undaunted and was able to vanquish him in no time. Sugriva then showed Ram huge sal trees that Bali could turn leafless by shaking them with his hands.

Addressing Ram, Sugriva said that he had described the strength and valour of Bali and now it was for him to assess whether he would be able to kill him. At this, Lakshaman asked Sugriva what Ram ought to do to assure Sugriva that he was capable of killing Bali. Sugriva replied that Bali had pierced the sal trees many times and if Ram could pierce any of them with his arrow, he would be assured of Bali's death by Ram.

Ram picked his bow, strung an arrow and aiming it at the sal tree released it. The arrow pierced not only that sal tree but all the seven trees in a row and then entered the ground. Seeing this astonishing feat of Ram, Sugriva said, "O Ram, you can kill with your arrows

even gods. Who can resist you in a battle-field? With folded hands, I beseech you to kill Bali today.”

Ram embraced Sugriva and said, “O Sugriva, let us go to Kishkindha ahead and challenge your brother to fight.” They all went to Kishkindha hiding behind a cluster of trees, while Sugriva loudly called out to Hid, challenging him to a fight. Hearing the roar of Sugriva, Bali immediately rushed out in anger and both of them began to fight, hitting each other with fists and feet. Ram, with bow in hand, kept watching the fight but they looked so alike that it was impossible for Ram to distinguish one from the other, so he could not shoot the arrow at Bali. In the meanwhile Sugriva having received a good beating from Bali broke away from his brother’s grip and fled to the Rishyamook Mountain. Shri Ram also returned with Lakshman and Hanuman to the mountain.

Seeing Ram and Lakshman coming, Sugriva with his eyes to the ground, said in a piteous tone, “O Ram, though you assured me of your help, you saw me being drubbed by Bali but did nothing. Had you clearly told me beforehand that you would not kill Bali, I would not have dared to challenge him.” Ram said, “Please calm yourself so that I may tell you why I did not shoot the

arrow. Both you and Bali look alike in all respects and because of your likeness, I was confused. Since I did not want you to be killed by mistake, I did not shoot the arrow. It would have been a great folly on my part, had you been killed”

“Please go and fight with Bali once again. But put some mark so that I may be able to recognise you. I assure you that you will soon see Bali lying prostrate on the ground.” Ram then ordered Lakshaman to put round the neck of Sugriva the garland of a flowery twig growing nearby, which Lakshaman did instantly. The four, viz., Ram, Lakshaman, Hanuman and Sugriva, then went to Kishkindha, the capital of Bali.

Ram, Lakshaman and Hanuman hid themselves in a cluster of trees at some distance, while Sugriva went ahead and again shouted at the door of Bali, challenging him to come out for a fight. Hearing the shout of Sugriva, Bali was about to come out but he was stopped by his wife Tara, who entreated him not to go, as she doubted that Sugriva was getting help from someone else. She told Bali that their son, Angada, had come to know from their volunteers, that princes from Ayodhya had promised help to Sugriva. It had been reported that they were very brave and courageous and were ever

willing to help the suffering ones she said, “Please listen to my advice. In your own interest, you should crown Sugriva a ' yuvaraj. It is not good to have enmity with your own brother want uat you should have friendship with Ram as well. Sugriva is your younger brother and it is your duty to look after him. You should ovr him so that he may hereafter live with you. I beseech you to acce; and act accordingly.”

Bali brushed aside all Tara’s entreaties, saying, “How can I tolerate ihe challenge of a brother who has become my enemy. It is woue than death to me. I do not think that Ram will harm me in any way, as he is known for his virtuosity and righteousness. Why should he commit such a sin? You need not follow me any more, but return with all these women. You have given ample evidence of your devotion and love towards me. You need not sorrow; I will humble Sugriva’s pride but will not take his life.”

Hearing these words from Bali, Tara recited SwastTverses, praying lor Bali’s victory and returned sorrowfully with all the women to the inner apartments. Bali came out red with anger, hissing like a cobra and as soon a lie saw Sugriva he attacked him fiercely. They began to fight with fists and legs. Soon Sugriva began to

look hither and thither, being tired of the duel and seeing Sugriva in trouble, Ram shot his arrow at the chest of Bali. Hit by the arrow, Bali fell to the ground and Ram and Lakshaman went near him.

Seeing Ram and Lakshaman standing, Bali said in a harsh tone, “O I'm, you are from a royal family and your name and fame is known all over the world for your nobility, valour and virtuousness. I came to fight with Sugriva contrary to Tara's advice as I thought that you would not shoot me, when I was engaged in a duel with Sugriva. I did not know Lhat HI arc a sinner and unrighteous man. I have not done anything wrong in win area, nor have I insulted you. Then why have you done such a despicable deed, killing me like a hunter. In case you had come to me to fight, i would have killed you. I do not grieve at my death, as all living-beings have to die one day. But I wonder how you are going to protect your “reputation and how you arc going to explain your evil conduct. It is certainly the rules of combat to hit a person from behind the shield of a tree.”

I am tried to pacify Bali, by justifying his action, saying that they were acting as the representatives of Bharat and any wrong committed anywere was to be righted. Bali had kept the wife of Sugriva, named Ruma

in his house, treating her as his wife. This was against Dharma because a younger brother's wife is just like a daughter. Besides, Ram and Sugriva were tied in a bond of friendship and it was his moral duty to help his friend. Of course, Ram admitted that he had done so as a hunter, there being no other way to kill Bali.

Here it would be pertinent to clear some doubts, in that Ram needed the help of Bali's army to vanquish Ravana, the great foe, who had abducted Sita. The only way to achieve this was to kill Bali and crown Sugriva, who readily agreed to become friendly with Ram for helping each other, as both of them were undergoing the same agony, i.e., separation from their wives. Ram knew it well that it was not possible for him to kill Bali in a fair fight; hence the devious method employed. As to Bali's friendship with Ram, it was not possible because Bali and Ravana had already been tied in a bond of friendship much earlier, about which no mention has been made here. Moreover, Bali was arrogant, on account of his might and prowess.

Having been fully humbled, Bali understood the futility of his arguments. He told Ram that he had nothing to worry about except his son, Angada, who he wanted to be well looked after. Similarly, Bali wanted

his wife Tara to be given a respectable place after his death. Ram fully assured Bali that appropriate decision had already been taken on these issues and there was nothing to worry about.

Tara soon came to know of Bali's death and came rushing out along with her son, Angada, on the scene. She began to weep bitterly, "O Arya, why don't you talk to me as before. It does not behove you lying on the ground in the dust. Get up and please us all, who are dependent on you for their life." She regretted that her heart had not been broken into pieces and asked Angada to touch the feet of his father for the last time. Tara fell on the body of her husband and decided to die without taking any food or water.

Hanuman tried to console Tara by and by, saying that she should now look after Angada, her son who was a brave, able and intelligent person, having all the virtues like his father. It was no use grieving for a dying man. Hanuman also told her to arrange for the cremation of Bali and for the crowning ceremony of Angada. Tara replied that she could not do any of the things as it was Sugriva, uncle of Angada, who was the heir of all.

Bali, for the last time, opened his eyes and saw Sugriva standing before him. He addressed him lovingly and slowly “O Sugriva! Because of some sins of our previous lives, we could not live together. Rather, we became enemies. You should get crowned today, as I am leaving for the next world soon. First of all, you must look after Angada as your own son, as he is as brave and courageous as you are. Secondly, Tara is very intelligent and you should always act on her counsel. You must accomplish the task of Ram, as you have promised. Take this golden chain from my neck, « it would lose its lustre after my death.”

Giving the gold-chain to Sugriva, Bali told Angada to obey Sugriva always. He then breathed his last. Tara was overwhelmed with sorrow and began to lament sadly recalling the many past events of their life together. Seeing Tara wailing and weeping, Sugriva could not control his grief and fell his mistake in getting Bali killed. Sadness gave rise to a feeling of renunciation in Sugriva’s heart and he told Ram that it was no longer his desire to accept the throne. He began to rue for his folly, thinking that while Bali had always

spared his life, he had been after taking Bali's life. I ii a, who was weeping all the while, requested Ram to kill her also, so ihat she might accompany her husband to the next world.

At such a time, Ram and Lakshaman consoled Tara, Angada and Sugriva. Lakshaman asked Sugriva to arrange for the cremation of Bali. This was duly performed with all decorum and honours as befitting a brave tn id valiant person like Bali, who was not only a king of Kishkindhan in his ownI rights, but was considered to be the bravest and mightiest king throughout the world.

## Four Months of Rainy Season

Soon after Sugriva was crowned king of Kishkindha and Angada as Yuvaraj. Just then the rainy season set in and it was, therefore, not possible to carry on the search for Sita. Ram, therefore, told Hanuman and others that they should go to Kishkindha, while Ram and Lakshaman intended to spend the rainy months in a cave nearby. Ram also told them that soon after the rains were over, all efforts be made to search for Sita and kill Ravana and his tribe.

Ram spent these months grieving most of the time because of his separation from Sita, though on that mountain known as Prasravan every-thing was available in plenty. Lakshaman tried to console Ram telling him that it was purposeless to waste his energy in grief and that it should be conserved to vanquish the enemy.

Here Valmiki has narrated the beauty of nature especially in rainy seasons when waters begin to flow and frogs croak as if the Brahmacharis were chanting Vedic hymns. The overnight growth of creepers and bushes all round, with plenty of waters running

downhill, making gurgling sounds all these things combined to make a charming scene for a beholder. The dancing of peacocks, herds of deer roaming about and clouds roaring in the skies, at times running on the waves of the wind were enchanting indeed.

During such a season, Ram lisined mostly thinking of Sita's suffering in the captivity of Ravana, but Sugriva was drowned in pleasures, with all the comforts and luxuries of royalty of which he had previously been deprived of. We read that Ram was awaiting eagerly the rainy season to be over, so that the great task ahead could be undertaken as soon as possible.

Rishi Valmiki describes how all activities came to a standstill because of rains, but the brahmins' chanting of Mantras in this Shravani- Parva became more manifest, as was customary in those days. Ram told Lakshaman that Sugriva would himself come at the end of the rains as he could not forget the promise given to him. Hanuman too was vigilant and reminded Sugriva of his duty that was still to be accomplished. So, Maharaj Sugriva ordered Nila to collect the army of Vanaras, telling him that he should take Angada with him and contact the heads of the groups so that they all came at the proper time, without delay.

Thus, the rainy season came to an end and the autumn was there with its pleasant atmosphere, the clouds having cleared and the rain waters having being drawn up by the rays of the sun. Ram regretfully observed to Lakshaman that Sugriva, who was enjoying his retrieved comforts and luxuries, had not cared to come. “You go to Kishkindha and tell the foolish king of Vanaras that one, who violates the given word, is considered a base person. He should stick to his promise, otherwise the path, by which Bali had gone, has not been closed.”

Lakshaman immediately went to Kishkindha that was really beautiful and attractive, with fruit laden trees, palatial houses decorated with Howers and inhabited by beautiful women. Lakshaman heard a sweet note of music and the twinkling sound of the anklets of the dancing girls. He lood aside in a comer and twanged his bow, expressing his anger. Sugriva was struck with fear and sent Tara to find out the reason of his anger, saying that when his anger had subsided, he would come and meet him. Lira came out and seeing her, Lakshaman began to look downwards and his anger was calmed.

Tara, who was unrivalled in looks, prudence and skill of speech, was somewhat intoxicated, yet she spoke to Lakshaman politely “O Prince! What is the reason of your becoming angry? Who has dared to disobey you? Who can live fearlessly, after putting fire in a dry-wood forest?” lakshaman, hearing such words, replied politely, “Why has your husband become so lustful and forsaken his duty of searching out Sita, as promised i \ him? The period of four months is over, but Sugriva does not appear ink conscious of it. One who gets intoxicated, loses all balance of mind; why don’t you bring him to his senses and make him understand his duty towards his friend?”

Tara said “O Prince, it is no time to express anger at your own people. Even if there has been some delay, it ought to be forgiven. Your brother Sugriva, who is hiding in the palace, has already given orders to his ministers. Let us go to meet him in the inner apartments.” Having received permission from Tara, Lakshaman entered the palace, where Sugriva was sitting on a golden throne.

Seeing Lakshaman coming, Sugriva got up from the throne, with all his women folk. Lakshaman then addressed Sugriva, “O Vanar-raj, why have you forgotten the promise you gave to Ram and not begun the search for Sita, though the four-month period of rains is already over. In case you do not keep your word, Ram will not hesitate to kill you like your brother Bali.”

Tara said, “O Lakshaman, you should not speak such harsh words to the king of Vanaras, as Sugriva is neither ungrateful, nor foolish, nor cruel. Sugriva has not forgotten the favour done by Ram as it is because of his kindness that Sugriva has been able to get the throne, Ruma and myself. Previously, he had suffered long nights all alone in the jungles; now having got back all the comforts and his women, Sugriva has lost all sense of time, like Vishwamitra, who enjoyed ten years with Menaka as if it were just a day. If a great sage like Vishwamitra would lose sense of time, how can ordinary people be expected not to do so? Besides, Sugriva has not forgotten Ram’s task as he will give up everything for the sake of Ram. Sugriva has already ordered the Vanaras to be here and they all should be here today itself.”

Lakshaman's anger subsided at the polite words of Tara. Sugriva then spoke to Lakshaman, "Ram has done so much for me that I am now the king of Vanaras and have got my wife. How can I repay the debt, as Ram is sure to kill Ravana and his supporters and I will only follow him? As a matter of fact. Ram needs no oilier help. Even if some wrong has been done by me, Ram may kindly forgive it as there is no servant who may not commit some mistake or the other while performing his master's work."

Lakshaman was pleased to hear such fine words from Sugriva and praised him for his simple and honest behaviour, telling him that whatever Sugriva was saying was indeed worthy of him. Lakshaman then asked Sugriva to accompany him to Ram in order to console Ram, who was aggrieved because of the abduction of his wife, Sita. Lakshaman also asked for Sugriva's forgiveness for all that he had said earlier in anger.

Sugriva asked Hanuman to see that all the Vanaras had collected soon. He then thought of proceeding with Lakshaman to see Ram. He ordered his beautiful palanquin to be brought and Lakshaman and Sugriva sat in it for going to the cave where Ram was living. Soon they reached the place and Sugriva getting down from

the palanquin, stood with folded hands before Ram. Ram embraced Sugriva and asked him to sit. He asked Sugriva to consult his Ministers to decide the next course of action.

Sugriva told Ram that the Vanaras were coming and when they went in search of Sita, they would kill Ravana in the battle and bring Sita to him. Ram said, “First, we have to find out whether Sita is alive or dead. Then we must find out the place where Ravana lives and then only can we decide what to do. Neither I nor Lakshaman is capable of finding out Sita’s whereabouts; you have to do this with the help of your Vanara army.”

Sugriva’s vast army of Vanaras had arrived in the meantime. He then asked Vinect Vanara to proceed to East along with his colleagues, instructing them to return within a period of one month and not to take more lime. Knowing that Ravana’s abode must be in south, he deputed strong and brave Vanaras, consisting of of Nila, Hanuman. Jambwant, Gaja, Gawaksha, Gavaya, Vrishabha, Manda, Dwivida, Viiaya,

Gandhamadan, Angada, etc. to the South, again telling them that they should return within the stipulated period of one month. He also declared that who brought the tidings of Sita's whereabouts would be duly rewarded.

To West, Sugriva sent a strong force under the leadership of Sushena, Tara's father, and to North, he despatched similarly a large number of Vanaras under the leadership of Shatabali.

आहुतिः सम्प्रति विप्रेभ्यः कुर्यात् प्रार्थनं ब्राह्मणेभ्यः।  
देवताभ्यः प्रदानं च यच्च कार्यं ब्राह्मणादिभिः॥

## Search of Sita

After sending four divisions of the Vanara-force into four directions, Sugriva called Hanuman to his side and gave him some special instructions, as he was certain that Hanuman would be able to do the work. “O Hanuman! You are like your father Pavan in all respects, having power and intelligence, ability and competence; besides you can act according to a situation. You have; therefore, to exert hard to find out Sita, as there is none else on this earth who can match you.”

Shri Ram was also impressed by the unique power that Hanuman possessed and the faith that Sugriva had in him. Thinking that Hanuman would be able to see Sita, Ram gladly handed over to him his ring with his name engraved on it and said, “O Hanuman! Seeing this ring, Sita would know that you have come from me and should be able to talk to you freely. Your strength, courage and intelligence as well as the faith Sugriva has reposed in you presage that you should be able to accomplish the task.” Hanuman accepted the ring and, bowing at the feet of Ram, he took leave to go.

According to the orders of Sugriva, Hanuman, Tar and Angada along with many other Vanaras and Jambwant proceeded towards South. They searched for Sita in the valleys of Vindhyachal, but could not find a trace of her anywhere. The groups that had gone to the east, west and north returned after searching for Sita for a month. But those that had gone southwards with Angada and Hanuman persisted in their efforts, because they had a feeling that Sita was to be found in South only, But even they appeared to be groping in the dark and likely to give up in despair. Angada then exhorted them all to begin their search more vigorously, as it was no good to sit idle leaving all hope of accomplishment.

Hearing the words of encouragement of Angada, the Vanaras began to search for Sita in the Vindhyachala forests. Roaming about they came across a labyrinthine cave, from which some birds were coming out in flocks, their feathers wet with water. Hanuman told his colleagues that this signified that inside there was some well or pond. They all entered the cave, where they saw to their amazement big palaces, trees laden with flowers and fruits and even vessels of gold and silver, besides divine heaps of sandalwood.

There were plenty of sweet-soft drinks, food aplenty and even valuable and beautiful clothes. Soon they saw a woman ascetic there, whom Hanuman asked about her introduction and the name of the owner of the cave.

The ascetic told Hanuman that it was Maya, who had constructed the beautiful forest and her name was Swayam-Prabha. She then asked them the reason of their coming, but before this, she asked them to partake of whatever food or fruit they wanted. Soon after finishing their food, Hanuman began to narrate the tale of Ram's exile in the company of Sita and Lakshman. He also told her about Sita's abduction by Ravana, Ram's friendship with Sugriva and their search for Sita that had brought them all there. The time stipulated by Sugriva for the search had ended; hence somehow they all wanted to get out of the cave.

Hearing their tale of woe, the woman ascetic asked them to close their eyes and no sooner had they done so than they were all out of the cave in a trice. She then gave them assurance of success in their pursuit, wishing them all well and entered the cave. They saw the vast expanse of the sea in front with its roaring waves and sat in the shade of some trees, wondering what to do, as the period of one month was already over.

Angada said, “Now that the one month is over and we have not been able to find out Sita, our death is certain. Sugriva will never forgive us. It would be better for us to starve ourselves to death here than to be punished with death by Sugriva. Sugriva had already inimical feelings towards me and because of his wrathful nature, he will not spare me.”

These words of Angada sent the Vanaras wailing. Some of them said in a piteous tone, “Sugriva no doubt is of wrathful nature and Shri Ram is lost in his love for Sita. In case we return without locating Sita, Sugriva would get us killed to please Ram. Therefore, it would not be proper for us to return to Kishkindha.” Seeing these Vanaras fearful, Tar said, “If you wish, we can all return to the cave and reside there.”

At this juncture, Hanuman thought that all the Vanaras were listening to Angada and were ready to do his bidding. He then thought awhile and said to Angada, “O Angada! No doubt, you are more skilled in the art of war than even your father and, if crowned, can rule like him. But Vanaras are generally fickle-minded. Today they are ready to obey you, but they would not be doing so, when they miss their wives and children. I am telling you before these all that they can never continue to love

you. Moreover, you cannot change the minds of Jambwant, Nila, Suhotra and mine against Sugriva by any means. And these Vanaras would also abandon you, as they cannot tolerate separation from their families and would join Sugriva ultimately. In that case, your position would be reduced to nothing. But if you go with us to Sugriva, he would crown you as per tradition. He loves you and will never kill you. Sugriva is also kind towards your mother and is prepared to lay down his life for her. Moreover, Sugriva has no other son, whom he may crown after killing you. Therefore, O Angada! Return to Kishkindha.”

