

RAMAYANA

Translated by Robert Biggs

PART I
BĀLA-KĀṆḌA

Edited by Josh Rutherford & Piotr Gajos

© *Robert Biggs* 2014

With love, respect and rotten chickens
— *Sourcebits Family*

THE SAGE NĀRADA SUMMARIZES THE RĀMĀYAṆA TO VĀLMĪKI

The ascetic Vālmīki, who had been practicing austerities and studying the sacred scriptures, inquired from the learned and best of sages, Nārada. "O sage, at present who in this world is virtuous, who possesses prowess, who knows the principles of religion, who is grateful for service rendered, who is truthful, and who has firm resolve? Who possesses good character, who is the well-wisher of all living beings, who is truly learned, who is powerful, and who is the most beautiful person? Who has self-control, who has conquered anger, who is effulgent, who is non-envious, and whom do the demigods fear when angered in battle? This is what I wish to hear, for I am filled with extreme curiosity. O great sage, you are capable of knowing such a person."

Hearing this request from Vālmīki, Nārada, who possesses knowledge of the three worlds, replied: "Listen." Then with great delight, he began to speak. "O sage, listen as I describe the person who possesses the many rare qualities you have mentioned. There is such a person, born in the dynasty of Īkṣvāku, whom people call by the name Rāma. He is self-controlled and extremely powerful. He is effulgent, determined and has conquered His passions. He is intelligent, prudent, eloquent, glorious and the destroyer of enemies. He has broad shoulders, strong arms, the marks of a conch upon His neck, and a sturdy jaw. His chest is broad and His bow is large. His collar bone is covered by flesh and He is capable of subduing any enemy. His arms reach His knees. His head is quite attractive, and so too is His forehead. His gait is dignified. He is of average height and the limbs of His body are well-proportioned. His complexion is shiny and He is very strong. His chest is muscular and His eyes broad. His body possesses great splendor and all auspicious attributes. He knows the principles of religion, is true to His word and is engaged in the welfare of the people. He is illustrious, endowed with knowledge, pure, in control of His faculties and has a steadfast mind. Being the support of the world, He is equal in every respect to Brahmā. He is endowed with great wealth and easily destroys His

enemies. He is the protector of all living creatures, and the defender of religion. He is the defender of His own virtues and of His own people. He knows the four Vedas and their corollaries and is skilled in the science of war (Dhanur-veda). He knows the meaning of all the sacred scriptures, and is endowed with a perfect memory and sharp mind. His popularity is universal. He is righteous, optimistic and skillful with words. He is always approached by the devout, as is the ocean by rivers. He is noble, equal to all, and His appearance is always very pleasant. He is endowed with all good qualities and He increases the bliss of His mother, Kausalyā. He is as profound as the ocean and as steadfast as the Himalayas. He is as powerful as Lord Viṣṇu, and as pleasing to see as the moon. His anger is like the fire of destruction at the end of the world, and His forgiveness is like the earth. In liberality, He is equal to Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods; and in truthfulness He is like a second Dharmarāja, the god of justice.

In order to please his subjects, King Daśaratha affectionately wished to install his eldest son, Rāma, who was endowed with all good qualities, as crown prince, especially since He possessed the best attributes and because His prowess was irresistible and He had the welfare of the people at heart. Then, seeing the preparations for Rāma's coronation, Kaikeyī, the second wife of King Daśaratha, on the strength of the promise of a boon from the king, requested that Rāma be banished from the kingdom and that her son, Bharata, be installed as king. Because of his truthfulness, Daśaratha was bound by the noose of duty. Thus he banished his beloved son Rāma. In obedience to His father's order and to please His step-mother, Kaikeyī, Rāma went to the forest, thus upholding His father's promise to Kaikeyī. As Rāma departed, His dear brother, Lakṣmaṇa, who was endowed with great modesty and who was the source of increasing happiness for his mother, Sumitra, accompanied Him because of the great affection he had for Him. In this way, Lakṣmaṇa showed his fidelity to his elder brother Rāma. Rāma's consort, Sītā, was as dear to Him as His own life. She was endowed with all auspicious attributes and was the very best of women. Sītā followed Rāma into the forest as the star Rohiṇī follows her husband, the moon. Rāma was accompanied some distance by the citizens, as well as by His own father, Daśaratha.

Rāma met the pious soul, Guha, who was His dear friend and leader of the Niṣādas, at the city of Śrīgerapura on the bank of the Ganges. Thereafter, He sent back His charioteer. In the company of Guha, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā, Rāma wandered from forest to forest, crossing many swollen rivers. By the order of the sage Bharadvāja, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā went to the mountain of Citrakuṭa. After building a pleasant cottage, the three of them enjoyed themselves in that forest. They resided there happily as if they were gods or gandharvas. After Rāma had gone to Citrakuṭa, King Daśaratha was overcome with grief due to separation from his son. While weeping for his son, he went to heaven.

After the death of King Daśaratha, the best of brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha urged Bharata to accept the post of king. Bharata, however, did not wish to, but instead went to the forest to placate Rāma. Reaching the great soul Rāma, whose prowess was unfailing, the noble Bharata entreated his brother. He spoke the following words, "O Rāma, You alone are the king, for You are the knower of the principles of righteousness." The countenance of Rāma, who was most magnanimous and whose glory was very great, was very pleasing to behold. Powerful Rāma did not wish to take over the kingdom because of the order of His father. He therefore presented Bharata with His own sandals as His representatives in the kingdom. Only after repeated requests was Rāma able to convince Bharata to return to Ayodhyā. Being unable to accomplish what he desired, Bharata touched the two lotus feet of Rāma. Taking up the rule of the kingdom, Bharata resided in the town of Nandigrāma outside of Ayodhyā, and waited anxiously for the return of Rāma.

After Bharata left, Rāma, whose promise was true and who had conquered His own senses, foresaw the arrival of the citizens of Ayodhyā seeking audience with Him there. With His mind set on only one thing, His father's order, He left that place and entered the Daṇḍakāranya Forest. Upon entering that great forest, Rāma, whose eyes were like red lotuses, killed the rākṣasa Virādha. Thereafter, He saw the sages Śarabhaṅga, Sūtikṣṇa, Agastya and Agastya's brother, Idhmavāhana. On Agastya's request, Rāma happily accepted a bow, a sword and a pair of quivers with an inexhaustible number of arrows. All these had originally been given to the sage by Indra. While dwelling in the forest with the aborigines, Rāma was approached by all the

forest sages who requested Him to kill the demons and rākṣasas. He vowed to kill all the rākṣasas in the forest. To the sages dwelling in the Daṇḍakāraṇya Forest, who were themselves as potent as fire, Rāma promised to kill all the rākṣasas in combat. In that very forest, in a region called Janasthāna, dwelt a rākṣasī named Śurpanakhā. She could assume any form at will, but was disfigured by Rāma. Then, after hearing from Śurpanakhā, all the rākṣasas were roused to fight. Rāma killed in battle Śurpanakhā's brothers Khara, Triśirā and Dūṣaṇa, as well as all of their foot soldiers. While dwelling in that forest, Rāma killed fourteen thousand rākṣasas that were staying in the Janastāna region of the Daṇḍakā Forest.

After hearing about the slaughter of his kinsmen, Rāvaṇa was overcome with anger. He then sought the help of one rākṣasa named Mārīca. Mārīca repeatedly entreated Rāvaṇa, "O Rāvaṇa, it is not wise to make enmity with the powerful Rāma! You should be tolerant of Him." Rāvaṇa, however, did not heed Mārīca's words, being impelled by destiny. Accompanied by Mārīca, he went to Rāma's hermitage. The sorcerer Mārīca lured the two princes, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, far away. Rāvaṇa carried off Rāma's wife, Sītā, after wounding the vulture Jaṭāyu. Seeing the wounded vulture and hearing from him about Sītā's abduction, Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu dynasty, was overwhelmed with grief. With all His senses disturbed, He began lamenting. Then, with great sadness, Rāma cremated the vulture Jaṭāyu.

While searching the forest for Sītā, Rāma came upon a rākṣasa named Kabandha. His body was deformed and frightening to behold. Rāma killed the rākṣasa and cremated him, after which the rākṣasa achieved heaven. As Kabandha ascended, he told Rāma to seek out Śabarī, an aborigine woman, who was very religious, "O descendant of the Raghu dynasty, approach that female hermit, for she is knowledgeable in all aspects of righteousness." Then Rāma, who was very powerful and the destroyer of enemies, approached Śabarī. Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha was appropriately worshiped by Śabarī.

On the shore of Lake Pampā, Rāma met the monkey Hanumān. On the request of Hanumān, Rāma then met the monkey chieftain Sugrīva.

Then the strong Rāma related to Sugrīva the story of His life from His very birth, as well as that of His consort, Sītā. After the monkey Sugrīva heard the whole story of Rāma, he developed great affection for Him and established friendship with Him with a sacred fire as witness. Then the monkey chieftain, Sugrīva, out of affection for Rāma and with sadness, informed Him about his enmity with his brother Vāli. At that time, Rāma promised to kill Vāli, after which Sugrīva described Vāli's strength, for Sugrīva always doubted Rāma's personal strength. In order to convince Rāma of Vāli's strength, Sugrīva showed Him the carcass as large as a mountain of the demon Dundubhi, who had been killed by Vāli. Slightly smiling, the strong-armed and greatly powerful Rāma took one look at the skeleton and then, with His big toe, kicked it a distance of ten yojanas. To instill confidence in Sugrīva, Rāma, with one mighty arrow, pierced the trunks of seven palmyra trees standing in a row, the mountain behind them and the seven lower worlds.

After seeing this, the monkey chieftain was pleased at heart and had faith in the ability of Rāma. He went with Rāma to Kiṣkindhā, the stronghold of Vāli, which was a cave in the mountains. Then the best of monkeys, Sugrīva, who was the color of gold, roared ferociously. Hearing that mighty roar, the king of monkeys, Vāli, sallied forth from his cave. Reassuring his wife, Tārā, Vāli confronted Sugrīva. Rāma thereupon slew Vāli with a single arrow. After slaying Vāli as per the advice of Sugrīva, Rāma bestowed the kingdom to Sugrīva.

Assembling all the monkeys, Sugrīva dispatched them in all directions to look for Sītā. On the advice of the vulture Sampāti, the strong Hanumān leapt one hundred yojanas across the salt ocean to the island of Laṅkā. Arriving at the city of Laṅkā, which was protected by Rāvaṇa, he saw Sītā in the Aśoka garden, where she was absorbed in thoughts of Rāma. After presenting Rāma's ring to Sītā, Hanumān related to Her a message from Rāma, thus assuaging Her grief. Then he demolished the gateway of the garden. After killing five generals and seven sons of ministers and crushing Akṣa, the son of Rāvaṇa, he was captured. Knowing that on the strength of a boon from Brahmā he would be released from the brahma-pāśa weapon, Hanumān deliberately tolerated the rākṣasas as they carried him, bound as he was. Then the great monkey set fire to the city of Laṅkā, except

where Sītā was, and departed from there to convey the good news to his dear master Rāma. Having reached the great-souled Rāma, Hanumān, who was of immeasurable prowess, circumambulated Him and informed Him, "I have actually seen Sītā." Then, in the company of Sugrīva, Rāma went to the shore of the great ocean and agitated it by firing arrows as bright as the sun. Then the deity of the ocean, who is the lord of all waters, appeared before them. On the advice of the ocean, Rāma had Nala build a bridge over the ocean. Crossing it to the city of Laṅkā, Rāma killed the demon Rāvaṇa.

Upon finding Sītā, Rāma felt terribly ashamed that She had been in the home of another man. In the assembly of monkeys, Rāma revealed His mind to Sītā. Being unable to bear such criticism, Sītā entered into a blazing fire. Thereafter, by the declaration of the deity of fire, Agni, it was made known that Sītā was faultless. All moving and nonmoving beings within the three worlds, including the demigods and sages, were pleased by the great feat executed by Lord Rāma. After being worshiped by all the demigods, Rāma was very satisfied. Installing the rākṣasa Vibhīṣaṇa as king of Laṅkā, Rāma had accomplished His purpose, was free from anxiety and thus rejoiced. He thereupon received a boon from the demigods that all those monkeys who had been killed in battle would regain their lives. Surrounded by His friends, Rāma departed for Ayodhyā in a flower aircraft called Puṣpaka.