Angada replied, “O Hanuman! Sugriva does not appear to be possessing any virtue like firmness, purity, kindness, simplicity or bravery. The fact that he usurped his elder brother’s wife, equal to his mother, is certainly abhorring. How can you call him a virtuous soul, when, deputed to protect his brother, he instead covered the mouth of the cave, and he forgot even Ram’s good turn towards himself and sent us in search of Sita only because of the fear of Lakshaman.

“I have expressed my idea of entering the cave and giving up food and water in order to die. I am also guilty of not being able to trace Sita as well as

harbouring antagonistic ideas against Sugriva. So, I do not want to return and be a prisoner of Sugriva. It is far better to die here. I want your permission.”

Here I may state for the benefit of the readers that it appears as if it were customary in those days that the womenfolk were greatly respected and in case of a brother's death, the other brother, whether younger or elder, took his wife also in his household. That is why we see Bali usurping Sugriva's wife Ruma and Sugriva accepting Bali's wife Tara on Bali's death. Similarly, we find Sita accusing Lakshaman of harbouring this idea of having Sita as his wife on Ram's death, when she forced Lakshaman to go to help Ram in the chase of Maricha (deer). In some societies, this custom is still prevalent.

So saying, Angada lay down on the ground weeping. Other Vanaras also began to shed tears and sat around Angada, talking about Ram's exile and the subsequent happenings like the death of Dasharath, fight with Rakshasas, Jatayu's death, Sita's abduction by Ravana and the killing of Bali by Ram, etc.

It so happened that the former king of Gridhrakoot came there just at the same place where the Vanaras were sitting. His name was Sampati. He was an old Vanaprasthi and was the elder brother of Jatayu. He was a ruler of a small kingdom that had been annexed by Ravana by force. (Ravana had annexed many such kingdoms, big or small, and either killed their rulers or ousted them.) Sampati was well known for his bravery and strength. Seeing the Vanaras, Sampati thought to himself, “Who has been narrating the tale of my brother Jatayu’s death and sending tremors of intense feeling through my heart? After a long-long time, I have come to know of the valour of my brother. I want to know more about his death.” He then asked them about Jatayu.

Angada related the story of Ram’s coming to Dandak forest with Lakshaman and Sita, as also Sita’s abduction by Ravana from Janasthan. When Jatayu, the friend of Maharaj Dasharath, had seen Sita being taken by Ravana by an aeroplane, he had fought with Ravana but, being old, had got tired soon and ultimately been killed by Ravana. Ram had performed Jatayu’s cremation samskara.

With eyes full of tears, Sampati revealed to them that Jatayu was his younger brother. Hearing this, Angada intervened to say, “You have heard all that said. Do you know the residence of Ravana? If so, please let us know where it is.”

At this Sampati said to the Vanaras, “I am too old to give any help, but may only guide you. I remember to have seen some time back a beautiful, young woman bedecked with ornaments being carried away by Ravana. The woman was loudly uttering the names Ram and Lakshman. She was beating her breasts and throwing her ornaments. I presume that she was Sita. I may tell you the Rakshasa’s house. He is the son of Vishrawa Muni and the real brother of Kubera and lives in Lanka. There is an island about 400 miles from this sea-shore, where the town known as Lanka was built by Vishwakarma. Sita has been kept there under the watch of the Rakshasas. O Vanaras! You should show your valour and reach there as soon as possible. I can confidently foresee that you will return after finding the whereabouts of Sita.”

Hearing the words of Sampati, the Vanaras began to jump happily and went to the sea-shore. But on the vast expanse of the sea, they were non-plussed. At this Angada said, “Do not be sad. This is the time to show your valour. Who, amongst all of you, is such a brave Vanara, that he can cross the hundred Yojana expanse of the sea?” There was silence and for some time none opened his mouth. The brave ones began to give an account how many miles they could go across, but none was up to the mark.

Jambwant said to Hanuman, “Why are you sitting alone silently? You have all the strength, intelligence, courage and valour, but forgotten it perhaps under a curse! Therefore, get up and cross the sea and come to our rescue.”

These words of appreciation instilled new courage in Hanuman. He said, “I have full confidence that with my courage and valour, I should be able to locate Sita.” Jambwant replied, “All of us will be here praying for your successful return, awaiting your arrival eagerly, as the life of all of us is now in your hands.”

Before closing the chapter, I may write that it appears as if the mankind of today is also under some curse and that is why most of us do not know our own powers which can, if properly utilised, change the course of events in this world that is now heading towards disaster. The knowledgeable persons say that only one-tenth of a man's energy is utilised, while nine-tenth of it goes waste.

ब्राह्मणेभ्यः प्रियो नास्ति विद्या नास्ति च यत्र हि।  
अन्नं नास्ति यशः किञ्चित् तत्र क्वापि न तिष्ठति॥

# SUNDER KAND



## Hanuman Searches Lanka

Hanuman then took off and flew in the sky, all the Vanaras following him with their eyes anxiously. Naturally, Hanuman had some mechanical device that was very small, yet capable of taking him high up, that enabled him to be able to fly. Besides, he was also expert in yogic feats, i.e., able to control his breathing system in such a way that it helped Hanuman to be able to fly in the air.

There was a Rakshasi known as Singhika, who though old yet powerful, caught hold of the shadow of Hanuman. Seeing that the Rakshasi was following him, Hanuman's mind at once went to the story that Sugriva had told him about such a person. He, therefore, darted at her in such a mighty sweep that the Rakshasi could not stand the blow and fell down dead. All the living-beings closeby praised Hanuman for his bravery and intelligence, and Hanuman kept on advancing in his path undaunted.

Having crossed the vast sea, Hanuman saw Lanka located on the mountain, Trikoot. It was well guarded and trenches full of water flowed around its four walls. Moreover, Ravana had taken special precaution in putting more Rakshasas on guard duty, after he had brought Sita there. It was indeed a wonderful place, beautifully situated, with white roads laid down and palatial houses, buntings and flags flying on the minarets, glittering as if made of gold.

Hanuman thought over the task of locating Sita, without in any way being detected by the men of Ravana. To him, it appeared a well-nigh impossible task. So, he thought it wiser to wait for the night after darkness fallen Hanuman reduced his size and entered Lanka. He was at once spotted by a Rakshasi Lanka, deputed especially to check intruders. She challenged Hanuman, “O Vanara, who are you and why have you come here? Tell me correctly, or you are dead.”

Hanuman said, “I will tell everything correctly. But before this, please tell me who you are, standing at the doorway of the town. Why are you speaking to me in such a tone, obstructing my way?”

At these words of Hanuman, Lanka became angry and said, “I am here on the orders of Rakshas-Raj Ravana and am the Chief Guard and Protector of Lanka. You cannot enter without my permission. If you do so, I shall kill you just now.”

Hanuman replied, “O Lanka! I have come here to see the beautiful Lanka, as I have been enchanted to hear reports about its beauty and other manifold attractions.”

Hearing this, Lanka spoke harshly, “O Vanara! You cannot enter Lanka, without defeating me.” Hanuman replied, “O Bhadre, I shall return soon after seeing the Lanka.” But Lanka would not allow Hanuman to enter despite repeated requests from him.

When Hanuman persisted in his entreaties, Rakshasi Lanka got enraged and gave him a slap. Hanuman retaliated by giving her a blow with his fist. Still in view of the fact that she was a woman, he kept his cool. But the Rakshasi could not bear the blow and fell down on the ground and requested Hanuman not to kill her. She even told Hanuman to go and see the town Lanka, as he wished.

Hanuman climbed up the boundary wall and jumped inside at night, possibly for the reason that he wanted to dodge the guards. As he walked along the streets, he found that the houses were scented and fine musical notes could be heard from inside. Also, Hanuman saw that some Rakshasas were reciting Ved-Mantras and were busy in studying the Veda. He also saw many Rakshasas working as spies, though there were some others who had become Sanyasis also. The soldiers were well armed with different types of arms and weapons. The inner apartments were well guarded by soldiers. Hanuman saw the grand palace of Ravana on the top of the mountain. It had a high white boundary wall enfolded by a water-filled moat, abounding in lotus flowers. Divine musical notes emanated from the palace and permeated the entire atmosphere.

There were many horses, chariots, aeroplanes, elephants and many other kinds of animals and birds at the gate of the King Ravana. Stealthily, Hanuman entered the palace. Inside he saw many beautiful damsels sleeping. He also saw Ravana sleeping, both of his hands spread, his scented breath filling the house, many of his wives lying near his feet. The women were all very beautiful, but amongst them one was exquisitely different from others. It was the Chief Queen

Mandodari lying asleep there. Hanuman thought her to be Sita, but soon he changed his mind, as on re-thinking, he came to the conclusion that Sita being faithful to Ram could not have been living in this manner.

Hanuman searched for Sita all over, but in vain. He became conscious of the fact that seeing these beautiful women sleeping was a sin and got worried, but then consoled himself thinking that he had no bad intention and there was no other way of searching for Sita, as she could only be traced amongst women of her kind. But when even persistent efforts bore no result, he felt sad and was on the verge of giving up. However, he was not the kind of person to give in easily.

Sometimes he wondered Sita had accepted Ravana or else she has committed suicide. Under such circumstances, he was at his wits end. Without seeing Sita, he could not leave Lanka, as it would mean a catastrophe and one by one, Ram,

Lakshaman, Sugriva and many others might give up their lives. All at once, a gleam of hope shimmered, as he saw Ashoka-Vatika with its tall trees and he proceeded towards it. It was a big garden, spread on a

vast stretch of land with many kinds of trees, ponds, flowers, fruits and exquisite marble work. A river could also be seen bowing from a mountain. Then Hanuman saw a big Ashoka tree, under which golden seats had been provided.

Hanuman climbed on this tree and hid himself in the leaves. Hanuman expected that he should be able to see Sita there in Ashoka-Vatika, as she was very fond of seeing the forests. Sita might be coming there to take a bath and to perform meditation—Sandhya—on this river bank; in case she was alive. There could be no doubt that she must visit this place in the mornings and evenings. He sat brooding like this for quite some time.

Soon Hanuman saw nearby a circular palace, built on a thousand pillars. It was shining white. Inside he saw a woman, clad in an old yellow-coloured, sari, weak and emaciated, like the thin-homed moon of Dwitiya and surrounded by Rakshasis. Hanuman began to make conjectures about the identity of this woman and soon came to the conclusion that she could be none else, but Sita. In his mind, he began to think of Ram and his eyes were full with tears, at the sight of her pitiable condition, as well as with joy at finding Sita.

Hanuman began to wonder at vicissitudes of human life. The beautiful Sita, the daughter of Raja Janak, accustomed to the comforts and luxuries of royal palaces had come with her husband Ram to the forests and had now to languish in the captivity of Havana. She had been living only in the hope of seeing Ram one day. How difficult it could be for a timid woman! Lost in these thoughts, Hanuman's heart became full of pity and compassion for her.

आचार्यो ब्राह्मणो वेदश्च नियमः सव्यदेशिकः।  
श्रुतं यज्ञः प्रवृत्तिः च शास्त्राणि च प्रकीर्तिताः॥

## Ravana's visit to Ashoka-Vatika

The night was about to end, the dawn approaching, when Hanuman heard the chanting of veda-mantras by Rakshasas and Ravana was awakened from his sleep with some soft melodious music. Ravana got up at the right time and as he was in passionate love with Sita, he could not control his passion and soon rushed to the Ashoka vatika, followed by hundreds of Rakshasa. Hanuman saw the Raksha-Raj, from behind the leaves, where he was hidden.

Seeing Ravana entering the Ashoka-Vatika, Sita began trembling with fear and began to weep, covering her stomach with her thighs and her breasts with her hands. Ravana saw all this, as Sita's body had become pale and dirty, yet she looked beautiful. Because of fasting, sorrows and worries, and surrounded by Rakshasis she looked miserable. Ravana then said. "O Beautiful Sita, do you from my heart and you should accept me. You should not be afraid of anyone here. It is the natural dharma of Rakshasas to abduct other's wives and use them as their wives. But I am not going to force you, though the Cupid is inflaming my desire. It

is not proper for you to continue pining for Ram, who has been exiled and deprived of the throne. You are a Real beauty; hence bedeck yourself well with beautiful clothes and ornaments. Your youth is going waste and once gone, it never comes back. You are so beautiful that I cannot take my eyes off your body.

“I want to see you well adorned and happy. You should accept me and enjoy all the luxuries of life. Ram is nothing as compared to me. You have already seen how much power and wealth I possess moreover, you cannot go back to Ram. Hence give up all ideas about him and eat, drink and be merry and with you all your kith and kin will also enjoy the amenities and will also become the masters of vast lands and immense wealth.”

Hearing the above sentiments of Ravana, Sita picked up a blade of grass and keeping it in between, said “O Ravana, you can never get me just as a sinful man cannot attain salvation. I am bom in a noble family and married in an equally noble clan and am a faithful wife; hence never hope that I will do such a sinful act as you suggest”

Sita then turned her face and her back towards Ravana. She said, “I am the wife of Ram and can never be a good wife to you. It behoves you to conduct yourself properly as a king and give protection to others’ wives. You should be an example for others. One who is not satisfied with his own wife has to accept insults from other women. Is there no noble and wise man here to counsel you rightly? A king who behaves like you is soon destroyed. Your Lanka cannot be an exception. All your power and pelf can never attract me, as I am the true and sincere wife of Ram and can never think of any other man. In case, you want your happiness to be secure then please take me to Ram immediately. But if you want to die, then you may pursue the course of lust as being done by you.”

Hearing such harsh words of Sita, Ravana said, “O Sita! When a man speaks soft words to a woman, the woman surrenders herself to him. But though I tried to persuade you with sweet words, you are insulting me. I love you and my love towards you suppresses my anger. It is indeed a great bondage of passionate love that makes one kind towards another person. That is why; I am not killing you, though you do deserve to be killed.

“O Beauty! In the time-limit that I stipulated for you, there are still two months left. Therefore, I have to wait for two months more, after which you have to come to my bed. If you do not accept me as your husband even after these two months, my cooks will cut up your body to prepare my breakfast.”

Even the women that had accompanied Ravana were moved with the anguish that Sita had to suffer. Sita said to Ravana, “O Ravana, I am now certain that in your Lanka, there is none to give you wise counsel to refrain you from committing such a crime. Remember, you are like a puny hare, living in a forest where elephants also live. But it does not mean that a hare can be equal to an elephant you do not feel ashamed of bragging like this. You consider yourself very brave. Then why did you deceptively remove Ram from the scene in order to abduct me?”

Ravana became angry and his eyes became red at these insulting words from Sita. Before going away, Ravana ordered the Rakshasis to fjc rsuade Sita somehow, so that she might become his wife. As soon

as Ravana left, all the Rakshasis surrounded Sita and began to terrorise her with all their antics as best as they could. They tried to extol the virtues and influence of Ravana, but it was all in vain.

Because of the fear that the Rakshasis created in the mind of Sita, she began to weep bitterly and moved near the Ashoka tree on top of which Hanuman was sitting, hiding himself in the leaves. The Rakshasis came with her, all the time teasing and goading Sita. Then a Rakshasi, named Vinata, flared up and said—  
“Enough is enough. You have shown love and sincerity towards your husband, but excess of everything is bad. And it is harmful and painful in the end. You have done your duty as a faithful wife, but there is a limit to everything and under the circumstances there is no way for you but to accept Ravana as your husband. Otherwise we all are going to kill you.”

But Sita told them bluntly that she was prepared to die but could never accept anyone other than Ram as her husband. She could not even blink because of the fear. Her condition was similar to that of a doe, separated from the herd and surrounded by wolves. Sita at last began to think of Ram and her tears rolled down her big breasts, washing them. She ran at her wits end and fell on

the ground, all the while lamenting her plight, thinking that she must have surely committed grave sins in her in vious lives, as a result of which she had to suffer so much in her present hi' She felt that a life of captivity in which one did not have even the i loin to die was no less than a curse.

Wailing and crying, Sita remembered that there was none equal to i am in intelligence, bravery, kindness and benevolence. “But why has he 1 nine so heartless now?” she wondered, possibly this is my misfortune. Hi I am not Ram who defeated and killed the fourteen thousand Rakshasas all alone defend me now? This cruel Ravana has kept me here as a prisoner and Ram is quite unaware of my plight Ram and Lakshaman may not even know that I am alive or dead. They should certainly be searching for me everywhere on this earth. May both the brothers keep on roaming in the forest and get some clues about me, who knows. Ravana might have got them killed somehow. In such a distress, I too would like to die. Blessed are the Rishis and Munis, who have no enemies and have no attachment either with anyone. I have been foresaken by Ram and am lying in the captivity of Ravana. So why should I continue to live. I think I should die.”

Hearing of Sita's intention to die, some Rakshasis got up in anger to inform Ravana. The remaining ones kept on their taunting and teasing antics. Seeing this, an old Rakshasi Trijata said, "Today I had a bad dream that signified that Rakshasas would be destroyed and Sita's husband would be victorious."

All the Rakshasis became anxious to know all about the dream and requested Trijata to narrate her dream in full. Thereupon Trijata said, "I saw in my dream that Shri Ram and Lakshaman have arrived in Lanka in a beautiful golden-ivory aeroplane, with white garlands and white clothes on. Sita was also wearing a white Sari and was sitting on the top of a white mountain, surrounded by sea. Then I saw that Shri Ram and Lakshaman went away with Sita, sitting on an elephant. In my dream, Ravana was lying on the ground, wet with oil, with red clothes on, intoxicated. Ravana had fallen to the ground from the Pushpak Viman, being pulled by women. His head was shaven, with red garland, riding a chariot driven by donkeys. Similar was the condition of Kumbhakaran and both of them were going Southwards. All the sons of Ravana were similarly smeared with oil and walking in a row. Only Vibhishan was seen with a white umbrella. I also saw that one powerful Vanara had burnt the Lanka to ashes."

Trijata then asked the Rakshasis to go away or speak soothing words to Sita as Ram would not tolerate any harsh behaviour with his wife. She said that it would be better if they request Sita to give them protection. Sita became happy at these words of Trijata and said, “In case your dream comes true, I shall surely protect you.”

अहिंसास्तेन विधिना विधिना ब्राह्मणस्य याज्यते।  
श्रीमद्भागवतं शास्त्रं ब्राह्मणानां विशेषतः॥

## Hanuman Appears to Sita

Hanuman who had been watching the entire scene came to know all about Sita's lamentations, Trijata's dream and the Rakshasis' terrorising her. He felt worried and thought of consoling Sita, because in his opinion to return without giving her any assurance would be a weakness on his part. Seeing no way of her protection, Sita was likely to give up her life. "When Ram asks me about some message from Sita, how shall I be able to reply?" he thought. Hence, Hanuman thought of waiting for some opportune time, so that he could give her some consolation.

Hanuman wanted to approach Sita in such a manner that she might not get frightened and should believe him. He thought of a plan. He thought that he would narrate the story of Ram in a sweet voice. He began to sing in a sweet melodious voice: "In Ikshwaku family there was a king Dasharath, who was very famous. He had four sons, of which the eldest Ram was very dear to him. Because of the orders of his father,

Ram came to the forest with his brother and wife. Ram killed many Rakshasas; there and was able to destroy the strong army of Khar and Dushan. Hearing about their destruction Ravana abducted Sita and Ram whilst searching for her befriended Sugriva. Shri Ram killed Bali and gave the throne of Kishkindha to Sugriva. With Sugriva's orders thousands of Vanaras are wandering in the forests searching for Sita. With the guidance of Sampati, I crossed the sea and ultimately came to the Ashok-Vatika, where I can now see Sita.”