On arriving at the hermitage of the sage Bharadvāja, Rāma, whose prowess was insurmountable, sent Hanumān ahead to inform Bharata of their return. After narrating once more the story of His life, He boarded the flower aircraft Puṣpaka with Sugrīva and other companions and departed for Nandigrāma. Having shaved off His matted locks of hair in Nandigrāma with His brothers, and having regained Sītā, the sinless Rāma again received His kingdom.

In the kingdom of Rāma the people will be joyful, happy, contented, well-fed, religious, free from disease, and free from the fear of famine. They will never see the death of their sons, nor will there be widows; and the women will always be devoted to their husbands. There will never be any fear of fire, nor will any living creatures drown in water; neither will there be any fear from the wind or from fever. There will never be fear of hunger or

theft. The cities and states will have ample wealth and food-grains. Everyone will always be as jubilant as in the Golden Age of Krita-yuga. He will perform one hundred horse sacrifices and other sacrifices with abundant quantities of gold, giving 100,000 cows in charity to the learned, as ordained in the sacred scriptures, and immeasurable wealth to the brāhmaṇas. He will establish royal dynasties one hundred times more glorious than others. The four castes in this world will remain fixed in the execution of their particular duties. Having served His kingdom for eleven hundred years, He will return to the spiritual world. This narration about Lord Rāma is as pure, holy, and destructive to sin as are the Vedas. One who studies it will become freed from all sins.

A person who reads this narration called Rāmāyaṇa will achieve long life and after death, will enjoy with his children, grandchildren and other relations in heaven. The brāhmaṇa who reads this will achieve mastery of speech, the kṣatriya will become ruler of the world, the vaiśya will achieve success in business ventures, and the śūdra will achieve greatness.

HOW THE RĀMĀYAṆA WAS COMPILED

Having heard those words of Nārada, the eloquent Vālmīki, who was a pious soul, assisted by his disciples, worshiped Nārada. After being duly worshiped by Vālmīki and receiving his permission to leave, the sage Nārada ascended into the sky. After remaining in Vālmīki's hermitage for a period of forty-eight minutes, Nārada had ascended to the realm of the gods. Then Vālmīki went to the shore of the Tamasā River, which was not far from the Ganges. Arriving on the bank of the Tamasā River, he saw that the bank was not muddy and spoke to the disciple standing at his side: "O Bharadvāja, this bathing place is free of mud. The water of this pleasant place is as peaceful as the mind of a saintly person. Child, put your water pot down and hand me my bark cloth to wrap myself with. I am going to bathe here in this most excellent ford of the Tamasā River." Having spoken thus, Bharadvāja, who was an obedient disciple, handed to his guru, the great soul Vālmīki, the bark cloth for bathing. Taking the bark cloth from the hand of his disciple, Vālmīki, whose senses were fully under his control, began to wander about, seeing everything that was there in that extensive forest.

Near that spot, the sage saw a pair of herons moving about the forest as they flirted in love, making a charming sound. Shortly thereafter, he saw a very sinful hunter, who was full of enmity to other creatures, shoot with an arrow the male heron of the pair. Seeing her mate flopping about on the ground, with blood smeared all over his body due to a fatal wound, she began to wail piteously. Knowing that they would soon be separated by death, the male heron, whose crest was reddish like copper, desired to enjoy with his mate one last time, thus he extended his wings as he united with her.

The sight of the bird's being struck down in that way by the hunter aroused the sage's compassion. On seeing the wailing heron and considering the hunter's action sinful, the sage spoke the following words:

*mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām
tvam agamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ
yat krauñca-mithunād ekam
avadbīḥ kāma-mobitam*

*O hunter, so wicked are you!
Thus may you not live many years;
For as the herons made love true,
You killed the one, left one in tears.*

Having spoken in this way, he began to reflect, "What is it that I have uttered, being stricken with grief for the plight of the bird?" Thinking about this for a while, the highly learned sage Vālmiki came to a conclusion and spoke the following words to his disciple: "Let these words uttered by me due to the pangs of grief, which were arranged in four feet of an equal number of syllables and which are therefore easily sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, be accepted as only a poetic verse and nothing more." Vālmiki's disciple, being pleased by the excellence of the verse, memorized it as the sage spoke it. Seeing this, Vālmiki was very pleased.

After that, the sage took his bath in the ford of the river according to scriptural rules. Thinking about what had occurred, he departed for his hermitage. Then the humble and learned disciple Bharadvāja picked up the full water pot and followed after his spiritual master. Having entered the hermitage, Vālmiki sat down and discussed various topics with his disciple, all the while thinking about the verse he had uttered. Just then, the creator of the world, the four-headed Lord Brahmā, arrived to see the great sage. Seeing him, Vālmiki immediately stood up. He stood there with folded hands and was unable to speak, being struck with wonder. After worshiping Lord Brahmā with water for washing the feet and hands, a seat to sit on and words of praise, Vālmiki bowed down to him according to scriptural rules and inquired about his well-being. After sitting on the most glorious seat, Lord Brahmā requested Vālmiki to also sit down. Accepting Brahmā's

request, Vālmīki took his seat. While sitting next to Brahmā, who is known as the grandfather of the universe, Vālmīki's mind began dwelling on the incident of the herons. He thought to himself: "The wicked hunter committed a great blunder with malicious intent. He killed for no reason the heron who was cooing so pleasingly in the rapture of love." Contemplating the plight of the female heron, in the presence of Brahmā, he recited the verse again. Once more he returned to mental contemplation, being overcome with grief.

Lord Brahmā then laughingly addressed the sage. "O brāhmaṇa, fret no longer over this metrical verse. It was intended for you alone. It was I who caused you to utter it. O best of sages, using the metrical format of this verse, describe in full the transcendental activities of Lord Rāma. The Supreme Personality of Godhead appeared in this world as Lord Rāma, the most righteous and sober person. Describe those activities as you heard them from the sage Nārada. Whatever activity, whether known or confidential, about the all-knowing Rāma, as well as about Lakṣmaṇa, or even about all the rākṣasas, as well as whatever there is that is known or confidential about Sītā, all that will be revealed to you. Not one word of yours in this poem will be proven false. Compose the auspicious and mind-pleasing story of Lord Rāma, using the pattern of this metrical verse. As long as there are mountains and rivers on the earth, the story of Lord Rāma will endure among people. As long as this story of Lord Rāma composed by you endures, you will dwell in this world and in the upper worlds."

Having spoken thus, Lord Brahmā vanished from sight. Thereafter, the great sage, along with his disciples, was astonished. Then all Vālmīki's disciples repeated that verse. Experiencing continual ecstasy, they then spoke with wonder. "What the great sage recited with four feet and an equal number of syllables was nothing but his grief transformed into a metrical verse by dint of his having uttered it." Thus it occurred to the thoughtful sage to compose the entire Rāmāyaṇa in such verses. Then the illustrious and broad-minded sage composed hundreds and thousands of captivating metrical verses extolling the glorious deeds of Lord Rāma. That poem has made the sage famous. Listen to the story composed by the sage Vālmīki which tells of Rāma, the best of the Raghu dynasty, and of the death of the ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa. This story is adorned with the proper use of

compound words and elision² of letters, and its words are full of meaning and uniform sweetness.

VĀLMĪKI SUMMARIZES THE RĀMĀYAṆA

Having heard the entire theme of the Rāmāyaṇa, which is conducive to religious merit and economic development, Vālmīki tried to uncover the details of the highly learned Rāma. Sitting on a mat of kuśa grass with its tips pointing east, Vālmīki sipped water according to scriptural regulation for his purification. Then he joined his hands and began considering how to achieve his goal of composing the Rāmāyaṇa. The sage was actually able to perceive everything regarding Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, Daśaratha and his queens and kingdom. How they laughed, talked, walked and acted—all that he saw by mystic power. Moreover, whatever Lord Rāma, who was true to His promise, did in the company of Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa as they wandered in the forest, he was also able to see. While situated in yogic trance, the pious soul Vālmīki saw everything that happened in the past as clearly as one sees a fruit in one's hand. The great sage saw all that by dint of his yogic ability, then he prepared to compose the story of the all-glorious Rāma. That story contains elaborations on the four principles of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa (religiosity, economic development, sense enjoyment and liberation). As the ocean is full of gems, so is the Rāmāyaṇa full of literary adornments. It attracts the ears and minds of everyone. The sage then began composing the story of the Raghu dynasty exactly as he heard it recited by the great soul Nārada.

He described Lord Rāma's birth, His superlative prowess, His benevolence to all, His popularity with the people, as well as His forgiveness, gentleness, and truthfulness. He also described many wonderful stories, such as: when Rāma was with the sage Viśvāmitra; how He married Sītā; how He broke the great bow of Śiva; the dispute between Him and Paraśurāma; His exceptional qualities; the preparation for His coronation; the ill will of Queen Kaikeyī towards Him; the interruption of Rāma's coronation and His banishment; King Daśaratha's grief and lamentation and how he attained the heavenly world; the grief of the citizens, and how He sent back those who followed Him into the forest; His conversation with the chief of the

Niṣādas and how He sent His charioteer back to Ayodhyā; His crossing of the Ganges and encounter with the sage Bharadvāja; how, on the advice of Bharadvāja, He went to Citrakuṭa; how He constructed a hut; the arrival of His brother, Bharata, who tried to convince Rāma to return to Ayodhyā; how Rāma offered water in the obsequial rite of His father; how Bharata installed Rāma's sandals and took up residence in the village of Nandigrāma; Rāma's arrival at the Daṇḍakāraṇya Forest; His killing of the rākṣasa Virādha; His visit with the sage Śarabhaṅga, and encounter with the sage Sutikṣṇa; Sītā's sojourn with Anasūyā, the wife of sage Atri, and how she offered sandalwood paste on the body of Sītā; Rāma's visiting the sage Agastya and receiving a bow from him; Śurpanakhā's conversation with Rāma and her disfigurement by Him; how Rāma killed Khara, Triśirā and Dūṣaṇa; Rāvaṇa's infuriation with Rāma; the killing of the magician Mārīca, and the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa; Rāma's lamentation and the death of the king of vultures, Jaṭāyu; Rāma's encounter with the demon Kabandha and His arrival at Lake Pampā; His meeting with Śabārī and His eating of fruits and roots offered by her; Rāma's wailing due to the loss of His consort and His meeting with the monkey Hanumān on the shore of Lake Pampā; Rāma's arrival at Rṣyamūka Mountain and His meeting with Sugrīva; Rāma's instilling confidence in Sugrīva and striking up a friendship with him; the battle between Vāli and Sugrīva, the crushing defeat of Vāli and the installation of Sugrīva on the throne of Kiṣkindhā; the lamentation of Vāli's widow, Tārā; the pact between Rāma and Sugrīva; Rāma's residing at Kiṣkindhā for the period of the monsoon; the anger of Rāma, the lion of the Raghu dynasty; the mustering of soldiers by Sugrīva and their being dispatched in all directions of the earth; Rāma's entrusting of His ring to Hanumān; the finding of the cave of the bear Jambavān; the monkeys' resolve to fast until death and their encounter with the vulture Sampātī; Hanumān's ascending Mahendra Mountain and his leaping across the ocean; Maināka Mountain's meeting with Hanumān by the instruction of the god of the ocean; Hanumān's being threatened by the demoness Surasā; his seeing the illusory form of the demoness Laṅkinī, and his killing of the demoness Simhikā; his seeing Trikuṭa Mountain upon which the city of Laṅkā stood; Hanumān's entry of Laṅkā at night and thinking what to do; his entry into Rāvaṇa's liquor hall and harem quarters; his seeing Rāvaṇa asleep, and also