Here Hanuman became silent, but Sitaji was amazed to hear this. Sita then raised her head and saw Hanuman partially hidden in the leaves. She thought, “Am I dreaming?”

Hanuman jumped down to a lower branch of the tree and thus being somewhat nearer to Sita, bowed his head with folded hands. Hanuinan then spoke softly and sweetly, “O Beautiful Lady, who are you? If you are Sita, abducted by Ravana, I ask you to please confirm it, as from your condition I can make out that you are definitely the wife of Ram.”

Being pleased with Hanuman's words, Sita said to Hanuman, "O Vanara! I am the daughter of Raja Janak and wife of Shri Ram; my name is Sita. I was abducted by Rakshasa-Raj Ravana, who has kindly given me two months time to live; thereafter he would kill me."

Hearing the above utterance of distressed Sita, Hanuman said sympathetically, "O Devi! I have come as a messenger with Ram's message to you. Shri Ram is all right and wants to know about you. Ram's younger brother, Lakshaman, has also sent you his devout greetings."

Sitaji became very happy to learn about the welfare of the two brothers and said to Hanuman "In case a man continues to live, happy days are bound to come." Gradually both Sita and Hanuman began to trust each other. But as Hanuman came nearer to Sita, she became apprehensive, suspecting that it might be Ravana in disguise. Seeing Sita in such a doubtful mind, Hanuman said "O Devi! I am not Ravana, shed all your suspicions and believe what I say."

“I am a Vanara and a messenger of Shri Ram. Look at this ring with Ram’s name engraved on it. I have brought this to convince you of my mission. Keep patience and think that your woes are over.” Sita took the ring in her hand, looking lovingly, as if she had been able to see Ram and then said, “O Vanarottam, I cannot take you as an ordinary Vanara, as you were not daunted by the sea nor were you afraid of Ravana. As Ram has sent you to me, you can talk to me freely. Why are Ram and Lakshaman not reducing the Lanka to ashes with their anger? They are quite able to punish even the gods. Perhaps time has yet not come for my sorrows to be over.”

Sitaji then put many questions including whether Ram and Lakshaman would come for her rescue with Sugriva and his brave Vanaras; whether Ram would be able to defeat Ravana with all his Rakshasas. In order to reassure Sita, Hanuman said, “O Devi! Shri Ram does not know about your whereabouts yet. That is why he has not come here to release you. When I return and tell him all about you, he will cross over to Lanka with the vast army of the Vanaras, and destroy all the Rakshasas.”

These encouraging words of Hanuman gave some solace to Sita, who said “O Vanara! On your return, you should tell Ram to hurry up. This rescue operation should be over this year-end, as it is the deadline given by Ravana to me. This is the tenth month and only two months remain, during which I must be released from Ravana’s captivity. Ravana’s younger brother, Vibhishan, has requested Ravana many times to hand me over to Ram, but Ravana does not agree to do so. It looks as if Ravana’s death is hovering over his head. My conscience tells me that Ram would come soon and kill Ravana with his supporters and my woes will come to an end.”

Seeing such a pitiable condition of Sita, Hanuman said to her, “As soon as I tell Ram about you, he will come with a large force. In fact, I can free you even today. You may sit on my back and I will carry you across the sea. As I came here flying, I can go back flying too.”

Hearing these words, Sita said, “It would not be proper for me to accompany you, as your fast speed may make me unconscious and I may fall down in the sea. Besides, the Rakshasas will chase you and in the battle, I am sure to fall down. All your labour would go

waste. Moreover, it is not proper for me to touch willingly any other man's body. It was by force that I touched Ravana's body; at that time I was helpless and could do nothing. The most suitable course of action in accordance with Ram's reputation is that he should come here and take me away after killing Ravana and the Rakshasas."

Hanuman was delighted to hear such sentiments of Sita and said, "Whatever you have stated conforms to the right conduct of a faithful wife. You are not able to cross the vast sea on my back. But Ram will hear all about your behaviour with me. Though there are many reasons of my asking you to accompany me on my back, the most important of them all was my devotion to Ram and that prompted me to wish that I might enable you to meet Ram today itself. As you are not going with me, give me some token to assure Ram that I have met you."

Sita immediately gave a churamani to Hanuman, saying that it be handed over to Ram. Hanuman bowed his head in salutation and got ready to leave. Seeing Hanuman ready, Sita could not control her tears; she repeated that Hanuman should convey her message to Ram to get her freed soon.

Hanuman, after taking leave of Sita, went to another place and thought that he should find out about the strength of the enemy, which could only be possible by creating some stir through destroying the beauty of the Ashoka-Vatika. Hanuman began destroying the Vatika rather mercilessly. Seeing this the Rakshasis were afraid and asked Sita who the destroyer was. Sita showed her ignorance and some of them ran to Ravana to inform him.

They told Ravana about a big Vanara who had talked with Sita and was now destroying the Ashoka-Vatika. He at once ordered some Rakshasas to apprehend and punish Hanuman. They all attacked Hanuman with the arms and weapons they carried and surrounded him on all sides. Hanuman shouted victory to Ram, Victory to Lakshaman and victory to Sugriva and picking up a mace, killed all the Rakshasas in no time. The remaining Rakshasas went running to Ravana and told him that the Vanara had killed the Kinkara Rakshasas that had been sent to apprehend him.

In the meanwhile Hanuman destroyed the Yajnashala of die Rakshasas in which they used to sacrifice animals. On getting this news from the Rakshasas, Ravana ordered Jambumali to go with Rakshasa force and capture the intruder. Jambumali at

once took his chariot and proceeded at a fast pace towards Ashoka-Vatika. Seeing Hanuman sitting on the garden wall, Jambumali bent his bow and aimed some arrows at Hanuman, which wounded him. Hanuman became very angry and revolving the mace he threw it at the chest of the Rakshasa, who was immediately crushed to death.

Receiving the news of the death of Jambumali, Ravana's eyes became red with rage and he ordered seven sons of his Ministers to go with a force of Rakshasas and apprehend the Vanara. They all proceeded and soon reached where Hanuman was sitting. All of them showered their arrows on Hanuman, but could do him very little harm. In turn Hanuman crushed and destroyed all the Rakshasas one by one. Soon all the seven sons of the Ministers were killed and the remaining Rakshasas went running to Ravana to inform him.

Ravana ordered the five commanders, viz., Virupaksha, Yupaaksha, Durdhar, Praghvas and Bhaskarna, to arrest Hanuman and all these went and attacked Hanuman with their arrows and other weapons. But Hanuman was not to be deterred and went on a spree of killing the Rakshasas with vehemence. In this way, he killed all the five commanders, while their followers ran back to Ravana.

In anger, Ravana looked towards his son, Akshaya Kumar, who stood up at once and rushed to the place where Hanuman was. Akshaya Kumar aimed three arrows at Hanuman, who, in turn, gave a triumphant roar. Akshaya Kumar wounded Hanuman in his chest and he began to bleed profusely. He thought for a while and knowing that if he ignored the attack, he was likely to collapse. He caught hold of the legs of Akshaya Kumar and whirling him round and round threw him on the ground, thereby killing him at once.

## Hanuman Sets Fire To Lanka

Ravana became very angry and ordered his brave son, Meghnad (Indrajit), to go and arrest the Vanara. Meghnad circumbulated Ravana and immediately rushed to Ashaka-Vatika, where as soon as Hanuman saw him coming, he gave a loud roar to meet the Rakshasa. Both the opponents were fierce fighters and Meghnad soon came to the conclusion that it was just not possible to defeat Hanuman. So, he thought of aiming Brahmastra at Hanuman, with which Hanuman got tied. Here some learned people say that Brahmastra was nothing but Yajnopavit and Hanuman, after a moment's, deliberation, willingly allowed himself to be tied, in deference to the sanctity of Yajnopavit

Whatever be the case, Meghnad and his Rakshasas were thus able to arrest Hanuman and presented him before Ravana, who sat on a beautiful throne, surrounded by his Ministers. Seeing Ravana and his splendour, his handsome bearing that was really attractive, Hanuman was impressed with Ravana's valour and tolerance. He felt that if Ravana had had no inclination towards evil deeds, he would have

continued to reign supreme. Many similar thoughts about Ravana flashed across Hanuman's mind.

Seeing Hanuman standing before him, Ravana asked his Prime Minister Prahasta to ask the Vanara from where he had come and what was his purpose in destroying the Ashoka-Vadka and terrifying the Rakshasas. He also wanted to know the purpose of his coming to his Lanka and why he had fought with his servants here.

Prahasta accordingly said to Hanuman, "O Vanara, tell everything correctly and fearlessly. You would be allowed to go free. But if you tell lies, you may have to lose your life."

Hanuman replied, "You may take me as the messenger of the powerful Shri Ram." After giving this brief information to Prahasta, Hanuman addressed Ravana, "O Rakshasraj, I have come here by the orders of King Sugriva; your brother Sugriva has asked about your welfare. I am the son of Pawan Dev and my name is Hanuman. I have crossed the vast sea and come here in search of Sitaji whom I have seen kept in captivity in your house. You know all about what is righteousness. Therefore, it is not proper for a man like you to keep

another's wife in your house. This act of yours would prove your destruction, as nobody has the power to oppose the two brothers. Ram and Lakshaman. You should restore Sita to Ram. There is still time to save from destruction both your Lanka and your kith and kin. Otherwise, you are doomed to destruction because of your evil deed.”

Hearing these words of Hanuman, Ravana ordered that he may be killed. But this was opposed by Vibhishan, who said, “O Rakshendra, Give up your anger and listen to what I say. The kings who understand diplomacy never kill a messenger. To order Vanara's killing is against the tenets of public dealing and does not behave a person like you. First think what is proper and then decide about the punishment”

Ravana countered this suggestion saying that there was no sin in killing a sinner and the Vanara should be hanged. Vibhishan replied, “O Shankeshwar! Be not angry; a messenger is always allowed to enjoy diplomatic immunity. No doubt he has done a great crime, yet he being a messenger, it is not proper to kill him. There are many other ways to punish him apart from killing him, e.g., to maim him, to give him some lashes, to get his head shaved or to mark some part of

his body with a hot iron. Constitutionally, these are the punishments given to messengers. I have not heard about their being killed. The question is not whether he is good or bad. The question is that he has been sent by someone else to convey a message. Hence, it is not at all proper to kill him.”

Ravana then said, “You are right that it is defamatory to kill a messenger. Still he must be punished. Vanaras have great love and regard for their Langul. Hence burn his Langul.” Ravana ordered that after putting fire to his Langul, he be taken round the Lanka town.

Accordingly, the Rakshasas wrapped in Hanuman’s Langul some pieces of cloth soaked with oil and set it on fire. Hanuman thought in his mind that it was a good opportunity to see Lanka. The Rakshasas started his parade round the town in accompaniment to the beat of drums. Here it may be clarified that Langul does not mean tail, as generally people think. Hanuman had no tail. It must be something similar to ‘totem’, some national insignia, hanging like a tail.

Hanuman decided to bum Lanka with all its palatial houses. With the help of his burning Langul, he set the Chiefs' houses on fire one by one, including that of Ravana. As the fire had spread far and wide, Hanuman fell afraid that it might also have reached Ashoka-Vatika. But this was not so and Hanuman saw Sita, bade her good-bye and assured her about Ram's early arrival with the Vanara force to free her.

Hanuman began his return journey also by air, exactly like the onward journey to Lanka. The Vanaras on the sea-shore saw Hanuman coming and were overjoyed. As soon as Hanuman landed, all the Vanaras surrounded him and presented him with fruits, etc. Hanuman bowed before the Chief Vanaras, Jambwant and Angada and then described briefly his meeting with Sita. All the Vanaras were overjoyed to learn of Hanuman's success.

After learning the details of Sita's whereabouts, the Vanara force began their backward journey and soon they reached Madhuvana that was being guarded by powerful Dadhimukh. The Vanaras were eager to eat the fruits and drink honey, a reward for the work they had accomplished. They sought Angada's permission and Angada in consultation with the elderly Vanaras,

readily obliged them. The Vanaras began their spree of eating fruits and drinking honey. When the guards came to stop them, the Vanaras beat them. Soon Dadhimukh flew away to Sugriva and told him, “O Rajan! The Madhuvana, that you cherished and protected, has all been eaten by Vanaras and the guards have mn away in fear.” When Dadhimukh was complaining to Sugriva, Lakshaman asked Sugriva what the matter was.

At this Sugriva replied, “O Arya, Dadhimukh says that the Vanaras have eaten all the fruits and honey of Madhuvana. From this, it appears that the Vanaras have been able to find out Sita in the South, because otherwise they could not have dared to do so. They have surely been successful and undoubtedly Hanuman must have seen Sita. Hanuman has all the virtues and has the intelligence to do any task successfully.”

From the conversation that transpired between Dadhimukh and Sugriva, it is clear that they must have spoken in their own dialect. That is why, Lakshaman could not understand and had to ask Sugriva. Both Rani and Lakshaman were pleased at the mention of Sita. They asked Dadhimukh to return and immediately send the Vanaras to them, especially Hanuman and company.

Dadhimukh went back to Madhuvana by air and spoke to Angada, O Angada, these guards prevented you because of their ignorance; hence do not be angry with them. You are the yuvaraj and the master of all this. Please forgive us for whatever mistake we have done. When I told all about you, Sugriva asked me to send you all to him.”

Angada thereupon told the Vanaras that Shri Ram had come to know about their return. Therefore, it was not proper to stay there any longer. All of them had eaten to their fill and there was nothing more there for them to do. So they must go and meet Sugriva. Thus they all went to the place where Ram, Lakshaman and Sugriva were waiting for them.

With Hanuman leading, they all went there and Hanuman began to describe all that he had seen. “On the south shore of the sea, Lanka town is situated. In that town, I have seen Sita in Havana’s inner apartments. She is living on the hope that Ram will soon come to free her. She is alone, surrounded by Rakshasis, who keep on scaring her. Sita has become pale and leads a life of total self-denial. She sleeps on the ground; In fact, she is prepared to die, having no connection with Ravana. Sita has asked me to tell you

all what I saw and has given me her Chudamani to be given to you. Sita has also said that she will be alive only for a month, after which she will die. Being in the captivity of Ravana, she is living like a fish out of water.”

With these words, Hanuman requested Ram to think of some way to cross the sea. Ram kept the Chudamani close to his heart and began to weep. Lakshman's eyes also were filled with tears. He said to Sugriva, “I am greatly moved to see the Chudamani that was given by Raja Janak to her”. Ram then said to Lakshman, “I am seeing Chudamani without Sita. In case Sita lives for a month, she will live for long.” This shows that Ram had full confidence about his success in the battle against Ravana, though well was beset with many odds.

# YUDHA

# KAND



## Vanara Force on the Move

Ram was greatly pleased with the exact details of Sita's captivity in Lanka by Hanuman and spoke timely words, "Hanuman has done the kind of great work, that could not have been accomplished by any one else in this world. Not to talk of actually doing it, none could have even imagined it. I feel distressed to see that I cannot give any proper reward to Hanuman for this. All that I can do is to embrace him to show my indebtedness to him."

So saying, Ram embraced Hanuman affectionately. After being lost for a while he again said, "The search is over, but when I think of the sea with its turbulent waves and its vast expanse, I lose my courage." Sugriva at this moment said, "I do not see any reason for your sorrow, as we now know about Sita and the place of the enemy. O Ram! We will cross the sea and after attacking Lanka, kill your enemy. Have courage. All our brave Vanaras are prepared to stake their life to do your dear work. They are all very powerful. I cannot say more at this time. You should shed all your worries now. In fact, I can already see good omens that are filling my heart with a new vigour".

Ram asked Hanuman to give him more details of Lanka, saying that he wants such a clear word-picture that he could visualise it in his mind. Hanuman told Ram about the boundary wall, well-fortified and guarded, with trenches full of clean water and lotus flowers, with fish and crocodiles. He also told him that the town has four big gates, with heavy iron-gold shutters, bound with heavy chains, well-guarded all over with hundreds of machine-guns strategically positioned. It was situated on a steep mountain, with four types of castles:

- River Castles,
- Mountain Castles,
- Forest Castles, and
- Artificial Castles. It was true that the town Lanka appeared to be invincible.

Knowing full details from Hanuman about Lanka, Shri Ram said, “O Hanuman, I would soon destroy the Lanka of the Rakshasa, about which you have told me”. He then addressed Sugriva, “O Sugriva, I would like to make a move just now for the battle, as the sun has turned westwards. Hearing about our move, Sita will become hopeful. Let us proceed in this Nakshatra of Uttar-Phalguni with all our forces.”

Sugriva at once ordered the Vanara forces to march towards South. Rishabh, Nila, Kumud, etc. went ahead to make the roads and paths fit for travel. Ram, Lakshaman, Sugriva etc. walked in the middle surrounded by many brave Vanaras, while Sushena and Jambwant were in the rear part. Thus after crossing the Malaya Mountains, they reached the shore of the sea. Ram told Sugriva to halt the forces there in the shade of some trees.

शृण्वन्तु शृण्वन्तु ब्राह्मणा वदन्त्वहर्निशं श्रुतं च श्रुतम्।  
दास्यन्तु भुवि वेदान्तं विद्वद्भिर्विमलं वपुः॥

## Parleys in Lanka

While Ram's forces arrived on the sea-shore, there in Lanka Ravana with his downcast eyes with shame because of Hanuman's terrible action said to the Rakshasas, "See, what destruction a Vanara has caused to our invincible town. He met Sita and talked with her, searched all our palaces and killed many brave Rakshasas. Now advise me what should be done and what is right to do. Think out some way that may prove useful in the end. Learned people say that a good idea is the key to victory. I want to discuss about Ram now.

"In this world there are three types of people:

- Best,
- Middle, and
- Inferior.

Let me recount their qualities:

- Those people who begin a work after consultation with their friends and well-wishers and strive hard to earn the grace of God are amongst the best ones.

- The one who thinks well or the mawer m hand and begins it single-handed, is of the middle order, and
- The one, who holds no deliberations on a matter, thinks that he can do it all alone and begins it only to abandon it later on, is of an inferior order.

“Similarly, the suggestions are also of three kinds:

- When the Ministers come forward with a unanimous suggestion in accordance with the scriptures, such a suggestion is of the best order,
- When the Ministers are of different opinion in the beginning, but become unanimous in the end, their suggestion is of middle order, and
- When the Ministers or advisers are of different opinion, mutually contradictory, and the suggestion is also unhelpful, such a suggestion is of the lowest order.

“You are all wise people. Think over the matter thoroughly and decide unanimously, so that I may be able to decide my duty. Ram, along with thousands of brave Vanaras, is coming to besiege Lanka and it is definite that Ram with Lakshaman and his forces will be able to cross the sea. Paying due attention to all these matters, give me the advice that may tic in the interest of Lanka and the Rakshasa army.”

To this, all the brave Rakshasas said to Ravana with folded hands, “O Maharaj, you should keep on sitting comfortably on the throne and need not bother about the Vanaras. Your son Indrajit would be able to kill all the Vanaras all alone.” Thereafter Prahasta said, “When the Gods, Demons, Gandharvas and Nagas could not do any harm to you, what can these poor Vanaras do in the battle-field? We were deceived by Hanuman because of our own carelessness. Had we been careful, that Vanara could not have returned alive. At your bidding, I can eradicate the entire Vanara race from the face of this earth.”

Thereafter Durmukha spoke angrily, “Hanuman insulted us all by coming over here. His evil deed cannot be ignored. We could tolerate our insult, but by burning Lanka, he has insulted the king. So these

Vanaras have to be punished. Let them hide in the sea, sky or anywhere else. I shall go just now and destroy them all.”

After this Vajradranshta spoke more angrily, “What would we get after killing that poor and evil-minded Hanuman? I alone would go and kill the whole Vanara army, Ram, Lakshaman and Sugriva.” Thence Kumbhakama’s son Nikumbha who was a brave warrior spoke to Ravana, “Nobody need stir from this place. I alone would kill Ram and Lakshaman.” Then another brave Rakshasa, known as Vajrahanu, heavy in build, said, “Let all of you make merry here, without any worry; I would kill Sugriva, Lakshaman, Angada, Hanuman and Ram all alone.”

Thereafter many other brave Rakshasa warriors, known as Rabhasa, Mahaparshwa, Mahodara, Virupaksha, etc., stood up with their swords and arms raised and spoke to Ravana angrily, “We people would kill all the Vanaras, including Sugriva and Hanuman, besides Ram and Lakshaman.”

Vibhishan requested these Rakshasas to become silent and with folded hands, he said to Ravana, “O Brother, great politicians have said that force ought to be used. How can you hope to attain victory over Ram, who is ever vigilant and brave and enjoys the support of a strong Vanara army? Could any one even imagine the terrible deeds that Hanuman Performed. after crossing the vast sea? How can you think lightly of Ram, who has such a strong army of Vanaras? Besides, what harm had Ram done to you that you abducted his beautiful wife, Sita? Sita held in captivity in Lanka is a source of great concern and fear to us. It would be far better to surrender her than to wage a war. Ram being invincible, we must return Sita, before he destroys us all. You are my elder brother; that is why I am telling you all this which is in your interest.”

Hearing these sentiments of Vibhishan, Ravana dispersed the meeting and went to his inner apartments. Next morning, Vibhishan went to Ravana’s palace and bowed before him. After the customary salutation ‘Victory to Maharaj’, he said to Ravana, “O Brother! ever since Sita has come to Lanka, we have been constantly pestered with bad omens. Even the pet animals like cows, horses and elephants look morose, while the camels, mules and donkeys shed tears and are

not keeping good health. To me the best course appears to be to return Sita to Ram. If I have said anything because of greed or attachment, I may be forgiven.”

But Ravana was so deeply infatuated with Sita that he found it impossible to accept Vibhishan’s counsel. In fact he felt infuriated at Vibhishan’s words and said, “I do not see any danger from anywhere. Ram would not get Sita in any case and he, along with all his supporters, cannot resist me in the battle-field.” So saying, Ravana bade farewell to Vibhishan disrespectfully.

It may be conceded that somewhere deep down in his heart even Ravana was worried though his pride would not let him admit it. He convened another meeting and said, “you all know well about the matters of statecraft. I too am always ready to share my thoughts with you. I seek your opinion on one specific issue. I abducted Sita from Dandaka-forest. She is an exquisitely beautiful lady, incomparable anywhere, having a moon-like face, doe-like eyes and big breasts. I am passionately in love with her. Therefore, think of some ways so that I may not have to return Sita and the two brothers, Ram and Lakshaman, are killed.”

Hearing the above words of Ravana, Kumbhakama spoke angrily, “O Maharaj, you have done this improper action. You ought to have consulted us before doing it. A king who consults his Ministers before hand need not regret later on. A foolish king who reverses the order, doing first thing last and last thing first, does not know anything about polity. You have committed a grave error without giving the matter due consideration. It is fortunate that Ram has not killed you so far though you have created enmity with him. But I would kill your enemies and set the matters right now.

The brave Rakshasa Mahaparshwa, sensing that Ravana had not taken well the words of Kumbhakama, said, “O Maharaj, you are the maker of the destiny of all. You may enjoy yourself with Sita to your hearts content; fully confident that all your enemies will be vanquished when Kumbhakama and Meghnad would stand to help us, who can dare oppose our might?”

Ravana praised Mahaparshwa for his sentiments and said, “My speed is like the waves and my movement is like the winds. Perhaps Ram does not know this; that is why he is coming to attack Lanka. What does he think of himself that he dares to awaken an angry lion, sleeping in his den? I would chase Ram

and make him run for life with my hundreds of arrows, like an elephant who is chased by torches. I would crush Ram's army with my own, as the Sun's light suppresses the light of all other stars.”

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।  
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥”

### Vibhishan

Hearing such useless bravado talks of Ravana, Kumbhakama and others, Vibhishan again tried to persuade Ravana, “O Rajan! Why have you brought this deadly snake in the shape of Sita here? It is better that you return Sita to Ram before his arrows cut the heads of Rakshasas. None of your brave Rakshasas including Kumbhakama, Indrajit, Mahaparshwa or Mahodaracan oppose Ram in battle. I am giving this counsel to you in the interest of the entire Rakshasa race.”

The brave Meghnad could not tolerate the praise of Ram and intervened to say, “O Uncle, why do you say such cowardly words unbecoming of one born in Pulastya family? What is the strength of those two princes? An ordinary Rakshasa can kill them. Then why are you getting afraid so much? Don't you remember the episode when I arrested Indra and all the gods ran away in fear? Can't I even fight with those ordinary princes?”

To this Vibhishan replied, “O Indrajit, you are extremely imprudent, haughty, cruel, unwise and foolish and are talking like a child. When Ram shoots his deadly arrows in the battle-field, who would be able to endure them?” Then, turning to Ravana he said, “Therefore, O Rajan, return Sita to Shri Ram along with many precious gifts of diamonds and jewels so that we may continue to live peacefully in Lanka.”

Ravana became very angry and said to Vibhishan, “One may live with a deadly snake but should never live with a pretentious friend. I am fully conversant with human nature. When someone is in difficulty, others get happiness out of it. As there is wealth in cows, self-control in Brahmins, and fickleness in women, so there is fear amongst the people of the same community. You resent the fact that I have earned unparalleled fame by getting victory over the enemies.

“As water-drops do not stick to a lotus-leaf, friendship with bad people cannot be stable. As black-bees leave flowers after sucking juice, bad people do not come for friendship after their work is over. As an elephant after taking a bath, fills his trunk with dust and sullies his body, bad people destroy the love that they had shown earlier.

“O Vibhishan, if anyone else had spoken such words as you have, I would have got him killed instantly. But you are my brother. So I simply pronounce a curse on you and leave you at that”

When Ravana rebuked Vibhishan so badly, he said to Ravana, “O Rajan! You harbour misplaced notions about me and, therefore, say what you like. Being my elder brother, you are like my father, but your conduct is not right. Therefore, I would not tolerate your harsh words. I have duly warned you about the danger lurking on your head, but impending death does not allow you to listen to good advice. There are people galore who flatter, but seldom are found such people who say and listen to harsh and just talk. I could not control myself seeing you relentlessly approaching the jaws of death, as who can sit idle seeing a house on fire? But whatever I said was with an eye on your welfare. However, since my words have displeased you, I seek forgiveness. May you be happy! Let me take leave of you wishing you joy once again.

Having thus spoken to Ravana, Vibhishan left Lanka and soon reached the place where Ram and Lakshaman were camping on the sea shore. There seeing Sugriva and other Vanaras, he said “I am the

younger brother of the Rakshasa-Raj Ravana and my name is Vibhishan. Ravana had abducted Sita from Jansthan after killing Jatayu and poor Sita is in his captivity, strongly guarded by Rakshasis.

“I tried to advise Ravana many times, but he did not listen to me like a dying sick person who does not want to take medicine. He has spoken very harsh words to me and insulted me like a servant Therefore; I have come to take refuge with Ram, leaving my wife and son behind. Please tell all this to Ram immediately.

Hearing this, Sugriva at once went to Ram and Lakshaman and said, “Ravana’s younger brother Vibhishan, with his four Rakshasas, has come to seek your protection. To me it appears that he is a secret agent of Ravana and would create friction amongst us. After entering amongst us, he may look for some opportunity to attack us. How can he be believed, as he comes from the enemy’s side? As he has been sent by Ravana, I think that he should be given proper punishment. In my opinion, he with his four Ministers should be killed.”

Ram then said to the other chief Vanaras including Hanuman, “All of you have heard Sugriva’s views on Vibhishan. Please give your opinion on this issue.” Angada supported the views of Sugriva, saying that it was but natural to doubt the integrity of one coming from the enemy’s side. Another Chief Vanara, Sharabh, opined that some secret agent be sent to Lanka in order to find out the truth about it. Then Jambwant said—“Vibhishan has come to us at such a critical juncture that we must be careful about it.”

Hanuman, who was considered learned, spoke sweetly, “O Rajan, when Vibhishan was speaking, I did not notice any trace of evil intention and his face was radiant. Hence I have no doubt about him. Vibhishan has come to you seeing Ravana’s bad conduct, having known about your killing of Bali and crowning of Sugriva, and with the greed of getting the throne of Lanka after Ravana’s death. Keeping all these facts in mind, it is proper to befriend Vibhishan.”

Shri Ram was very much pleased with Hanuman’s suggestion and expressed his own views thus, “O Vanaras! I have also to say something about Vibhishan. In my opinion one who comes with a friendly motive should not be abandoned though there may be some

faults in him. It is the duty of the righteous people to accept them.”

But Sugriva stuck to his former views. He said “Whether this Rakshasa is good or bad is not the point to be considered. If he can forsake his own brother in times of difficulty, why would he not leave others in similar circumstances?”

Ram looked towards all the Vanaras and said to Lakshaman, “None without the knowledge of the scriptures can speak such words as have been spoken by Sugriva. One point definitely merits careful thinking. All kings have two types of enemies:

- Within their own families, and
- Others from neighbouring countries. Both of these enemies attack in difficult times. Therefore, it is possible that Vibhishan has come here to see Ravana in difficulty and get him killed.

Ram continued further after a little pause, “I feel I am very lucky in diis respect, having a brother like Bharat, a father like Dasharath who loved me so much and friends like you. It is a great blemish not to protect one who has sought refuge, as it becomes the root of all

the miseries and ill-fame. Moreover, I have taken a vow to give protection to those who come as suppliants, thus making them fearless. He may be Vibhishan or even Ravana, I have granted him protection. You may bring him here.”

This practice of our kings of granting pardon to those who surrendered proved very costly to us as a nation, as history tells us. Prithvi Raj granted pardon to Mohammed Ghauri seventeen times when the latter attacked India. But at last when Mohammed Ghauri was successful, he did not forgive Prithvi Raj even once.

Vibhishan, along with the four Ministers who had accompanied him, fell at the feet of Ram and embracing Vibhishan, Ram said, “From today onwards, you are my friend.” Vibhishan replied, “O Rajan! I am the younger brother of Ravana and have been insulted by him. As you are the ultimate refuge of miserable people, I have come to you. I have given up all, including my country Lanka, and my happiness now lies in your hands.

Ram then asked Vibhishan to tell him all about Ravana and his Lanka, as also the strength of his army of Rakshasas. Vibhishan described in as much detail as possible, telling Ram about Kumbhakama, Indrajit Meghanad and many other brave warriors. Ram, after thinking awhile, said to Vibhishan, “I will kill Ravana with his supporters and will make you the king of Lanka. Ravana may go anywhere to. save his life, but he cannot escape me. I swear that I will not enter Ayodhya without killing Ravana, with his kith and kin.

Vibhishan said to Ram, “O Rajan, I shall do my best to help you in getting the Rakshasas killed and in destroying Lanka. Ram embraced Vibhishan and asked Lakshaman to perform Abhishek ceremony of Vibhishan for the throne of Lanka with the water of the sea. Lakshaman immediately did the Abhishek of Vibhishan.

## Yajna on the Sea-Coast

Ram was discussing with Vibhishan the ways and means of vanquishing Ravana and his forces. Vibhishan gave Ram the advice that he should perform 'Ajayamedha' yajna. At this Ram asked Vibhishan who would officiate as Brahma at such a yajna. Vibhishan replied that in his opinion, Ravana was the best person and, if approached, Ravana should agree.

So, as per advice of Vibhishan, preparations for 'Ajaymedha' yajna were made. Ram and Lakshaman went to Lanka to request Ravana to officiate as Brahma and in Lanka; they found Ravana dispensing justice at that time. They waited and when Ravana was free, they made their request and Ravana at once agreed. The two brothers told Ravana the place, time, etc., and returned.

Thus, at the appointed time, Ravana arrived in his aero-chariot and when on making enquiries he came to know that the yajna was being performed by Ram with the purpose of attaining victory over Ravana, he was naturally perplexed. It was an utterly unexpected situation. But Ravana remained firm to his word.

As the presence of yajman-patni, i.e., wife of yajman, is also essential at a yajna, Ravana went back to Ashoka-Vatika and brought Sita to the yajna site. He thus got the 'Ajayamedha\* yajna performed, knowing full well that such a course meant his own destruction. After the yajna was over, Sita asked Ram what Dakshina he wanted to give to Ravana for getting the yajna performed? Ram did not say anything, as he had hardly anything to give. Sita gave his head-ornament, known as 'Kauri-juda' to Ram for giving Dakshina to Ravana. Ram accordingly offered to Ravana, but Ravana declined to accept it, saying that it would not be proper on his part to do so, as this particular ornament was an insignia of 'Suhag'.

At this stage, Ravana told Sita to stay behind if she liked. But Sita preferred to go back with Ravana, as Ravana was not prepared to seek pardon from Ram. Ram too did not want Sita to be left behind as she had been brought there for yajna only. Hence, she went away with Ravana. In this yajna Shiva was especially invited and he came and blessed Ram. He also gave Ram some special weapons that could be helpful to him in the ensuing war with Ravana.

(This is according to the version of Shringi Rishi.)

## Bridge over the Sea

When the forces of Vanaras were camping on the sea-shore, one spy of Ravana named Shardul came there and saw all that was going on. He returned to Lanka and told Ravana, “O Rajan! The great army of Vanaras and Rikshas has come near Lanka; their number is very large. In whichever direction one may chance to see, there is a sea of heads swirling around. Both Ram and Lakshaman are well armed who have come to free Sita.”

Hearing the above description from Shardul, Ravana summoned Shuka Rakshasa and said to him, “O Shuka! Go to Vanara-Raj Sugriva and give him politely but fearlessly my message:

“O Maharaj, you are from a noble and brave family. Being the grandson of Brahma, you are like my brother. Therefore, it is not proper for you to harbour enmity with me without any cause. If I have stolen the wife of Ram, it has got nothing to do with you, as you are not concerned at all. You should return to your Kishkindha with your forces.”

At the orders of Ravana, the Rakshasa Shuka flew over the sea and reached the sea-shore where Sugriva was sitting and told him the message of Ravana. When Shuka was conveying the message of Ravana, the Vanaras caught hold of him and began to torture him. Shuka cried aloud, “O Ram, messengers are not to be killed; therefore stop these Vanaras.”

Hearing the piteous cries of Shuka, Ram told the Vanaras not to kill him. Shuka then took off and pausing for a while in the sky, he asked Sugriva, “O Vanara-Raj, what should I tell Ravana in reply?” Sugriva told Shuka to convey to Ravana, “O Ravana, you are neither my friend nor my well-wisher. In no way you are dear to me. To my mind, you don’t deserve any kindness too. Being the enemy of Ram, you are my enemy and de-serve to be killed like Bali.”

When Sugriva had given his message, Angada said, “Maharaj, to me he appears to be a spy, and not a messenger. He has seen how we have organised our troops. It is, therefore, proper that he may be caught and not allowed to return to Lanka. Then with the orders of

Sugriva, Shuka was caught by the Vanaras and tied. At this Shuka loudly called to Ram and said, “In case I am killed by the Vanaras, all the sins that I have committed shall be yours.” Hearing such piteous cries of Shuka, Ram told the Vanaras that as he had come as a messenger, he might be freed to leave.

Now Sugriva and Hanuman asked Vibhishan how vast expanse of the sea could be crossed. Vibhishan suggested that Maharaj Ram should seek the help of the sea-god. Here Valmiki personifies the sea in his poetic vein. Ram liked the idea and he sat there silently praying to the sea-god but all his prayers went unheeded. After waiting for three days and nights continuously, Ram became furious and wanted to scorch the sea water with the fire of his arrows. But Nala stood up and said, “I shall build a bridge over the sea.”

It is popularly believed that Nala and Nila had earlier been granted a boon that whatever stones or articles they released in the water, would keep floating on the surface. This is not so. The fact is that Nala and Nila were engineers who could construct a bridge over the sea and it was indeed a marvellous task that they accomplished in time, with the help of the Vanara force. All types of material was brought by the Vanaras, i.e.,

heavy boulders, trees, etc., and these were nicely utilised by Nala and Nila. Soon the bridge was ready. It was quite wide for the Vanara army to cross the sea easily.

Vibhishan crossed the sea by the bridge and stood with his four Ministers with mace in hand to face the enemy. Ram, Lakshaman and Sugriva also crossed the sea with the Vanara army.

Hearing that the Vanara army had crossed the sea, Ravana said to his Ministers Shuka and Sarana, “Though Ram and Lakshaman have built a bridge over the sea, which, of course, is a stupendous task, yet I am not bothered about Ram. But I must know how much army Ram has got with him. Therefore, both of you should go secretly into the Vanara army to find out its strength. Also try to find out the names of the commanders.

“You should also find out who are the Ministers of Ram and Sugriva and who are to lead the army. Find out all about the plans of Ram and Lakshaman and the arms and weapons they have.” Both the Rakshasas entered the Vanara army disguised as Vanaras. When these Rakshasas were in the midst of the Vanara army,

Vibhishan recognised them. He caught hold of them and took them to Shri Ram and said, “Both of these are the Ministers of Ravana and have come here as spies from Lanka.”

Seeing Ram, both the Rakshasas felt ashamed and lost all hope of their life being saved. They said to Ram, “We both have been sent by Ravana to find out about the strength of your army.” Ram smiled and said, “If you have known all that you were told to find out by Ravana, you may return to Lanka, but if there is still anything that you want to see, Vibhishan would show you if you so desire. Though you are in our captivity, you will not be done to death, because messengers are not killed.” Ram then asked Vibhishan to release them.

Ram then said to the spies, “Tell Ravana exactly what I say. Tell him that the time has now come to show his might on the strength of which he had stolen Sita. Tomorrow he will witness Lanka being destroyed”. The Rakshasas shouted ‘Jai to Ram’ and on reaching Lanka said to Ravana, “O Rajan! Vibhishan had captured us and wanted us to be killed. But Ram freed us as soon as

he saw us. Shri Ram, Lakshaman, Vibhishan and Sugriva all these four are there at one place and all the four are quite capable of destroying Lanka. There appears to be no need for the Vanara army to do anything. As a matter of fact, Ram alone is quite competent. Under their leadership, the Vanara army has become invincible. All the Vanaras are eager to fight. Hence you should give up your anger and returning Sita to Ram seek reconciliation with them.” But Ravana was unmoved. He said, “If the whole world attacks me, I would not return Sita, as I am not afraid of anyone. Since you have been tortured by the Vanaras and have been badly scared, you think that Sita should be returned. But tell me if there is anyone who can face me in battle.” So saying, Ravana along with the two Rakshasas went to the top of the palace, from where he got a clear view of the Vanara army. He asked them who was mighty and strong enough to face him. Sarana told Ravana about the various Chiefs amongst the Vanaras, e.g., Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambwant, Angada, Sush- cna, Kumud, Nila and Nala, as well as about their respective strength.

This praise of the chief commanders of the enemy's forces infuriated Ravana and he reprimanded them in rather harsh words. He said, "You are praising the enemy-side for which you deserve to be given life punishment but remembering your previous good turns, I shall cause you no harm. Go out of my sight and never come before me." Both the Rakshasas were greatly ashamed and went away, saying 'Victory to Ravana'.