Rāvaṇa's airship Puṣpaka; his seeing the Aśoka grove and Sītā within it; his delivery of Rāma's ring to Sītā to identify himself as Rāma's servant and his subsequent conversation with Sītā; Sītā's relating to Hanumān about Her harassment by the rākṣasīs and how Trijaṭā, the daughter of Vibhīṣaṇa, had a dream in which Rāma was victorious; Sītā's bestowal to Hanumān of Her diadem; Hanumān's destruction of the trees in the Aśoka Grove; the fleeing of the Rākṣasīs and the slaughter by Hanumān of Rāvaṇa's servants; the capture of Hanumān, the son of the wind god; the incineration of Laṅkā by Hanumān as he roared; Hanumān's return jump across the ocean and his forcible confiscation of Sugrīva's honey; Hanumān's comforting of Rāma and delivery to Him of Sītā's diadem; how Lord Rāma with an army of monkeys converged on the sea and met the god of the sea, and how Lord Rāma had the monkey Nala build a bridge across the sea; the passage of the army across the sea at night and the siege of Laṅkā; the encounter of Rāma with Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhīṣaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa's instruction on how to kill Rāvaṇa and others; the slaughter of Kumbhakarṇa and Meghanāda; the destruction of Rāvaṇa and the retrieval of Sītā from the enemy city; the coronation of Vibhīṣaṇa as king of Laṅkā by Rāma and discovery of the airship Puṣpaka; the departure of Rāma and His followers for Ayodhyā; their visit to the sage Bharadvāja in Prayāga; Rāma's dispatching of Hanumān to inform Bharata of their impending arrival; the coronation of Rāma and the dispatchment of the monkey troops to their homeland; and, Rāma's endearment to His subjects and the banishment of Sītā. Furthermore, whatever else that Lord Rāma was yet to perform while on the earth was also described by the powerful sage Vālmiki in the excellent poem, the Rāmāyaṇa.

RĀMA HEARS THE RĀMĀYAṆA RECITED BY HIS OWN SONS

The powerful sage Vālmīki compiled the complete narration of the deeds of Rāma, which is full of wonderful expressions and potent with meaning, after Lord Rāma regained His kingdom. The sage composed the poem in twenty-four thousand verses with five hundred chapters and six cantos, plus an epilogue. Having finished the main body of the Rāmāyaṇa, as well as the epilogue dealing with future events in the life of Rāma, the highly intelligent sage began wondering who would be capable of reciting it. While the sage was thinking in this way, the two sons of Rāma, Lava and Kuśa, dressed as ascetics, approached their teacher, prostrated themselves and caught hold of his feet. Vālmīki's eyes rested on the two princes, who were dutiful, famous, skilled in singing sweetly and were living together in his hermitage.

Seeing that the two youths had good memories and were well-versed in the revealed scriptures, for the purpose of teaching them the meaning of the scriptures, the sage, who had taken it upon himself to compose the Rāmāyaṇa, taught them the entire poem which deals with the story of Sītā and the death of Rāvaṇa, the son of Pulastya. The two brothers recited this poem, which is very sweet to read or sing, and which can be recited in three speeds—slow, medium or fast—with the seven notes of the musical scale and with accompaniment by a stringed instrument. The poem was also adorned with the sentiments of love, mercy, mirth, chivalry, horror, anger, etc. The two brothers were indeed skilled in the art of singing, and understood how sound could be generated in the lungs, throat and head. Their voices were as sweet as angels'. Their bodies were beautified with auspicious marks and they spoke with sweet voices. Like two images arisen from an original, they looked like two more Rāmas arisen from the body of Lord Rāma. The irreproachable princes memorized the entire poem, which was conducive to virtue and unexcelled.

On a certain day, the two dedicated brothers who knew the meaning of the Vedas recited the Rāmāyaṇa, as it had been instructed to them, in an assembly of sages, brāhmaṇas and holy men. Standing together in the midst of the assembly of sages of purified mind, the two great souls, who were most fortunate and endowed with all auspicious marks, recited the poem. Hearing it, all the sages were totally astonished. With their eyes full of tears, they shouted "Well done! Well done!" Being pleased in mind, the sages, who were all lovers of virtue, praised the two worthy singers, Kuśa and Lava, "O how wonderful is this music, and even more so the verses themselves! Although these things occurred long ago, they made them appear before our eyes. After entering into the spirit of the poem, the two sang in one sweet voice with the richness of music." Being praised by the sages who were themselves worthy of praise for their asceticism, the two sang even more sweetly and with more emotion.

Pleased with them, a certain sage stood up and presented them a water pot. Another sage, himself being very famous, gave them bark cloth to wear. Another gave them the skin of a black deer and another gave them sacred threads to wear as brāhmaṇas. Another gave them a water pitcher, and one great sage gave them a belt made of muñja grass. Another gave them mats of kuśa grass, while another gave them loincloths. Another sage joyfully gave them a hatchet for cutting firewood, another gave them saffron-colored cloth, another gave them a shawl. Another gave them string for tying their matted locks in a topknot, another joyfully gave them rope for tying bundles of firewood. One sage gave them a sacrificial vessel and another gave them a bundle of firewood. Another gave them a low seat made of udumbara wood, as a number of great sages jubilantly gave them blessings for a long life.

In this way, the sages who were speakers of truth granted boons to the two youths and exclaimed, "How wonderful is this narration elaborated by the sage Vālmiki. It will be the model for all future poetry and has ended with the proper sequence of events. You two who are skilled in all kinds of music have sung this song admirably. It is conducive to long life and prosperity, and is fascinating for the ears and mind."

Once Rāma, the elder brother of Bharata, saw the two singers roaming about the streets and avenues of Ayodhyā, receiving praise from

everyone. After bringing the two brothers, Kuśa and Lava, into His own palace and properly honoring them, Rāma, the slayer of foes, sat on His brilliant lion throne made of gold. Seated around Him were His ministers and brothers. Seeing the two brothers who were not only handsome, but humble too, Lord Rāma said to His brothers, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna and Bharata, "Hear from these two boys, who possess the luster of gods, this narration which deals with many different topics." Then he urged the two singers to begin. The two recited the poem, whose subject matter was well known, in a sweet and charming manner. Their voices sounded like a vīṇā when they reached high sweet notes. That song thrilled every limb of the bodies of those present in the assembly. It was pleasing to the mind, heart and ears.

Then Lord Rāma said, "The two sages, Kuśa and Lava, possess characteristics of world leaders, though they are ascetics. Listen to this narration which is highly emotional and which has been declared to be beneficial even for Me." Then, being urged by the words of Lord Rāma, the two boys began singing in the courtly style. Rāma too, in the company of His associates, gradually absorbed His mind in the recitation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CITY OF AYODHYĀ

Since ancient times, the entire earth has been the property of the victorious kings beginning from Vaivasvata Manu. Among them was King Sagara, who excavated the oceans and who, when he went out in battle, was followed by his sixty thousand sons. It is said that this narration known as the Rāmāyaṇa has its origin in the dynasty of great kings descended from Ikṣvāku. We will narrate all of this from the very beginning, as it is conducive to piety, economic gain, sense enjoyment and final beatitude. It should be heard with a heart free from envy.

There is a kingdom of the name Kosala situated on the bank of the Sarayu River. It is happy and prosperous and endowed with abundant wealth and food. Its capital is the world-famous city of Ayodhyā, which was built by Vaivasvata Manu himself, the sovereign lord of humankind. The great city is twelve yojanas long and three yojanas wide and has well-laid out streets. It is beautified by a wonderful extensive highway system that is regularly sprinkled with scented water and strewn with flowers.

As Indra, the lord of the gods, inhabits the city of Amarāvātī in the heavens, so does King Daśaratha dwell in the city of Ayodhyā, bringing about its good fortune. The city of Ayodhyā is beautified with gateways and arches, and within it there are well-designed marketplaces. It is equipped with all types of war machines and has a copious supply of weapons. In the city dwell all types of sculptors, masons and artisans. Possessing numerous bards and rhapsodists, the city is blessed with matchless opulence. Its lofty buildings have penthouses and are decorated with flags. There are hundreds of cannons dispersed throughout the city. There are troupes of women dancers in every section of the city. There are gardens and groves of mangoes and the whole city is surrounded by a great defensive wall. Around the city there is a moat which is both deep and difficult to cross. As such, the city is impenetrable by enemies. The city is full of horses, elephants, cows, camels

and donkeys. Feudatory lords throng the city to pay tribute. The city is beautified by merchants from many different foreign lands. It is replete with bejeweled palaces that are as tall as mountains. With its splendid penthouses it resembles Amarāvati, the capital of Lord Indra.

The city is wonderfully laid-out in eight sections, like a dice board. It is inhabited by the most exquisite women. All of its buildings are adorned with precious gems and it looks glorious with its palatial structures. The city is crowded with houses with no vacant lots and is built upon level ground. It is filled with rice and other food grains, and its water is as sweet as sugarcane juice. Resonating with the rhythmic sound of drums, such as dundubhīs, mṛdaṅgas and pāṇavas, and with the sweet sound of stringed instruments like the vīṇā, it is unexcelled on this earth.

Inhabited by the most gentle people, its well-arranged houses resemble the airships in which the perfected ones, by dint of penance, attain the heavenly world. Its dextrous and skillful warriors never shoot an unarmed warrior, nor one without parents or children, nor one who cannot be seen but can be pinpointed by the sound of his voice. The warriors are capable of slaying with the help of sharp weapons, or with their bare hands, ferocious lions, tigers and boars that roar in the jungle. King Daśaratha has populated the city with thousands of such mahārathas, or warriors who can single-handedly defeat scores of opponents. The city is also inhabited by brāhmaṇas who are expert at performing fire sacrifices, endowed with all good qualities, learned in the six branches of Vedic studies, magnanimous, truthful and who are mahātmās, as well as by seers who are practically great sages.

THE PROSPERITY OF AYODHYĀ DURING KING DAŚARATHA'S REIGN

In the city of Ayodhyā, King Daśaratha, who was well-versed in the Vedas, collected all sorts of useful things for the kingdom. He was farsighted and immensely powerful, and very dear to both the residents of the city as well as to those of the countryside. He was one of the outstanding charioteers of the Ikṣvāku dynasty and a patron of sacrifices. He was devoted to righteousness and had his senses fully under control. He was a royal sage almost equal to a great sage and was famous throughout the three worlds. He was strong, devoid of enemies, surrounded by allies and was the conqueror of the senses. In the matter of accumulating wealth and other things, he was equal to Indra and Kuvera. Just as the powerful Manu protected the world, so also did King Daśaratha. The city was protected by the king, who was true to his word, as Amarāvātī was protected by Indra.

In that best of cities the citizens were content, virtuous, highly learned, satisfied with their own wealth, free from greed and truthful. There was no family man in that city who had not accumulated the necessities, nor was there one who had not achieved the goals of human pursuit in the shape of cows, horses, wealth and food. There could not be seen in Ayodhyā a person who was lusty, miserly, cruel, uneducated or agnostic. All the men and women were virtuous, well-regulated, cheerful and in character as faultless as great sages. There was no one without gold earrings, crowns or flower garlands, nor was anyone short in enjoyment. Everyone was properly bathed, with their bodies smeared with sandalwood paste and anointed with sweet fragrances. No one ate impure food, nor did they neglect giving in charity. No one was without gold bracelets and armlets, nor was anyone unable to control his mind. There was no one in Ayodhyā who did not maintain the sacred fire and who did not perform sacrifices. Neither was there anyone who was petty-minded or a thief, immoral or of disreputable origin.

The brāhmaṇas, whose senses were fully conquered, were always engaged in their prescribed duties. They were charitable, studious and shy in accepting gifts. None of them was an agnostic, unrighteous, unstudied, envious, attached to material things or unlearned. There was none who was not conversant in the six branches of learning, who did not observe vows, or who was not profusely generous. No one was miserable, mentally disturbed or distressed. There could not be found a man or woman in Ayodhyā who was not prosperous and good-looking, or who was not loyal to the king. The four castes headed by the brāhmaṇas worshiped the gods and house guests. They were grateful, magnanimous, heroic and powerful. Everyone in that great city was long-lived, dedicated to truth, and as such, they were always able to enjoy the company of their wives, children and grandchildren. The kṣatriya (warrior) caste followed the advice of the brāhmaṇas; the vaiśyas followed the orders of the kṣatriyas, and the śūdras engaged in their own duties while assisting the other three castes.