Ravana asked Mahodara who was sitting nearby to send for some more spies. They were duly summoned and Ravana said to them, "Go to the side of Ram to find out quietly about their intentions, strength and all that may be helpful to us in the ensuing battle." The spies went straight and having disguised themselves, they saw the four, viz.. Ram, Lakshaman, Vibhishan and Sugriva. While they were sneaking into the Vanara forces, Vibhishan recognised them and got Shardula caught out of them. The Vanaras were bent upon killing him, but Ram again got him freed, as also others, who speedily ran back to Lanka. They told Ravana that Ram along with his army had reached near Suvela mountain. They also gave him the details of everything else they had seen.

### Sita Deceived

Ravana called all his Ministers for consultations. Finding the situation highly explosive, when all the Ministers had assembled, consultations were held on the strategy to be adopted in the battle. When the meeting was over, Ravana called a sorcerer Vidyut-Jihwa and told him that he was to accompany him to Sita, where they wanted to deceive her. It was planned that when Ravana was with Sita, Vidyut-Jihwa was to bring the artificial head of Ram with an arrow and a big bow to him.

According to this plan, Ravana went to Ashoka-Vadka to see Sita, who was sitting on the ground surrounded by the Rakshasis, sadly thinking about Ram. Ravana said to Sita, “I have tried to make you understand the reality, but you have not cared to listen to me. Now your husband, the killer of Khara, has been killed. I have cut the roots of your shelter and have thus broken your pride. Now you will have to be my wife. O, Unfortunate foolish woman! Listen to how your husband was killed.

“Ram came to this side of the sea with a large force of Sugriva, when the sun was about to set. He camped on the north-side of the sea. Being tired because of the long journey they had undertaken, at mid-night Ram and his forces were lying asleep carelessly. My spies found out about them all and Prahasta went with the army of Rakshasas to attack them and kill both the brothers. Prahasta cut off the head of Ram with a big sword and Vibhishan was tied with ropes, while Lakshaman ran away with the remaining Vanaras. All the chiefs including Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambwant, etc., are lying dead. A number of Vanaras have been crushed by elephants.

“Thus, your husband has been killed and his head has been brought here to be shown to you.” After saying this to Sita, Ravana told a Rakshasi, Sita Deceived “Go and call Vidyut-Jihwa, who had brought the head of Ram from the battle-field.”

On being called by the Rakshasi, Vidyut-Jihwa came immediately with the head and the arrow and stood before Ravana with his head bent. Ravan told Vidyut-Jihwa, “Put the head of Ram before Sita, so that she may see the last condition of her husband.”

The Rakshasai put the head down and went away. Ravana also placed the bow of Ram before Sita and said, “This is your husband Ram’s bow, which was brought by Prahasta after killing him.” He then told Sita that she should become his wife, as there was no way out for her.

Sita was taken in by this deceit and she began to lament aloud, “O Ravana! kill me also. It would be a good turn to me in that you will unite the husband and wife.” While Sita was weeping bitterly, a Rakshasa of Ravana’s army came there and stood before him with folded hands. He wished Ravana, saying— “Victory to Thee” and requested, “O Rajan, our Commander Prahasta is present with all the Ministers and they want to see you. That is why I have come here. There seems to be some emergent situation calling for your immediate attention.”

Hearing this, Ravana left Ashoka-Vatika and went to see the Ministers. There he consulted the Ministers and made necessary arrangements, as required. But no sooner had Ravana left Ashoka-Vatika then the head of Ram with the bow vanished, as it was all a deception of sorcery.

Seeing Sita in a miserable plight, a Rakshasi known as Sarma came and consoled Sita, assuring her that it was all fraud, as Ram could not be killed by anyone. She also told her that no Vanara chiefs had been done to death as claimed by Ravana. She told Sita that the period of her woes was going to be over soon, because Ram and Lakshaman with their army led by Sugriva, Vibhishan, Jambwant, etc. would march over Lanka and kill Ravana and the Rakshasas and set her free.

After leaving Ashoka-Vatika Ravana came straight to the meeting and said to his ministers, “I have heard all that you have said about Ram and his forces having crossed the sea and about their valour. But I also know that you are going to demonstrate your bravery and courage in the battle. I am surprised that all of you are looking at each other, considering Ram to be very powerful.”

Hearing this from Ravana, his maternal grandfather, Malyawan said, “O Rajan, a king, who acts according to the scriptures and knows how to handle matters of conflict with his enemies, is able to enjoy his kingdom. One should never consider an enemy small and weigh his strength wisely, as compared to his own

and make a friendly treaty if the power of the enemy is greater than his own. According to this principle, it appears to me better that you make peace with Ram, by returning Sita to him.”

Ravana did not like the advice of Malyawan, as death was hovering over his head. He angrily retorted, “Since you have taken sides with the enemy, I have no regard for the harsh words you have spoken in my welfare. Ram is an ordinary man, exiled by his father and living in the forests. He has the support of just a few Vanaras. Why do you consider him to be so powerful? And why do you consider me as poor and inferior to him? How can I return Sita now and give the impression that I am afraid of Ram.

Besides, temperamentally, I am so made up that I can be broken, but cannot bow before anybody. Dispositions cannot be changed. And let me tell you clearly, Ram will not be able to go alive from here.”

Seeing Ravana speaking in such an angry tone, Malyawan realised that his destruction was close at hand. Malyawan, therefore, got up and left the place after blessing Ravana.

### Angada as Messenger

There Ram and the Vanara forces were camping near Suvela Mountain. Seeing its beauty, Ram expressed his desire to go up the mountain and accordingly Ram, Lakshaman, Vibhishan and Sugriva climbed up the hill. Ram wanted to spend the night up on the top. Ram was going chatting with Vibhishan, saying that from the top of the hill, they would be able to see Lanka well. He was being followed by Lakshaman and Sugriva, who were well armed and vigilant. Soon they were up there and saw Lanka as if it were touching the sky.

They saw Ravana sitting on a throne inside Lanka. Seeing Ravana, Sugriva was flushed with anger and he jumped into Lanka and went where Ravana was sitting. Then he angrily said to Ravana, “O Rakshasa, I am the friend and servant of Ram and you cannot escape from me today?” So saying, Sugriva attacked Ravana, who caught hold of Sugriva with both of his hands and threw him on the ground. But Sugriva got up at once and

threw Ravana on the ground. Both of them began to perspire, as they thrashed each other with their fists, legs and hands. When Ravana thought of some sorcery, Sugriva understood it and jumped back to the Suvela hill amongst his people.

Sugriva narrated the incident to Ram, who though happy yet told Sugriva that it was not proper on his part to do so. It was a great risk that he had taken and if something had gone amiss, the whole purpose of their battle would have been lost. He also told Sugriva that as long as he did not Ram had thought in his mind that after killing Ravana and crowning Vibhishan, he would return to Ayodhya and after giving the throne to Bharai. He would give up his body.

Sugriva replied, “O Rajan, seeing Ravana, who had abducted your wife, and knowing my own strength, how I could control myself?” They then climbed down the hill and Ram inspected the forces. Seeing that the right time for battle had come, Ram and Sugriva ordered them to be ready to fight. Thereafter, Ram proceeded towards Lanka at the head of the army, followed by Vibhishan, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambwant, Nala, Riksharaj, Nila and Lakshaman.

The great army of the Vanaras followed them. After some time, they reached near Lanka and on the orders of Ram; they besieged the town, each one going to his appointed post and position. The northern gate, being as high as a mountain peak, was surrounded by Ram and Lakshaman, with a sizable Vanara force. On the eastern Gate, Vanara-commander Nila, Mainda and Dwida took positions, while on the southern gate were Angada, Rishabha, Samakha, Saya and Savaya and on the western gate were Hanuman, Praghosa, Pramathi, etc. In the middle stood Vanararaj Sugriva.

Having deployed his army around Lanka, Ram discussed with his advisers the possibility of sending a messenger to Lanka and calling Angada, said to him, “Go to Ravana, after jumping over the boundary wall of Lanka and give him fearlessly my message, “O Rakshadham, now the time has come to show your strength on the basis of which you proudly abducted Sita from the Ashram, having deceptively removed us from there. If you do not come to me for protection, restoring Sita, you with all the Rakshasas will be destroyed. Feast your eyes on your Lanka since you are going to look at it for the last time, and better perform your last rites yourself, as there will be hardly anyone to do so after your death.”

Angada soon reached the palace of Ravana and saw him sitting with all his Ministers. Angada landed there, as he had flown. Readers must have noted that we see the Rakshasas and Vanaras flying through the skies, right from the beginning when Shoorpanakha was insulted at Panchvati, making it obvious that some small device of flying was very much in vogue at that time. It was more common among the Rakshasas. Possibly Vanaras did not possess a good mechanical device. But some of them must have had one because Hanuman did cross the sea.

Angada told Ravana exactly what Ram had said. He informed Ravana that he was the messenger of Ram and son of Bali and his name was Angada. Angada even challenged Ravana to come and fight or return Sita. In case he did not agree to do so, all his wealth and the throne of Lanka would go to Vibhishan after his death.

Ravana became extremely angry and with red eyes, he told his Ministers to catch hold of the Vanara and kill him. At once four terrible Rakshasas got up and caught hold of Angada, who allowed them to do so. Angada then jumped up and climbed on the top of the palace, while the four Rakshasas fell down on the ground. Then he flew away to the place where Ram was camping.

Valmiki does not say anything about Angada's putting his foot on the ground, as is popularly believed. But Tulsidas mentions it in glowing terms, stating that there was a great wordy duel between Ravana and Angada. At one stage, Angada challenged the might of the Rakshasas, saying that he was putting firmly his foot on the ground and if it could be removed by any of the Rakshasas, he would return, foregoing Sita on behalf of Ram. One by one many mighty Rakshasas came forward but were unable to move Angada's foot even a bit, though Ravana had ordered them to lift the Vanara up with his foot and throw him on the ground, thus killing him in the process.

None of the mighty Rakshasas was able to do so. Even the brave Meghanada tried his best, but at last accepted his inability to move the foot. In the end Ravana got up and wanted to try, but Angada himself removed his foot, saying that Ravana should rather go and touch the feet of Ram, who alone was competent to grant him pardon.

Thus, Angada returned to his fold, after giving a big jolt to Ravana and his Rakshasas. Previously, the Rakshasas in Lanka used to talk about Hanuman, who had put Lanka aflame and killed many Rakshasas also.

Now, they began to chat about Angada also, fearing that the Vanara force was indeed very mighty and powerful. How could they fight with such warriors who had mastered the breathing system to such an extent?

ॐ त्र्यंबकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।  
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान् मृत्योर् मुक्षीय मामृतात् ।

## The Battle Begins

Being enraged with the action of Angada, Ravana ordered all the Rakshasa forces to go out and fight. The Rakshasas gave a great shout all of a sudden and attacked the Vanara forces. Thus, both the sides were locked in battle and the chiefs on both the sides got engaged in dual combats, e.g., Angada with Indrajit, Hanuman with Jambumali, Vibhishan with Mitraghna, Nila with Nikumbha, Sugriva with Praghasa, Lakshaman with Virupaksha and the four Rakshasas Agniketu, Rashmikutu, Suptaghna and Yajnakopa together with Ram, The battle was so fierce that soon the entire field was littered with dismembered bodies of the warriors lying in pools of blood.

In the battle Angada killed the charioteer and horses of Meghanada and crushed his chariot to pieces. Similarly Hanuman broke the chariot of Jambumali and crushed the Rakshasa while Sugriva killed Praghasa. Lakshaman aimed his arrows at Virupaksha and then cut off his head with a sharp arrow. Ram also killed the four Rakshasas' who were fighting with him. When the sun was about to set, scales were very much in favour of the Vanara army.

Darkness of the night spread but the battle continued and the shouts of 'kill, kill' continued to be heard. Indrajit suddenly disappeared in the darkness, as his chariot had already been smashed. Thus hiding, he began to dart his poisonous arrows, more particularly towards Ram and Lakshman. He aimed his arrows at the vital and weak points of the bodies of both the brothers, thus felling them down on the ground, tied completely in the web, making them unconscious in the process.

The bodies of both the brothers pierced with arrows bled profusely. Ram and Lakshman had to bear immense pain. Vibhishan, Sugriva and the Vanaras were astonished and felt much aggrieved. Vibhishan consoled them, saying that they should stop crying, as in such warfare, who would be the winner was difficult to surmise. This was not the time to show cowardliness and he felt certain that they would recover soon. Vibhishan told Sugriva to have patience and courage and console his warriors as well.

Indrajit went to Lanka and told his father Ravana that both the brothers, Ram and Lakshaman, had been killed. On hearing this news, Ravana jumped with exultation and embraced Meghanad. Ravana then bade farewell to his son and called the Rakshasis, guarding Sita. They immediately went to Ravana, including Trijata, and Ravana said to them, “Tell Sita that Indrajit has killed Ram and Lakshman and then show her the dead brothers lying in the battle-field from Pushpak aeroplane. Sita should now come to me without any fear and doubt”

The Rakshasis went at once with Pushpak aeroplane to Sita and getting Sita, Trijata and many other Rakshasis seated in the plane took them to show Ram and Lakshaman. Going over the battle field, Sita saw that almost all the Vanara army had been killed and the two brothers Ram and Lakshaman were lying unconscious on the ground. Seeing this gruesome scene, she was terribly filled with grief and wailed loudly. Trijata then told Sita that she should not cry as her husband had not died, but was alive because had he been dead the aeroplane could not have flown her, as the Pushpak aeroplane did not fly a widow.

Trijata observed that the Vanara army was guarding the two brothers carefully. The glow on their faces was intact. So she believed that they were still alive. After consoling Sita, Trijata then took Sita to Ashoka- Vatika. Soon after this, Ram became conscious and seeing Lakshaman lying unconscious began to lament.

In the meanwhile someone brought Garuda, the Vaidya, on the scene and he immediately began to treat both the brothers, more particularly Lakshman, who was unconscious. Soon the Vaidya was able to make them both healthy and the Vanara army, Vibhishan, Sugriva, etc. were jubilant at the sudden change in the situation. Shri Ram profusely thanked Garuda and told him that seeing the old Vaidya, he had felt so much elation at heart as if his father Dashratha or his grand-father Aja had come to meet him. Garuda then left by air, as he had come, telling Ram and Lakshaman to be cautious in the ensuing battle with the Rakshasas.

Seeing Ram and Lakshaman quite hale and hearty, the Vanara army regained confidence. The sound of jubilation made by it was heard even by the Rakshasas in Lanka. Ravana then asked his Ministers the cause of so much elation in Ram's army, while they ought to

have been mourning instead. Ravana asked some Rakshasas, sitting nearby, to find out all about it and some of them climbed the boundary wall, from where they saw Ram and Lakshaman sitting happily with the Vanara Chiefs, e.g., Sugriva, Vibhishan, etc., surrounding them.

The Rakshasas immediately conveyed this to Ravana in a sorrowful tone and Ravana was terribly upset to hear. His face becoming pale, he said, “If these enemies have got disentangled even from the web of serpentine arrows, I doubt if we can win against them.” So saying, he ordered Dhumraksha to take a large Rakshasa force with him and kill Ram with all his forces. Dhumraksha immediately set forth with his army to the battlefield and came out of Lanka from the western gate, where Hanuman was posted.

Seeing Dhumraksha coming out on a chariot, the eager Vanaras began to roar and there was another fierce battle between the two forces. Dhumraksha fought very bravely and killed many Vanaras. Seeing this, Hanuman attacked the Rakshasa with a heavy boulder and with a mighty blow on the head of Dhumraksha, killed him instantly. Their leader having been killed, the Rakshasas took to their heels.

Hearing the news of the death of Dhumraksha, Ravana sent Vajradanshtra, who immediately proceeded to the battlefield with many Rakshasas and got out of the southern gate, where Angada was positioned. Seeing the Rakshasas emerging, the Vanaras immediately stirred into action and fought a pitched battle. Angada and Vajradanshtra faced each other in a combat giving one harsh blow after another trying to outwit their foe. All of a sudden, Angada leapt and seized the sharp sword of Vajradanshtra and cut his head in a trice. Seeing him killed, the remaining Rakshasas ran in fear back to Lanka.

As soon as Ravana came to know of Vajradanshtra's death, he despatched Akampana with a larger force of Rakshasas. Akampana and his army had a pitched battle with the Vanaras and each one tried to kill the other. At me point, Akampana was able to wage such a fierce battle that the Vanara army began to flee. But when Hanuman saw this, he came forward and faced Akampana so bravely that other Vanaras also rallied around. Hanuman at long last decided to kill him. But in the fierce battle that ensued between the two, Akmpana wounded Hanuman seriously. However, Hanuman did not weaken his attack and threw a big boulder on the head of the Rakshasa that smashed his

head and killed him instantly. Akampana fell to the ground and seeing this, the other Rakshasas ran back to Lanka. The Vanaras began to praise Hanuman, but in turn Hanuman praised them for their active help, that had actually been responsible for their victory.

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।  
गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

### Ravana in the Battlefield

When Ravana came to know of the death of Akampana, he became very angry at first, but later on he was sad and after thinking for a while, he asked his brave Minister Prahasta to go to the battlefield along with a large force of the Rakshasas. Accordingly Prahasta got out of Lanka. Again there was a very fierce battle between the two forces of the Rakshasas and the Vanaras. Prahasta was assisted by four chiefs Narantaka, Kumbhahanu, Mahanada and Samunnata, who began to kill the Vanaras. But the Vanaras also on their part were not to be outwitted and the chief amongst them were engaged with each of the chief Rakshasas.

Just then Dwida Vanara threw a big boulder at Narantaka, killing him suddenly and Durmukha Vanara was able to kill Samunnata in a combat. Jambwant gave a hard blow on the head of Mahanada with a large tree and Vanara Tar hit Kumbhahanu on the head with a boulder. Thus all the four chiefs were soon killed. Seeing this wholesale destruction of the Rakshasa army, Prahasta was enraged and he began to fight more vengefully. But his bow was broken by Nila. Soon Nila and

Prahasta got engaged in a duel. Prahasta gave Nila a blow on the forehead with his mace and Nila began to bleed profusely. But Nila became furious and picking a large boulder, he threw it on the head of Prahasta, who crashed under its weight and fell down dead. Seeing their commanders' dead, the remaining Rakshasas ran towards Lanka.

The death of Prahasta alarmed Ravana. He said to his warriors, 'O Rakshasas! The enemies, who have killed our great commander Prahasta and his warriors, should not be considered insignificant Now I shall go myself and kill the two brothers along with all their forces, as fire reduce::; a forest to ashes.'" So saying, Ravana wearing glittering ornaments all over his body, climbed on a flaming chariot The Rakshasas began blowing trumpets, conch-shells and drums and in this manner, Ravana set out on his martial expedition. Ram asked Vibhishan to identify the various Rakshasa chiefs. Pointing out the various chiefs to Ram, Vibhishan said, "The Rakshasa with large red eyes on an elephant is known as Mahodara; the other riding a high horse with a

mace in hand is Pishacha, while the one with a trident in hand is Trishira, riding a bull and the Rakshasa known as Kumbha all of them are very brave and terrible. The one with a crown over his head and wearing golden earrings is the Master of Lanka, Ravana himself.

As Ram and Vibhishan stood talking, Ravana began to destroy the Vanara army. Seeing this, Sugriva went forward to fight with Ravana, but the latter was too quick and at once aimed his arrows at Sugriva, who fell down grievously injured. When Ravana was chasing the Vanaras, Hanuman came to their rescue, and climbing on Ravana's chariot, he gave a heavy blow to Ravana on his chest, which he could hardly bear. He in turn gave a similar blow on Hanuman's chest and Hanuman staggered a little, but then rallying his courage, Hanuman gave another blow and Ravana began to praise Hanuman's might. Now Ravana gave another blow and Hanuman was on the verge of fainting.

Seeing this, Ravana attacked Lakshaman nearby. Lakshaman also told him that it was not proper for him to fight with the Vanaras and, as befitted his status, he should fight with Lakshaman. Ravana replied that he had been waiting for this opportunity and the time had come when he could kill the two brothers. Thus, the two brave warriors Ravana and Uikshaman fought such a pitched battle that it was difficult to estimate who was more powerful. Seeing him self locked in such a fierce battle, Ravana felt that his life was endangered. He took out his Brahma-Shakti and shot it at Lakshaman's chest making him fall unconscious, on the ground.

Ravana got down from his chariot in order to pick up Lakshaman to carry him to Lanka, but he was not able to do so. For in the meanwhile, Hanuman had arrived on the scene. Hanuman gave such a fierce blow on the chest of Ravana that Ravana fell down and fainted. Hanuman then picked up Lakshaman on his shoulders and took him away to where Ram was.

When Ravana came to senses, he began to harass the Vanaras with his arrows and seeing this Ram immediately rushed forward to meet him. Ram challenged Ravana to stand and fight like a brave warrior and at once aimed several arrows at his chariot, horses and charioteer, thus forcing Ravana to leave his chariot and stand on the ground. Ram then took out an arrow and released it taking aim at his chest. The arrow hit Ravana and made him unconscious for some time. Ram then cut off his crown and seeing that Ravana was tired, Ram said to him, "You are now tired. Better go back and come to fight tomorrow when you are fresh with a new bow and arrows." Ravana was crestfallen, but he at once rushed back to Lanka.

## Kumbhakarna Slain

Back in Lanka, Ravana was haunted by the fierce arrows of Ram and was very much upset. He told his Rakshasas to be very vigilant lest the Vanara army should enter the palaces in Lanka and destroy them. Ravana then told his Rakshasas to wake up Kumbhakarna, who never bothered about the affairs of the State. According to the popular belief, Kumbhakarna used to sleep for six months and kept awake for only a day thereafter. But this does not appear to be literally true. Metaphorically speaking one may discern some truth in this statement. He knew full well that Ravana was arrogant and stubborn and never paid heed to others' advice. Hence, he being a great scientist of his time, spent most of his time in his laboratories in the Himalayas (perhaps for six months in summer), or when he was in Lanka in winter, he would teach, but care little about other matters.

So the Rakshasas went to Kumbhakarna's palace and stood with bent heads before him. Then Ravana's Minister Yupaaksha addressed him with folded hands, "Ram, whose Sita was stolen by Ravana, has become a

source of great tenor to us. His Vanara forces have besieged Lanka. Some lime ago, just one Vanara put the entire town aflame and killed many Rakshasas, including Akshajft Kumar. In the battle today Ravana had to run for life. He could come back alive only because Ram allowed him to come.”

Hearing all this, Kumbhakarna told Yupaksha that he would first go and kill Ram, Lakshaman and the Vanara force, and then he would come to see Ravana. Hearing this proud statement of Kumbhakarna, Mahodara 'me forward with folded hands and said, “O Mahabaho! First you may please go and listen to what Ravana has to say and then only you should go and fight the enemy.”

Kumbhakama accompanied the Rakshasas to Ravana's palace to see him. When Ravana saw Kumbhakama coming, he got up from the throne and went a few steps to meet him. Kumbhakama bowed at the feet of Ravana and said, “Please tell me what I am to do. O Rajan! Why have I been sent for? Who is it that you are afraid of? I would kill him soon.”

Ravana replied, “You are so indifferent that you do not even know that Ram has become a source of great fear to me. He and Sugriva with their Vanara army have Reached Lanka, after crossing the sea and are destroying our family. You should protect us from their onslaught you should do this difficult task for your brother’s sake. Remember that never before this moment have I ever sought a brother’s help desperately.”

Laughing loudly, Kumbhakama said, “O Rajan, the faults that I pointed out earlier while discussing the matter, you seem to be realising now. At that time you did not like to listen to your well-wishers. You are now reaping die fruit of your misdeed of abducting Sita in haste. Drugged with power, you did not realise what you were going to do.

“A king must act according to the advice of his ministers. But without consulting anyone, you abducted Sita. It was not right on your part. In case you had so much confidence in your strength, you should

have fought and killed the two brothers first and then brought her. But you did all this because of your lust and passion. When one does not care to listen to the wise counsel of good and faithful friends, one is likely to run the risk of an unforeseen danger and consequent ruin.

“A king, who considers his enemy insignificant and mean and does not take action to protect him self, has to face misfortune and loses his place. You were advised by your wife Mandodari and our younger brother Vibhishan time and again. Their advice was in our interest and welfare. But you did not care to take heed. Now you may do as you like.”

Ravana did not like the lecture of Kumbhakama and said to him angrily, “I am your elder brother and deserve to be respected. Then why are you teaching me? Moreover, what is the use of talking in this manner now? Since the past cannot be recalled, we should act as the present demands. It is pointless to talk again and again about your advice given to me earlier. Do what is proper now. Whatever past is past and there is no use of repenting it.

“O Kumbhakama, if you love me and have confidence in your power, then manage the affairs in such a way that my mistake gets repaired. A friend in need is a friend indeed and a brother is one who helps his brother though following a wrong path. Therefore, do as you please now.”

When Ravana spoke such harsh words, Kumbhakama realised that Ravana had become angry. So he said sweetly, “O Rakshasa-Raj, leave your worries as well as your anger and calm down. I must speak out what is right in all conditions and I assure you that I said all this because of my brotherly feelings and love for you. I shall do my duty as your brother and you will see how I destroy your enemies. You will be pleased to see the head of Ram brought by me after cutting it in the battlefield.”

Ravana then asked Kumbhakama to proceed to the battlefield. Kumbhakama said to Ravana, “I shall go to the battlefield all alone and destroy the enemies single-handed.” Ravana said to him, “Please take the army of Rakshasas with you and go well armed, because the Vanaras are very agile and intelligent and are veteran fighters.” So saying, Ravana put a garland of diamonds around Kumbhakama’s neck. Kumbhakama embraced

Ravana and bowing at his feet, he jumped over the boundary wall of Lanka and set off to the battlefield.

Seeing the heavily built Kumbhakama coming, the Vanaras began to run helter-skelter. Even Ram was surprised to see him and asked Vibhishan, "Who is this brave warrior, with crown on his head?" Vibhishan told Ram, "He is the son of Vishrawa Muni, known as the brave Kumbhakama." But the Vanaras fled for life, the chiefs among them, Angada, Nila, Gavaksha and Kumuda, tried to encourage them. They said, "O Vanaras, why are you running like this, forgetting your valour and the noble families you belong to. Don't you know that if you ran away from the battlefield, like cowards of fear, your wives will laugh at your cowardness? You are not Vanaras, but brave warriors. Why are you now behaving as cowards? You should not try to save your lives by running away like cowards. Ram would soon kill this monster. You need not be afraid."

Hearing these words of Angada and others, the Vanaras returned and started to fight. Kumbhakama appeared to be on a killing spree. Seeing the large-scale destruction, Lakshaman aimed seven arrows at Kumbhakama. Kumbhakama immediately challenged him, "O Lakshaman, you have really shown your

courage by fearlessly facing me in battle. None had so far dared to stand against me in a battle. But I want your permission to go and fight Ram, as I am fully satisfied with your might and strength.”

Similarly, Lakshaman said, “No doubt, I too have verified your valour. You may go to Ram who is standing like a mountain and your wish would be fulfilled there.” Kumbhakama left Lakshaman disdainfully and proceeded to where Ram was. But Vibhishan ran to fight his brother on behalf of Ram. Seeing this, Kumbhakama said, “Please do your duty as a Kshatriya and attack me. Don’t be moved by brotherly affection. Try to please Ram alone. As a matter of fact, you have done our work by coming to Ram, because in the Rakshasa clan, only you have adhered to truth and righteousness and those who adhere to dharma, have not to suffer. In the end, only you will remain alive to carry on our family, and with Ram’s kindness you will become the king of the Rakshasas.

“O Vibhishan! I am now engaged in battle; therefore, I can exercise little discrimination. I want you to remain alive. Hence keep out of my path” When Kumbhakama said such things, Vibhishan said, “O Brother, I tried my best to make all see sense, but when

nobody cared to listen to me, I had to come to Ram per force.” So saying, Vibhishan went away with tears in his eyes.

Seeing Kumbhakama coming, Ram said to him, “O Rakshasapati, come on, do not be sad, I am standing here to welcome you with a bow in hand.” Knowing that he was facing Ram, Kumbhakama laughed heartily and then said, “O Ram, do not consider me Viradha, Kabandha, Khara, Bali or Maricha; I am Kumbhakama. Have a good look at my mace of iron with which I have earlier defeated the gods as well as the demons. I allow you to attack me first. Thereafter I shall eat you up.”

Ram aimed some arrows at Kumbhakama, piercing his large body, but he did not flinch even a bit and kept on swinging his mace in order to prevent the arrows shot by Ram. Ram at this juncture aimed a special arrow at his right hand which was holding the mace and it was cut off and fell to the ground. Kumbhakama uprooted a large tree with his left hand and darted it towards Ram, but Ram swiftly pierced this hand also with an arrow, cutting it off as well. Yet the Rakshasa

was not to be daunted and he rushed at Ram, but Ram cut off both his legs with half moon-shaped arrows. Then Ram shot many arrows, filling his mouth, rendering him unfit to speak and he became unconscious. Ram at that moment aimed a special arrow that cut off his head. Thus, the great Rakshasa was killed and the Vanara army was much relieved.

गुरोर्यत्र परीवादो निंदा वापिप्रवर्तते ।  
कर्णौ तत्र विधातव्यो गन्तव्यं वा ततोऽन्यतः ॥

## Indrajit Goes to Fight

The Rakshasas ran to Lanka and told Ravana about the death of Kumbhakama. Ravana fell unconscious on hearing the sad news. And when he regained consciousness, he began to lament, saying that it was no use living, if he could not kill the killer of his brave brother. Seeing Ravana so sad, as if drowned in a sea of sorrow, his son Indrajit said, “O Father, why should you be so sad as long as I am alive? Today you will see both Ram and Lakshaman lying injured on the ground.”

He then sought Ravana's permission and riding on a very fast chariot, in which different types of arms and weapons were kept, went to the battle-field. The Rakshasa army also followed Meghanad and soon the two armies were locked in a fierce fight Meghanad pestered the Vanaras, chasing and killing them in hordes, especially aiming his arrows at the Chief Vanaras, e.g., at Gandhamadana, Mainda, Gaja, Jambwant, Nila, Sugriva, Rishabha, Angada and Dwivida. Injuring them grievously, Indrajit directed his attack on the two brothers, Ram and Lakshaman, rendering them unconscious for a while. Thus, he

defeated the Vanara army and suddenly left for Lanka as the day was coming to a close.

Seeing Ram and Lakshaman unconscious, the Chief Vanaras were at a loss and could not think what to do. At that time, Vibhishan consoled them and on the suggestion of Hanuman, both of them, viz., Vibhishan and Hanuman, went round the battlefield with a torch in hand to see the condition of the injured warriors. They saw Sugriva, Angada, Nila, Sharabha, Gandhamadana, Gavaksha, Sushena, Vegadarshi, Ahuka, Mainda, Nala, Jyotimukha, Dwivida and Panasa with many more lying injured.

Vibhishan and Hanuman began searching for Jambwant and soon saw him lying with multiple arrows piercing his body. Vibhishan spoke to him, asking whether he was still alive. To this Jambwant answered in a very feeble voice, groaning and asked Vibhishan whether Hanuman was alive or not. Vibhishan asked Jambwant why he was showing so much concern for Hanuman only, and not even Sugriva or Ram and Lakshaman? Jambwant said, “If Hanuman is alive, the whole of our army is alive; but if Hanuman is dead then all of us are virtually dead. It is Hanuman alone in whose abilities I have faith.”

Hanuman at once went forward and uttering his name, bowed at jambwant's feet. Jambwant, though severely injured, became glad and said, O Vanara-Shreshtha, you should go flying over the seas to the Himalayas. If you go still further on, you Will reach the mountain, known as Rishabha, where you will see the peak of Kailash mountain also. In between the two mountains, there are herbs shining, giving light in all directions. Their names are: (1) Mrit-Sanjivani, (2) Vishalya Karini, (3) Savamya-Karini, mid (4) Sandhan-Karini.

- Mrit-Sanjivani could bring alive even a dead one;
- Vishalya-Kami could heal up the wounds;
- Savamya-Karini could restore the natural colour;
- Sandhan-Karini could join the bones.

“You should go and bring all these four medicinal herbs soon.”

Hanuman at once flew away and soon reached the Himalayas. Going milicr, he saw the herbs, but he could not recognise them specifically. So, he took the whole lot of the herbs, roots and plant all, and returned to the place where the Vanara army was. The medicines were

administered quickly mid all the vanaras with the two princes felt rejuvenated and stood up as if nothing had happened.

Ram and Lakshaman both picked up their bows and arrows and Ram twanged the bow-string so loudly that Ravana could hear the sound in Lanka. Ravana became very furious and began to think of the further course of action. Angrily, he ordered Meghanad to go and fight, saying that he was far superior to both the brothers, Ram and Lakshaman, and should somehow kill them.

Meghanad at once set off for the battlefield, where he saw both the brothers destroying the Rakshasa army. Meghanad wasted no time and immediately shot some arrows at the two brothers, who also shot many arrows, but none could hit the Rakshasa, as he was fighting enveloped in a smoke-screen, created by himself. Single-handed, he played havoc with the Vanara army. Seeing such a desperate situation, Lakshaman said to Ram, “O Brother, now I want to destroy all the Rakshasas by using the Brahma-astra.” But Ram asked him to desist from such an action, saying that it was not correct to kill all the Rakshasas because of the fault of one of them.

Ram told Lakshaman to fight with other weapons. When Meghanad saw the two brothers thus talking, he understood that some infallible weapon might be thrown at him; hence he went away to Lanka. But thinking that in his absence, the Rakshasa army would be crushed by the two brothers, he returned with an artificial Sita sitting in his chariot. He wanted to deceive Ram's side and with this intention, appeared before the Vanaras. Seeing the Vanaras attacking him, he caught hold of Sita by the hair and drawing his sword began to torture her. When Hanuman saw this, he said harshly to Meghanad, "Why are you committing such a heinous crime? What harm has she done to you? Do you think you can remain alive after killing Sita?"

Hanuman ran towards him, but Meghanad defied his attack with the help of his Rakshasa army and said, "I shall kill Sita for whom you, Sugriva and Ram have come here. After killing her, I am going to kill you all, including Ram, Lakshaman, Sugriva and Vibhishan. O Vanara, you tell me that to kill a woman is not right, but I believe that any action, that may be painful to an enemy, must be done."

So saying, Meghanad took out a sharp sword and cut into two the artificial Sita who fell down dead on the ground. He then said to Hanuman, “Sita has been killed and now all your labour is useless.” Hanuman killed so many Rakshasas that the Rakshasa army fled from the field. But Hanuman then asked the Vanaras to return saying, “We have been fighting for Sita and Sita has been killed. What is the use of continuing our fight now? Let us go and tell this to Shri Ram and Sugriva and then as they say, we will do.”

Hanuman along with the Vanara army returned to the place where Ram was. Seeing them going back, Meghanad went to Nikumbhala Devi temple and began to perform a yajna. On getting close to Ram, Hanuman said, “Bhagwan, while fighting, we saw Indrajit killing Sita. The sight -ade me almost mad and I have come to tell you about it” Hearing this sad news, Ram fainted and the chiefs of the Vanaras rushed to tend him. \_akshman embraced Rasm and said, “Indrajit has done a very painful act, but I am soon going to take revenge. In no case should you despair.”

When this conversation was going on, Vibhishan arrived there and: on being told that Sita had been done to death, he said, “I consider this quite improbable. It is

like suggesting that the sea has dried up. I know Havana's intentions towards Sita. He would never kill her. Many times I requested Ravana to set Sita free, but he did not relent. Indrajit must have done this killing of an artificial Sita and has gone to perform yajna in Devi's temple. When he returns to fight after performing the yajna, he becomes invincible. He has done all this to deceive the Vanaras, so that they may not disturb him in the yajna. We should at once go to the site of the yajna with our forces. Give up your sorrow and send Lakshaman with the Vanaras with us. When Lakshaman shoots his sharp arrows at him in yajna, he will leave the yajna unfinished and it will be possible to kill him thereafter."

Hearing this, Shri Ram said to Lakshaman, "Go with all the Vanara force, Hanuman, Jambwant, etc. and kill that artful Rakshasa Indrajit. Mahatma Vibhishan knows the place and shall be accompanying you with his four ministers. Lakshaman at once armed himself well with many bows, arrows and weapons and, after touching the feet of Ram, proceeded fight with Meghanad. After traversing a long journey, Lakshaman saw Rakshasa army well prepared to fight in order to thwart any attack and well protected by the army sat Meghanad performing the yajna.

## Indrajit Slain

With the two armies pitched against each other, Vibhishan asked Lakshaman to attack the Rakshasas, so that Indrajit was not able to finish the yajna. The Vanara army attacked the Rakshasas and Lakshaman aimed the arrows at Indrajit seeing this, Indrajit had to leave the yajna unfinished and come to fight. He came out of the grove of the trees and climbed on his chariot. He ordered the charioteer to take him to the place where Hanuman was killing the Rakshasas mercilessly.

Meghanad's chariot was taken there and seeing Hanuman, he shot some arrows at him. Hanuman challenged Meghanad to a duel, but he preferred to fight with his bow and arrows. Vibhishan drew the Lakshaman's attention to the impending disaster and exhorted him to kill the Rakshasa. Both Vibhishan and Lakshaman went to the place where the two warriors, Meghanad and Hanuman were locked in a fight.

Lakshaman challenged Indrajit to fight with him. But when Indrajit saw his uncle Vibhishan with Lakshaman he addressed him, "O Vibhishan, you were born in our family and are the real brother of my father.

Why are you behaving today as if you were the enemy of your own? You must realise that you do not belong to them in any way, being unconnected with them either by blood or by any other relation whatsoever. Yet you have created animosity with your own kith and you not only have deserted them but also joined hands with the enemy. It is always good to be in one's own fold, because after all, blood is thicker than water. And don't forget that one who joins the enemy is not owned by the enemy in the long run.”

Vibhishan said, “When you do not know my nature, why are you talking uselessly? It is right that I am bom in a Rakshasa family, but I do not subscribe to the Rakshasa code of conduct and behaviour. I have no' interest in doing cruel deeds, like abducting the wife of the other and so on. Your father is very proud and haughty. Besides, he is following the wrong path of unrighteousness. That is why I have left him. You are yet a mere boy and have inherited all the undesirable traits of your father. Death appears to be hovering over your head. Go and fight with Laksha- man and die in the battle, where you can satisfy the gods in Yamalok.”

Indrajit became very angry and in excitement, he said, “Today I am determined to kill all of you in the battle. You have forgotten how I made the entire Vanara army and Ram and Lakshaman unconscious with my arrows.” Lakshaman only told him not to brag but fight and show what he could do. He said, “Brave people do not talk as you do. The bravery you are boasting of was shown in the darkness of night while you were hidden like a thief. Here I am standing before you in full sight of everybody. Come forward and show your valour, if you can.”

Hearing the taunts of Lakshaman, Indrajit caught hold of his bow and stringing sharp arrows, began to shoot at Lakshaman. Lakshaman was wounded and though he bled profusely, he stood like a rock. He took out five arrows from the quiver and shot at the chest of Indrajit wounding him seriously. They were both adept in warfare and used their tactics as best as they could. They kept fighting for a long time and yet neither of them showed any signs of weakness.