King Daśaratha, the lord of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, completely protected the city of Ayodhyā as did the wise Manu, the lord of humankind, in former times. Like a den full of lions, the city was full of warriors who were as dangerous as fire, learned in the art of war, expert in combat and intolerant of insult. The city was full of horses from Kamboja, Bāhlika, Vanāyu and the Indus Valley. They were equal to Indra's horse, Uccaiśrava. The city was also always full of strong elephants in rut that were as big as mountains. They were of the following varieties: Airāvata, Mahāpadma, Añjana and Vāmana. There were also elephants of the Bhadra, Mandra and Mṛga species, and interbreeds of these. The main part of Ayodhyā encompassed two yojanas. Residing there, King Daśaratha protected the world. As the moon dominates the starry sky, the great and powerful King Daśaratha, who had subdued all his enemies, ruled over that city. Thus the king ruled that fortunate city whose good name was Ayodhyā (the unconquerable), which was fortified with strong gates and bars, and which had a large variety of buildings and thousands of inhabitants.

THE QUALITIES AND UPRIGHT CHARACTER OF THE KING'S MINISTERS

The exceptionally high-souled king of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty had ministers who were endowed with good qualities. They were also versed in the recitation of incantations and in physiognomy. They were always engaged in the welfare of their dear master. The valiant king had eight ministers. They were glorious, pure and ever-devoted to the affairs of the state. Their names were: Dhṛṣṭi, Jayanta, Vijaya, Surāṣṭra, Rāṣṭravardhana, Akopa, Dharmapāla, and as the eighth, Sumantra, who could discern the motive of any action. Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva were the two beloved family priests. There were also other ministers, such as Suyajña, Jābāli, Kāśyapa, Gautama, Mārkaṇḍeya, Dīrghāyus and the brāhmaṇa Kātyāyana. Along with the great brahmaṛṣis, his two family priests always acted as his advisors.

The ministers were humble because of their wisdom. They were bashful, clever, in control of their senses, wealthy, great-souled, learned in the use of weapons, perpetually powerful, glorious, vigilant, and always did what they promised. They were strong, forgiving and famous, and smiled sweetly when they spoke. They never spoke a lie, even out of anger or for sense enjoyment. There was nothing of their own people or of others that was not known to them. Whatever was done or intended to be done was known to them through spies. They were tactful in their dealings and had been tested in their loyalty: they had punished their own sons according to law when the occasion demanded it. They were always busy increasing the kingdom's treasury and the strength of the army, and they never harmed an enemy if he was guiltless. They were heroes with perpetual enthusiasm for combat and carefully followed the principles of political science. They always protected those citizens of the kingdom who were good. They filled the treasurehouse without harassing the brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas. They meted out heavy punishment only after taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the person. Because of the purity and single-

mindedness of these ministers, there was not one person who would speak a lie in the city or country. There was never anyone there who was wicked or who would have an affair with another man's wife. Indeed, the excellent city and the entire kingdom were perfectly tranquil.

All of the ministers were fashionably dressed and adorned and were observing holy vows. They were dedicated to the well-being of the king, and vigilant, seeing with eyes of prudence. They had acquired all the good qualities of their preceptors and were famous for their prowess. They enjoyed universal recognition, even in foreign lands, for their intelligent decisions. They were completely qualified and were never devoid of virtue. They were conversant in the matter of peace and war and were naturally endowed with good fortune. They were capable of keeping secrets and of making subtle deliberations. They were especially conversant with political science and always spoke pleasantly.

Assisted by such qualified ministers, the sinless King Daśaratha ruled over the earth. Seeing everything through the eyes of spies, he protected the citizens through righteousness, maintained them and thus abstained from unrighteousness. The tiger among men, who was famous throughout the three worlds for his magnanimity and for being an ocean of truthfulness, ruled over the earth from his capital. He never encountered an enemy who could surpass him or match him. He possessed numerous friends, he was honored by neighboring states, and his glory diminished his enemies. Thus the king ruled the world as Indra, the lord of the gods, rules the heavens. Surrounded by counselors who were intent upon deliberation, who were concerned with the welfare of the state and who were clever and capable, the king shone like the rising sun enveloped in its shining rays of light.

THE KING'S PROPOSAL TO PERFORM A HORSE SACRIFICE TO OBTAIN A SON

The great-souled and religious-minded King Daśaratha, whose glory has been described previously, had no son to perpetuate his dynasty, although he had been anxious for one. While thinking about this, it occurred to the highly intelligent king that he should perform a horse sacrifice to achieve a son. Having made up his mind to perform the sacrifice, the wise king consulted with all his capable ministers. Thereupon, the mighty monarch said to Sumantra, "O best of ministers, quickly bring all my family preceptors." Thereafter the swift Sumantra hurriedly went and assembled all those souls who had completely mastered the Vedas. Having honored Suyajña, Vāmadeva, Jābāli, Kāśyapa, his family priest Vasiṣṭha and anyone else who was an outstanding brāhmaṇa, the righteous King Daśaratha spoke the following sweet words conducive to virtue:

"There is indeed no happiness for me, because I have been desiring a son for some time. For that purpose I shall perform a horse sacrifice. That is my idea. I therefore wish to perform the sacrifice according to rites prescribed in the scriptures. How can I accomplish my desire? Please deliberate on this."

Then all the brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha praised the words spoken from the mouth of the king, saying, "Very good!" Highly pleased, they all told Daśaratha, "Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be gathered and the horse released! Let the sacrificial ground be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. By all means, you will have the son you desire, O king, for this plan of yours to get a son is virtuous."

The king was pleased to hear the remarks of the brāhmaṇas. With his eyes rolling with delight, the king said to his ministers, "By the order of my preceptors, immediately prepare the ingredients for the sacrifice. Let the sacrificial horse be released under the supervision of capable men

accompanied by the priest. And let the sacrificial ground be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. Also let the propitiatory rites be elaborately performed in the order ordained in the scriptures. This most excellent sacrifice can be performed by all monarchs, provided there is no serious transgression in its execution, for the astute brahma-rākṣasas (brāhmaṇas born as rākṣasas) are always looking for some fault in sacrificial performances in order to seize the share of the gods. One who performs sacrifices without proper procedure soon perishes. Therefore, this sacrifice undertaken by me should be executed according to procedure. Let it be thus performed, for you are all capable in these affairs."