Lakshaman at long last aimed some arrows at the horses and the charioteer of Indrajit, killing all of them instantly and denying him the advantage of chariot on which he had been in a better position to fight In the

meanwhile, darkness had enveloped the place and it was difficult to see. but Indrajit ordered the Rakshasas to continue the fight Besides he went into Lanka and almost instantaneously returned in a beautiful chariot. He straight rushed to the place where Lakshaman and Vibhishan were fighting with the Rakshasa Army. All of them were surprised to see Indrajit back so soon.

Indrajit began harassing the Vanaras with his continuous shower of arrows. Seeing this Lakshaman cut off his bow with a sharp arrow. When Indrajit took another bow, it met the same fate at the hands of Lakshaman. In this way both of them tried to outwit each other. At this stage, Lakshaman killed Indrajit's charioteer with an arrow, but the horses being well trained did not startle and began to go round and round in circles. Lakshaman aimed some arrows at the horses and injured them, after which they became uncontrollable.

Seeing this Indrajit became furious and aimed some arrows at Lakshaman, who also did the same. In this way both the brave warriors fought fiercely, each trying to gain supremacy over the opponent. Vibhishan threw his mace at the horses of Indrajit's chariot and killed the horses. Indrajit jumped out of the chariot and

shot a special arrow at his uncle Vibhishan. Lakshaman intercepted this arrow mid-way with his own arrows and broke it into pieces. Indrajit used Agneyastra on Lakshaman, while Lakshaman used Suryastra to render Agneyastra ineffective.

At this stage Lakshaman thought of killing Indrajit and thinking of Ram, he shot Indrastra at Indrajit's head. It hit the target and cut Indrajit's head. Indrajit's crown and glittering ear-rings immediately fell to the ground. After Indrajit's death, the Rakshasa army was driven away by the Vanara army in all directions. This was indeed a decisive step in the direction of victory. Vibhishan, Hanuman and Jambwant were pleased to see this and began praising Lakshaman for his bravery and steadfastness in the battlefield.

Soon they returned to the place where Ram and Sugriva were waiting for them. Lakshaman narrated the events that had taken place to Ram, after bowing before him. Ram expressed immense satisfaction, saying that their victory was now quite assured. He embraced Lakshaman again and again, sniffed his head and put his hand on Lakshaman's head in a gesture of blessing, saying that the killing of Indrajit was indeed a formidable task, which would cripple Ravana to a large

extent. Ram then called Vaidya Sushena to treat Lakshaman well so that all his wounds were soon healed up. Sushena gave a miraculous medicine to Lakshaman as well as others thus making all of them quite fit for the battle.

In Ram Charit Manas written by Goswami Tulsidasji, Sushena has been described as the Family Doctor of Ravana. But Valmiki says that Sushena was a Vanara chief. Can both these descriptions be right? Before Ram killed Bali, as already written earlier, Ravana and Bali were friends and, therefore, it is possible that a Vanara chief Sushena, who was a good doctor or Vaidya in those days, might have been a family doctor of Ravana also. Later on with the change of circumstances, Sugriva became the ruler of the Vanaras since Ravana had abducted Sita and Sugriva, in order to repay his debt to Ram for the restoration of his kingdom to him, pledged support to him. In this way Ravana became the arch enemy of the Vanaras.

### Ravana Afterall

The Rakshasas who had fled the battlefield gave the message of the death of Indrajit to the Ministers in Lanka, who in turn informed Havana of the bitter truth, stating that with the help of Vibhishan, Lakshaman had killed his son Indrajit with all of them helplessly watching. Hearing this sad news, Ravana lost his consciousness for a little while. On recovering, he began to lament loudly, wondering how it was possible that his son, who was so powerful in all respects, had been done to death by Lakshaman.

Ravana was so much distressed and upset at this event that his mind became perplexed and he could not decide the future course of action. In the heat of fury, he thought of killing Sita, who, in his opinion, was the sole cause of all this misery. He got up with a sharp sword in hand and with his wives and Ministers got out of the palace and proceeded to where Sita was.

Mustering enough courage, one of his intelligent Minister, named Suparshwa, said to Ravana, “O Rajan, you are the brother of Kubera, because of your wrath you want to kill Sita, who is faultless. You have studied the Vedas and are fully conversant with your duty. Then, how can you think of killing an innocent woman? You should forgive Sita and come with us to the battlefield to pour your wrath on Ram. After killing Ram, you shall automatically get Sita.”

Accepting the advice of Suparshwa, Ravana returned to his palace and told his Ministers standing nearby to be ready for the battle. Accordingly this was duly announced in Lanka and the Rakshasas came out of their houses to accompany Ravana, who got into a chariot, along with Mahaparshwa, Mahodara, Virupaksha and Durdharsha, sitting in their own chariots. Soon after reaching the battlefield, the two armies clashed and the Rakshasas began to kill the Vanaras under the leadership of their King Ravana.

Seeing the slaughter of the Vanaras, Sugriva went forward to face Ravana. Virupaksha who was riding an elephant saw him advancing and challenged him. Sugriva hurled a tree at the big elephant, that forced the animal to step back a few paces. Virupaksha, realising

that the elephant could not serve his purpose, jumped down and faced Sugriva in a duel. Virupaksha attacked the Vanara-Raj with the sword, while the latter, moving with great agility, caught hold of his hand and gave a heavy blow on his head. Virupaksha fell down vomiting blood on the ground and was killed.

Mahrishi Valmiki states here that because many soldiers on both the sides had been killed, the armies had been depleted, like small ponds in summer. Seeing Virupaksha killed, Ravana asked Mahodara to take his place and he killed many Vanaras. But Sugriva again launched himself in the drive and roaring loudly engaged Mahodara in a combat. They picked two swords lying nearby and when Mahodara cut off the armour of Sugriva with a sweep of his sword and wanted to attack him again, Sugriva jumped up, giving a sharp blow on the head of the Rakshasa, thus killing him.

Mahaparshwa, who had seen his companion being killed by Sugriva, began destroying the Vanara forces. Angada saw this and went in to attack Mahaparshwa with a heavy ironrod. Angada's blow was so heavy that the Rakshasa lost his balance, but he recovered soon and attacked Angada with a sword. Angada dodged him

cleverly making the attack ineffective. Then he gave the Rakshasa a heavy blow on his chest. The Rakshasa lost consciousness, fell on the ground and died.

Seeing his chiefs being killed one by one, Ravana lost temper and asked his charioteer to take him to Ram and Laicshaman. He said he wanted to kill them at once in order to eliminate the cause of the whole struggle. As soon as he approached before the two brothers, his eyes became red with anger and he began to shower his arrows on them. Ram also took out his arrows and aimed them at Ravana, but both Ram and Ravana were quick and intercepted each other's arrows before any of them could reach their target.

Lakshaman aimed his arrows at the flagpole of Ravana and cut it off. Then he also cut off the head of Ravana's charioteer, as well as the bow of Ravana in quick succession. Vibhishan killed Ravana's horses. Ravana became very angry at these attacks and he threw a Shakti at Vibhishan, which was cut in the way by Lakshaman with an arrow. When Ravana saw that Lakshman had saved Vibhishan, he said, "O Lakshaman, since you have saved him, I am going to hurl this Shakti on you. You cannot escape it" So saying, Ravana threw the Shakti at Lakshaman with a

great force and it hit Lakshman on the chest His chest virtually split into two, Lakshman bled profusely and collapsed.

Ram was sad to see Lakshaman falling. But thinking that it was not the time for sorrow, he told Hanuman and Sugriva to surround Lakshaman, while he himself went to fight the arch enemy. He was resolved to make the day's battle conclusive. He said that either he or Ravana would surely fall. He aimed seven sharp arrows at Ravana, who in turn did the same. In the end, Ravana was so much troubled by Ram's incessant flow of arrows that he ran away from the battlefield to Lanka.

Ram was under the impression that Lakshaman had been killed by Ravana. He felt that all further fighting was pointless and had no desire even to continue living. However, Sushena Vaidya consoled him, telling him that Lakshaman was not dead, but alive, as his face was bright. Sugriva then asked Hanuman to go to the Himalayas as before and bring medicinal herbs to save Lakshaman's life. Hanumanji at once flew to the Himalayas, but was unable to make out exactly the herbs required and so he was worried. Then he had an idea. He uprooted the entire cluster and was soon back to where Lakshaman was lying unconscious. Sushena

administered them to Lakshaman and soon Lakshaman became well and got up.

All the Vanaras were pleased to see this and began praising Sushena for his knowledge. With tears in his eyes Ram said to Lakshaman, “O brave one, I am lucky to see you back from the jaws of death. In case you had died, what would have been the purpose of attaining victory over Ravana and getting Sita back?” When Ram said so, Lakshaman said in a wearied tone, “O brother, having taken a vow previously, it is not proper for you to talk like a coward. Noble people adhere to their vow at all costs. It was not proper for you to be dejected for my sake. Now I am fully recovered. You should fulfil your vow by killing Ravana.”

Accordingly Ram prepared himself to fight with Ravana. In the meanwhile, Ravana had returned to the battlefield in another chariot Ravana attacked Ram and Ram retaliated with a shower of arrows.

Here Vaimiki writes that seeing Ram standing on the ground fighting, while Ravana was fighting from his chariot, the gods, Gandharvas and Danavas, being spectators of the battle, felt that it was not an equal battle. At this, Indra asked his charioteer Matali to take

his chariot to Ram and accordingly Matali went to Shri Ram and requested with folded hands, “O Maharaj! Indra has sent this chariot to ensure your victory. Kindly get on to this and destroy Ravana.” Ram circumbulated the chariot and got into it

It needs to be explained for the benefit of the readers that Ravana’s son Meghanada was known as Indrajit also, as he had been able to vanquish Indra also in war. And who is Indra? According to the tradition prevalent then, a king who was considered noble, most virtuous and powerful and whose subjects were like the gods in virtue, was chosen Indra. Such a king, known as Indra, had been defeated by Meghanada and that is why Meghanada became Indrajit But why did Indra send his chariot for Ram at the fag-end of the war, and not earlier? May be because Ravana’s son, Indrajit had been killed and it became obvious to Indra that the victory of Ram was certain.

Now a very fierce battle ensued between the two Ram and Ravana, both of whom were eager to score victory over each other. Ram said to Ravana, “O Rakshasadham, you call yourself brave and courageous, though you stole Sita by deception and fraud. You show your bravery only before unarmed women and yet you

do not feel ashamed! Now that you have come before me, you cannot go alive.”

With these words, Ram showered some sharp fiery arrows at him in such quick succession that Ravana could not see anything and became unconscious. Seeing the condition of his master, his charioteer carefully took him out of the battlefield. When Ravana regained his consciousness, he became very furious with the charioteer. He said, “Did you think of me as powerless, weak and cowardly that you took me away from my enemy, regardless of my intention? This action of yours has put a blot on my reputation. Why don’t you take me back to my enemy? Have you been bribed by the enemy? You have behaved as an enemy today for no well-wisher of mine could have ever acted as you have. Take me back to the battlefield before the enemy comes here chasing me.”

But the charioteer was not provoked by these harsh words of Ravana. Very politely he said, “O Rajan, I have not acted out of fear. I have neither lost my senses nor taken bribe from the enemy. Nor have I forgotten all the good you have done to me. I was prompted to bring you out of the battlefield only by the love I have for you. It is my misfortune that you have misconstrued

my intentions. I brought your chariot here because you were tired and had become unconscious. The horses were also tired. I seek forgiveness if I did something inappropriate. I am prepared to do your bidding.” Ravana was satisfied with this reply and he praised him for his loyalty. Then he ordered his chariot to be taken before Ram, as he wanted to return from the battlefield only after killing the enemy. The charioteer at once returned to the battlefield. Ram directed Matali also to take his chariot to a position from where he could fight well with the enemy. Thus the two warriors came face to face with each other and got engaged in a fierce battle.

Ravana took several aims with his arrows at the flag of Ram, but all in vain. But when Ram did the same, the flag pole of Ravana’s chariot came down tumbling. Ravana became very furious to see this and wounded the horses of Ram’s chariot. In return Ram did the same. The battle that raged between these two warriors was unique, there being no parallel that could be cited. Ram at last put a sharp-edged arrow on his bow and taking aim at Ravana’s head released it with great strength. Ravana’s head was cut but to the surprise of all, another head appeared at once on Ravana’s shoulders.

Ram cut the head of Ravana many times over, yet a new head always appeared to replace the severed one. Matali then suggested that Ram should use Brahmastra which Ram did. This divine weapon hit Ravana's chest, splitting it into pieces. Life ebbed out of his body and his bow with arrows fell down from his hand. Soon he fell down dead on the ground. Seeing this, the remaining Rakshasas ran away out of fear, while the Vanaras shouted loudly, "Victory to Ram and Death to Ravana".

What is the mystery behind Ravana's head growing after the previous one had been cut off? According to Ram Charit Manas, Tulsidas has written that there was nectar in the navel of Ravana, which he had earned by virtue of his penance. In fact, this nectar Shiva had granted him as a boon. When Ram was cutting Ravana's heads, he was told by Vibhishan to shoot an arrow at Ravana's navel so that the nectar be dried up. That was the only way to kill Ravana, Vibhishan told Ram. Ram did exactly as he had been told by Vibhishan and was successful in killing the Rakshasa.

However, Ravana had only one head and NOT ten as people popularly believe. The second version is that Ravana had got some such device which gave him life's juice and he could not be killed. This device was given to him by Shiva. But Ram had come to know about it earlier by Vibhishan, who told Ram about this when he came to Ram from Lanka. Thereafter as per the advice of Vibhishan, Ram performed "Ajayamedha Yajna" on the shore of the sea, in which Shiva was also invited and at that time Shiva gave some special arms and weapons to Ram, to enable him to vanquish Ravana by destroying the device that he himself had given to Ravana, as Shivaji Maharaj was also not happy with Ravana's conduct later in his life.

### Sita Restored

Seeing his brother Ravana lying dead in the battle-field, Vibhishan was overcome by grief. He recounted the numerous virtues that he possessed and remarked that but for his one great fault; he would have surpassed all others. He also said that it was Ram alone who could vanquish him. Ravana was indeed a very learned man, and equally brave, but his pride had led to his downfall. That is why in our scriptures, we have been time and again warned against this evil trait and told to be polite and humble, always keeping in mind the fact that all these virtues are the grace of God and man should always adorn them with all humility.

Ram then consoled Vibhishan saying that Ravana had not been killed, as he was never afraid of death. Such brave people as die in the battle-field are not the ones to be grieved about, because they are always praised for their valour. All the same one, who is born, has to die one day, sooner or later, and considering this infallible truth, learned people never grieve. Ram also said that as long as a man is alive, there might be enmity with him, but with death, enmity also ended. As Ravana

was dead and their purpose had been achieved, he was as much his brother, as Vibhishan's. He suggested that arrangements should be made for Ravana's cremation.

Hearing the news of the death of Ravana, the aggrieved queens, wives and some Rakshasis came out of the inner apartments of Lanka and began to cry bitterly and loudly, some falling on his body, others catching hold of his hands and feet. The Chief Queen, Mandodari, was beside herself with sorrow, wailing. "The whole world was afraid of you as long as you controlled your senses. But now your sensuality has taken revenge from you. It is a pity you did not listen to my advice.

"No one dies without any cause and Sita had become the cause of your death?" When they were lamenting in this way, Ram asked Vibhishan to send the women in and prepare for Ravana's cremation. Vibhishan asked Ram if it were proper for him to perform the cremation rites of his brother who was so evilminded. He knew that some people might consider it bad on his part, while some others, who were good, might appreciate it.

Ram, though pleased with what Vibhishan had said, counselled him thus, “Though Ravana was a great sinner, yet he was brave and courageous; hence it is right to perform his cremation rites. As long as one is alive, there may be enmity, after death all is over and it would be good for you to do your brother’s cremation. By doing so, you will be honoured.” Vibhishan then performed the cremation rites of Ravana, befitting a king of his status.

After the cremation ceremony, Ram asked Lakshaman to go to Lanka and get the auspicious ceremony of the crowning of Vibhishan performed, as he wanted to see Vibhishan seated on the throne of Lanka. Lakshaman went to Lanka along with the chief Vanaras. Ceremony of Vibhishan's crowning was duly performed. Vibhishan was seated on the throne, and in accompaniment to Ved mantras, holy sea water was sprinkled on him, the sacred mark was applied to his forehead with saffron and he was made to wear the crown. There was jubilation all around in Lanka.

There is a popular belief that seeing the beauty, comforts and luxuries of Lanka, Lakshman asked Ram to stay on in Lanka. But Ram said, “This golden Lanka is not to my liking. My own motherland is much dearer to me than life even in heaven.”

After the crowning ceremony, Lakshman, Vibhishan and many others returned to where Ram was. Ram then asked Hanuman to go to Lanka with due permission of Vibhishan and inform Sita about victory. “Tell her that we are all well and that Ravana has been killed by Ram and return with her message soon.”

Hanuman at once went to Ashoka-Vatika, where he saw Sita sitting under a tree, surrounded by Rakshasis. He bowed before her and stood there in all Sita recognised Hanuman, who told her about the victory of Ram over Ravana and about Ravana’s death. He also told her that kingdom of Lanka had been handed over to Vibhishan. Sita was so pleased to hear all this that tears began flowing from her eyes. She told Hanuman that the news he had brought was so good that no reward could duly compensate him for it. Hanuman replied that her loving words were more than enough and added that subject to her permission, he wanted to kill all those Rakshasis, who had been tormenting her.

When Hanuman said so, Sita said, “O Vanara-Shreshtha, who would ever be angry with the Rakshasis, that are slaves of the royal orders? I must have suffered because of my evil deeds in previous lives.”\* Sita then narrated a story: “In some forest, a hunter climbed up a tree because of the fear of a leopard. On the tree there was already a bear sitting on a branch. Going under the tree, the leopard said to the bear, ‘This hunter daily hunts the forest animals; hence you drop him down.’ But the bear replied, ‘He has come under my protection; hence I cannot drop him. It will be wrong on my part to do so. Saying so to the leopard and assuring the hunter, the bear fell asleep. After the bear had fallen asleep, the leopard said to the hunter ‘You should drop this sleeping bear; I shall eat him up but leave you alone.’ At this, the hunter tried to push the bear down the tree, but the bear caught hold of another branch of the tree and did not fall down. Then the leopard said to the bear, ‘This hunter is a criminal; hence you should drop him down.’”

But the bear said, I shall protect even the criminal' and thus protected him. On this occasion, the bear said to the leopard, It is not proper for me to behave in a bad manner, just because his actions have been bad. Every one should protect his own character, because character is the best ornament of the noble people.'

“O Vanara! One may be a sinner or virtuous, but noble people should always show kindness to him, as there is hardly any one who does not commit an offence.” When Sita uttered such words, Hanuman said, “O Devi, you are right. Now I want to go back to Ram and you may give me your message to him.”

Sitaji said to Hanuman, “You should give him just one message I want to see my husband.” Hanuman replied as he was about to go, “O Arye, you shall be seeing Ram, with Lakshaman and others, today itself.”

So, returning from Ashoka-Vatika, Hanuman bowed before Ram and said, “O Rajan, It makes me happy that you will now be able to meet Sita for whose sake, so much had to be done. Hearing about your

victory, Sita began to weep with joy and told me that she wanted to see you soon.” Ram’s eyes also became tearful at these words and addressing Vibhishan, who was sitting nearby, he said, “Bring Sita here, after she has taken her bath and changed into proper clothes.”

Vibhishan went into the inner apartments and told his women folk to inform Sita about his coming. Then he went to Sita and told her politely with folded hands, “O Devi, your husband wants to see you. Therefore take bath, put on some nice clothes and ornaments and get into a palanquin to go to him.” But Sita said that she wanted to go to see Ram without taking her bath. To this, Vibhishan told her that it was the order of her husband Shri Ram and she ought to comply.

Sita agreed and taking her bath, and wearing beautiful clothes and ornaments, she went to Ram in a palanquin. Vibhishan informed Ram of Sita’s arrival. Hearing this, Ram felt a mixture of anger, happiness and regret. Ram then told Vibhishan to send Sita to him soon. Vibhishan requested the crowd to give way to Sita. Thus Sita went to Ram, all the people looking at them in wonder and excitement.

As Sita reached there, she was overcome by feelings of wonder, happiness and love and she stood there speechless, just gazing at her. Husband But she almost immediately lowered her eyes because of shyness. Ram said in anger, “After defeating the enemy, I have recovered you and my wrath has subsided. Ravana had humiliated me by abducting you and I have taken revenge for my humiliation by destroying him. I have fulfilled my vow and am no longer bound by anything. Whatever a man could do I have done, but I have not done all that for you. I had to save my reputation and I have done it.

“O Sita, I have become suspicious about your character. Therefore, I do not you're your sending before me. The whole world is open to you and I order you to go wherever you like, as I have nothing to do with you. No men can accept a women, who has been living in someone else's house. How can I accept you, who had taken a scat in the lap of Ravana? I have said all this after giving a great thought to the matter. You may go wherever you like to live with Lakshaman, Bharat, Sugriva or Vibhishan.”

Sita was very much distressed to hear such harsh words from Ram and said, “O Vira, why are you saying such improper and crude words to me, like a vulgar man? I am not what your words imply. I say this on oath of my Pativrata-dharma and you should believe me. In case you know my character, you should shed your suspicion about me. When Ravana caught hold of me, he no doubt touched my body, but I was helpless and it was done against my desire, so I am not to be blamed. My heart is mine and that was always devoted to you. It is a pity that you have treated me like an ordinary woman. You seem to have forgotten even the vow taken together at the time of our marriage, and have ignored my devotion towards you.”

So saying, Sita said to Lakshaman, “O Lakshaman, I do not want to live any more with this false stigma. Please prepare a funeral pyre for me. Immolation appears to be the only option left to me. Since my husband has abandoned me, being suspicious of my conduct, it is but proper for me that I die in fire.”

Hearing these words, Lakshaman looked at Ram and sensing his intentions from his looks, he prepared a pyre. Thereafter, Sita circumbulated Ram slowly with head bent and came near the blazing fire. She then

folded her hands in salutation to the Brahmans, saying that as she had ever been thinking of Ram, as her husband, and none else, so Agni-god might grant her protection. Sita then circumbulated the pyre and was about to jump into the fire, when all the people around got afraid. Shri Ram came forward and prevented Sita from doing so and said, “Sita is certainly pure and chaste. But she had lived for many days in Ravana’s Ashoka-Vatika. If I had not made her go through this fire test, people would take me as a passionate fool. I know Sita loves me and has no place for any one else in her heart. She is to me, as light to the Sun. I cannot leave her as a great man cannot leave his fame.”

## Return to Ayodhya

Next morning, Vibhishan came and requested Ram to take his proper bath and wear lovely garments, garlands, etc. To this Ram replied “O Friend, Bharat has been suffering a lot because of me in Ayodhya. I cannot do any of these things, without seeing him first. Therefore, think of some means of taking us to Ayodhya quickly as the path we came by was long and arduous.”

Vibhishan said, “O Raj Kumar, I shall send you to Ayodhya in a day by the Pushpak Viman. It is here already. Sitting in this, you will reach Ayodhya without any trouble. In case you have any love for me, stay here for a day as my guest along with Lakshaman and Sita. I have collected a few things to present to you. I am saying all this because of my love and request for you.”

Ram replied, “O Vibhishan, I am unable to accept your request, because my heart is with my brother Bharat. You have done a good turn to us by rendering so much help so far. Please do not be angry with me it is my request to you. We may be allowed to go to Ayodhya at once.”

The Pushpak Viman was already there. Vibhishan asked Ram if there was anything else to be done. In consultation with Lakshaman, Ram said “O Vibhishan! All these brave and valiant Vanaras have done wonderful deeds in the battle. Hence they may be given diamonds, wealth and ornaments as a token of respect to them. Their hard work should be recognized and if you reward them, they will be happy. A king who does not encourage his soldiers by rewarding them, but knows only how to get killed, finds himself unsupported later on.”

Vibhishan immediately arranged for the appropriate rewards to be given to the Vanaras. Thereafter Ram, Sita and Lakshaman climbed up the aeroplane and wanted to take leave of all the Vanaras, Sugriva, Vibhishan, etc., saying that they had all done their friendly duties for which he would ever remain grateful and they could all return to their respective places.

“O Sugriva! You have done your friendly turn and could return to Kishkindha with this army.” Similarly, Ram told Vibhishan to go to Lanka as he was returning to Ayodhya, taking leave of all of them. When Ram said

so, all the Vanaras and Vibhishan said to Ram with folded hands, “We all want to accompany you to Ayodhya and return soon after seeing your coronation ceremony.”

Ram replied, “There can be nothing better than you all accompany me to Ayodhya. So Sugriva with his Chiefs and Vibhishan with his Ministers can come on to the Viman.” Accordingly they all took their seats in the Viman and it took off into the sky. Then Ram began to tell Sita, “O Vaidehi, see the Lanka constructed by skilled artisans on the top of Trikoota mountain. This is the battle-field where thousands of Rakshasas and Vanaras were killed.”

As the aeroplane flew further away, Ram told Sita about the various landmarks of his attack on Lanka. “This is the southern sea-shore where we crossed the sea. See the bridge which was made because of you. Here we now see the other shore of the sea, where we did the yajna and Vibhishan came and met me. We have now reached Kishkindhapuri, full of gardens and orchards all round. Here I killed Bali.”

Seeing Kishkindha and thinking of the friendly relations of Ram and Sugriva, Sita humbly said to Ram, “O Rajan, I want that I may enter Ayodhya along with the women of the Chief Vanaras.” When Sita expressed such a desire, Ram said, “All right” and the aeroplane was stopped there and Ram said to Sugriva, “O Vanara-Raj tell all your Chiefs to come along with their wives to go to Ayodhya. You should also do the same. Do it soon because we have to proceed immediately.”

Sugriva told this to all the Vanara Chiefs as well as Tara, who conveyed this pleasant message to all and they happily joined the party. With all these people in the Viman, it took off and soon they were over Rishyamook mountain, pointing to which Ram told Sita that it was at that place that the friendship bond with Sugriva had been established.

Continuing Ram said, “O Sila, Here we see the pond known as Pampa, where I met Dharmcharini Shabari and I killed Kabandha Rakshasa.” As the plane advanced further, Ram told Sita, “Here is the place where Jatayu fought with Ravana for your sake. Now we have come to the place where I killed Khara, Dushan and Trishira and see Panchvati, the Ashram that was built by us, still standing beautifully. We can see the

Ashram of Agastya Rishi, near the river Godavari. The Ashram of Sharbhanga can be seen as also the Ashram of Atri Rishi, where you met his wife Anusuya. Lo, here is Chitrakoot. It was here that Bharat came to see me. That is the Ashram of Bharadwaj Rishi with the sacred Ganga flowing by. We can also see Shringberpur, where I met Guha and the Sarayu River as well as Ayodhya.”

All these scenes were seen from the sky as they were flying over in the air. They got down in the Ashram of Bharadwaj Rishi and Ram asked the Rishi, after salutations, “Bhagwan, is all well in Ayodhya? Is there nothing amiss?” Bharadwaj replied, “Bharat is waiting for you as an ascetic, all is well in your family. I was very unhappy to see you at the time of your going to the forests fourteen years ago, but feel elated that you have returned after vanquishing the enemy. I know all that happened with you from beginning to end. You should stay here to-night as my guests and go to Ayodhya tomorrow morning.” Ram assented, but he sent Hanuman to Ayodhya to inform Bharat of their arrival, before the whole party arrived the next day.

### Arrival in Ayodhya

Hanuman, as per the directions of Ram, first landed at Shringberpur where he informed Guha about Ram's return. Hanuman then flew to Ayodhya but landed at Nandigram close to the place where Bharat was staying. There he saw Bharat with matted hair like an ascetic and ruling from there. He was surrounded by Ministers, Purohit, Army Commanders, etc., who were also attired very simply.

Hanuman said to Bharat with folded hands, "O Rajan, Ram about whom you keep worrying so much has sent some good message for you. You should give up all your sorrow, as he will be here soon! He is coming back after killing Ravana, with Lakshaman and Sita and some friends having completed the period of exile." Bharat was so happy to hear this that tears began to flow from his eyes out of ecstasy. Bharat embraced Hanuman and then said, "After a long while I am hearing the good message of his return. Please tell me how he became friendly with the Vanaras, with all the details." Hanuman narrated the entire story of Sira's abduction and the subsequent happenings to Bharat.

Bharat asked Shatrughan to get the town decorated with bunting and flowers to welcome Ram and party properly. He ordered that the roads be repaired and everything else be put in order before dawn. This was all done during the night, and early next morning, Bharat, with Ram's sandals on his head, white garlands and umbrella with Shatrughan and the Ministers following, proceeded to meet Ram half-way to welcome him. Many people gathered along the road, shouting loudly, "Ram has come—Ram has come". They saw the Pushpak Viman in the sky and began looking upwards, as if looking at the moon in the sky.

When the Viman landed, Bharat bowed at the feet of Ram, while Ram embraced him. Then Bharat bowed before Lakshaman and Sita, embraced Sugriva, saying that he was their fifth brother, being a friend. Ilien Bharat said to Vibhishan that it was indeed their good luck that with liis help, Ram was able to do such a formidable task. Shatrughan also bowed before Ram, Lakshaman and Sita.

Ram then met the three mothers, bowing at their feet. He bowed at I he feet of Guru Vashishtha, and Lakshaman and Sita did likewise. Bharat (hen put the sandals on the feet of Ram, saying that it was up to him

to carry on the work of the kingdom. Then they all went to Nandigram, the Ashram of Bharat.

Shatrughan sent for a barber so that the brothers could have a haircut, then all of them took their bath with scented water and wore beautiful clothes, garlands, etc., the women helped Sita in wearing ornaments and all other women also wore beautiful clothes, ornaments. In the meanwhile Suiriantra brought a chariot yoked with good beautiful horses. Ram sat in it. Sugriva and Vibhishan accompanying him, wife Sita and the wives of the Vanaras followed.

Bharat took the reins of the horses in his hands; Shatrughan held the royal umbrella and Lakshaman held the whisk. Thus the procession started from Nandigram to Ayodhya, with a large crowd of people and the Vanaras following. They entered Ayodhya with all pomp and show. Then Ram asked Bharat to arrange for the stay of Vibhishan, Sugriva and other Chiefs who had come with him.

## Ram's Coronation

When all preparations had been made for the coronation ceremony Guru Vishishtha with other Brahmins asked Ram to sit on a diamond- studded table and then the eight Ministers did the Abhisheka of Ram with scented water. The ceremony was performed by the Ritwajas, unmarried girls, Ministers, soldiers and last of all the business people. Mahatma Vashishtha then put the crown on Ram's head and the other Ritwajas gave him ornaments to wear.

The ceremony being over, Ram gave alms to the poor and deserving Brahmins. He also gave in charity cows, horses, bulls, gold crowns, beautiful clothes, and soon. Ram gave a diamond garland to Sugriva, two arm ornaments to Angada, a necklace to Sita, while Sitaji gave a beautiful diamond necklace to Hann man. Ram embraced Hanuman, saying that he would ever remain grateful to him. Ram also gave many rewards to other Vanara Chiefs according to their positions. Thus, the coronation ceremony and the subsequent joyous happenings were over. Vibhishan and all other Vanaras including Sugriva, Angada and Hanuman left Ayodhya for their places respectively.

According to Shringi Rishi's version, on completion of the fourteen years' period in exile, Ram, Lakshaman and Sila returned to Ayodhya, but Ram did not agree to accept the throne, saying that it was Bharat's, as per the boon given by Raja Dasharatha to mother Kaikeyi. He said that there was no such condition that the throne was to be turned over to Ram on his return from the forests. Bharat, on the other hand, did not accept this position and continued to request Ram to agree to be the king.

This stalmate between the two brothers, Ram and Bharat, continued for as long as twelve years, though efficient administration was carried on, with all the four brothers being at the helm of affairs and Bharat as the king. But it was not in any way a happy position, more so for Bharat, who wanted the responsibility of the kingdom to be given to Ram as a king, while others might do his bidding.

When Bharat saw that matters had stretched too far, he called a meeting of all the kings, rulers and Rishis, Munis, etc., to persuade Ram to become the king, in which Vibhishan, Sugriva, Makardhwaja (who

was ruling in America, known as Patal-lok, and was the only son of Hanuman from his wife, who was the daughter of Sugriva.

Hanuman's wife had died soon after Makardhawaja's birth and as Hanuman did not marry thereafter, he was known as Brahmachari) and many more people were invited. They all pleaded with Ram and lent support to Bharat in his request to Ram to take over the reins of the kingdom. Thus Ram had to yield after a great tussle and it was then decided that the ceremony be held on the day of Dipawali, though Ram had returned to Ayodhya some time in Chaitra (April). Thus time had dragged, on, and after twelve and a half years, Ram accepted the throne of Ayodhya.

So, according to Shringi Rishi, the marriage of Ram and his brothers took place at the age of 32; thereafter they lived in Ayodhya happily for twelve years, when Raja Dasharath thought of crowning Ram. At that time Ram was 44, but he had to go to forests, where he spent fourteen years. He returned when he was 58. Thereafter, twelve and a half years passed by; when he accepted throne he was seventy and a half years old, and ruled for thirty years, z.e., Ram passed away at the age of over one hundred years.

Soon after Ram became king, Sita became pregnant. During her pregnancy, Sita once expressed her desire before Ram that she wanted to spend some time in the Ashram of the Rishis, where it was so peaceful in the vicinity of Nature. Ram said, “Sita! Your desire would be fulfilled.” After a few days, Ram asked one of his servants about the people of his kingdom. He told Ram that all else was perfect, but some people still disapproved of Sita’s having been accepted by him, since she had lived in Havana’s I^anka for so long.

This made Ram sad. He immediately consulted his brothers and told Lakshaman firmly that he was to take Sita to the forests across the river to the Ashram of Valmiki and leave her there. Next morning, when she was told that Lakshaman would take her along to the forests to show her the Ashramas, she was pleased and accordingly Lakshaman took out a chariot, on which Sita sat and they both set off to the forests. After crossing Ganga, Lakshaman told Sita about the episode and she began to cry bitterly. All the same, Lakshaman came back, leaving her there.

Rishi Valmiki came there soon after and seeing Sita in a state of pregnancy, he blessed her and took her to the Ashram, where in course of time; she gave birth

to a son, who was named 'Lav' meaning the tuft of the tail of a cow. According to Shringi Rishi, one day Sita had taken her son along, who was a few months old, whilst going to fetch some water from the river. During her absence some daughter of a Rishi came there with a boy of almost the same age and left him on the Kusha-Asan spread in the Ashram. When Valmiki Rishi saw that boy, he thought it to be Sita's son Lav.

But soon after Sita returned with a jug of water and Lav in her lap, Valmiki was surprised to see this. He understood that die boy left in the Ashram was the son of a Rishi's young daughter. He asked Sita to adopt that boy also as her son and he was named 'Kusha' having been found on the 'Kusha-Asan'. Thus, the two were later on known to be the sons of Ram.

Time passed by and the two boys were well trained and educated by the Rishi, as also by their mother Sita so much so that they became excellent in all respects, not only in the Vedas and scriptures, but also in the art of warfare, as a Kshatriya should be.

## The End

After some time, Ram thought of performing Ashwamedha yajna and preparations were made. The yajna was begun with Sita made of gold sitting at Ram's side and during this period, the two brothers, i.e., Lav and Kusha, who were also good singers, went round the streets of Ayodhya, singing Ramayana, with special reference to Sita's later life and her sufferings. People were charmed to listen to them and their tale reached Ram's ears who called them and listened to his own story. People used to listen attentively and many eyes shed tears.

When asked, the boys told them about their mother and Rishi Valmiki. Ram along with his brothers went to Valmiki's Ashram and there Valmiki told Ram about his sons, asking Ram to take back Sita. Ram said that he knew full well that Sita was blameless, yet some people thinking of Ravana's bad character, had little faith in Sita's purity. In case Sita could prove her innocence before his people, he was prepared to have her back.

So Sita came to Ayodhya once again. The condition of proving her innocence before the public was a difficult proposition, though Ram and all the good people were fully convinced of her purity. Sita, therefore, decided to fast unto death in this way she passed away after a week from her return to Ayodhya. This was too much for Ram to bear, as possibly the guilt of her suffering and ultimate death must have haunted him.

Ram was more than one hundred years of age at this time. It so happened that some Muni came to see Ram and told Ram that he wanted to talk to him when none else be allowed to be present. In case someone came, he be turned out of the country. Ram agreed and whilst they were talking Durvasa Rishi came there and told Lakshaman, who was sitting at the door, to inform Ram about his coming. Lakshaman knew that if he went in, he would be turned out of the country. Yet fearing the curse from Durvasa, he went in and informed Ram of Durvasa's coming.

On coming out, Lakshaman straight went to the river Saryu and there by jumping into the river, he breathed his last. When Ram came to know of this happening, he went to Saryu River, and followed Lakshaman, and thus came the inevitable end of Ram's journey in this world.

An English poet has said, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts." Possibly, this is one reason why Ramayana is so much liked by the people, though it is about nine lakh years old. It is a love story on a divine scale, wherein we find duty and love intermingling, as if forming the warp and woof of the divinely magic carpet that can take us wandering into the highest bliss, which one cannot even imagine.

In Ram's life duty and sacrifice have been depicted by Valmiki, as love for Ram is divinely, much higher than the worldly affair, which is best achieved by sacrificing his all for the sake of duty towards his parents initially, culminating in his love-duty towards his subjects and the public in the end.

The readers may observe two most important incidents in Ram's life:

He went to the forests with a purpose in mind. It was to annihilate the might of the Rakshasas, more particularly that of Ravana and his followers, as he had become a potent enemy to the Vedic culture, from within. Ravana himself was the follower of Vedic culture, as he professed so very vehemently, yet he was eroding its structure in the name of Rakshasi culture. This was indeed a gigantic task that he was able to accomplish the help of most of the people.

It was for the sake of the people again that Ram sacrificed his personal comforts as well as happiness and sent Sita to Valmiki's Ashram even though she was pregnant. Herein lies Ram's greatness and that is why possibly 'Ram-Rajya' has come to be known as the most ideal form of government in the history of the world. Whenever it is required to give an example of ideal rule, one immediately alludes to 'Ram-Rajya'.

Some people dismiss the second episode as an interpolation. They forget the fact that all greatness rests on the shoulders of sacrifice. In their views Sita's second exile was a most unjust and undeserved of

punishment for Sita. I entirely agree and have all sympathies, but Ram inflicted greater punishment on his own self, because he did not marry at all and led a selfrestrained life, suffering the agony of separation from his dear wife day and night

With this brief comment, I leave it more to the imagination of the readers themselves, who may judge as well as enjoy reading this great epic, immortal in its theme and appeal to the people as a whole.

एकमप्यक्षरं यस्तु गुरुः शिष्ये निवेदयेत् ।  
पृथिव्यां नास्ति तद् द्रव्यं यद्वत्वा ह्यनृणी भवेत् ॥



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