"So be it," said all the counselors, who had been properly honored by the king. Having heard the words previously spoken by the king, the brāhmaṇas who were conversant with religion also encouraged the king. Then, with his permission, they all departed as they had come. Having sent away the brāhmaṇas, he spoke the following to his ministers: "Let the sacrifice be executed as the priests have recommended." Having spoken, the lion among kings sent away the assembled ministers. Then the highly intelligent king entered the quarters of his harem. There the king sought out his favorite consorts and told them of his intention to perform a sacrifice for the purpose of having a son. By that pleasant utterance of the king, the lotus faces of those beautiful women shone like lotus flowers at the end of winter.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DAŚARATHA AND SUMANTRA

Hearing this, the king's charioteer, Sumantra (who was also one of his ministers) spoke to him privately. "Hear from me what I heard during the recitation of a Purāṇic legend. This sacrifice recommended by the priests was heard by me in an old legend. In an assembly of sages, the wise Sanatkumāra narrated this story regarding the birth of your sons:

There is a son of Kāśyapa known as Vibhāṇḍaka will have a son known as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who will be reared in the forest. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga will always frequent the forest. This chief of the brāhmaṇas will know nothing except service to his father. The great soul will practice both kinds of celibacy extolled in the worlds and spoken of by learned brāhmaṇas. In this way, he will pass his time in worship of the sacred fire and of his father. At that time, there will be a strong and powerful king named Romapāda in the country of Aṅga. Because of the king's transgressions, there will be a drought so terrible and frightful that it will inflict the whole world with fear.

Saddened by the news of the drought, the king will summon the brāhmaṇas who are Vedic scholars and say: "You are all engaged in the duties prescribed by the scriptures and are conversant with the customs and practices of the common people. Please, therefore, teach me the means of atonement for my sins." Those outstanding brāhmaṇas will be entreated in this way by the king. Then they will reply to the king: "O king, please bring here the son of Vibhāṇḍaka by whatever means. After bringing Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, the son of Vibhāṇḍaka, O protector of the earth, give your daughter Śāntā to him in marriage, for he is a brāhmaṇa and an accomplished scholar of the Vedas."

Hearing their words, the king will begin thinking of the means by which he will be able to bring that powerful sage to his city. Having arrived

at a decision with his counselors, the king will send his family priest accompanied by his respectable ministers. Hearing the king's words, they will be pained. With downcast faces, they will entreat the king, "We will not go, for we are afraid of his father, the sage Vibhāṇḍaka." After duly considering the feasible means of bringing R̥ṣyaśṛṅga, they will say to the king, "We shall bring the brāhmaṇa. There will be no fault in it." Thus the king of the Aṅgas will cause the son of the sage to be brought by courtesans, Lord Indra will cause the rains to fall and Śāntā will be given in marriage to the sage R̥ṣyaśṛṅga.

Sumantra continued: "Being your son-in-law, R̥ṣyaśṛṅga will arrange for you to have sons. This prophecy of Sanatkumāra has been told by me." Being greatly pleased, Daśaratha said to Sumantra, "Inform me about the means by which R̥ṣyaśṛṅga was brought to the capital of Romapāda."

HOW R̥ṢYAŚR̥ṄGA WAS BROUGHT TO AṄGA AND MARRIED TO ŚĀNTĀ

Being ordered by the king, Sumantra spoke the following words.

"Accompanied by your ministers, listen to me narrate everything regarding how King Romapāda brought R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga and what means he used to do so."

The family priest along with the counselors said to King Romapāda: "We have devised a sure plan. R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga has always lived in the forest where he practices austerities and studies scripture. As such, he is unfamiliar with the happiness of women or the happiness of sense enjoyment. By agreeable objects which agitate the senses, we shall bring him here to the city. Now quickly do the needful. Let the beautiful and well-groomed courtesans go there. After he receives them, they will entice him by various means and bring him here."

Hearing this, the king replied to his family priest: "Very well, let it be so." Then the priest and the ministers did just that. After receiving this order from the king, the best of the courtesans entered that great forest. Staying not far from Vibhāṇḍaka's hermitage, they tried to meet R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga in some way. The son of the sage was very grave and had always lived in the hermitage. He was always happy to be with his father, and so he had never left the hermitage. Since his birth, the ascetic had never seen a woman or man or any other creature from the cities or towns of the country. One day, by chance, the son of Vibhāṇḍaka wandered from the hermitage to the place where the courtesans were staying and saw them there. The women's garments were of different colors and they were singing with sweet voices. Gathering around the sage's son, they all spoke the following words. "O brāhmaṇa, who are you? What are you doing? We wish to know. You frequent this distant and uninhabited forest by your self. Please tell us." He had never before seen in the forest women who were of beautiful form and desirable. In his heart arose the desire to tell them about his father. He said:

"My father is Vibhāṇḍaka. I am his son, his own flesh and blood. I am known as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and in this world I am engaged in the practice of austerities. Nearby is my hermitage which is delightful to see. There I shall honor all of you according to the rule of scripture."

Hearing the words of the sage's son, they all agreed. Thereafter all the beautiful women went to see the hermitage. Saying "here is water for washing the hands, here is water for washing the feet, and here are roots and fruits for us to eat," the sage's son received his female guests. After accepting this reception ceremony, they all became anxious to leave soon out of fear of Vibhāṇḍaka's anger. They said, "O brāhmaṇa, we have fruits that are even better than these. Bless you, O brāhmaṇa. Please accept them and eat them. Do not delay." Then they all embraced him joyfully and gave him round sweetmeats and other tasty things to eat. After tasting the sweets and fruits, the powerful ascetic began thinking, "Such things have never been tasted by any forest dweller before." Taking leave of the brāhmaṇa on the pretext of a religious observance, the women left for their own place out of fear of his father. After they had all left, the brāhmaṇa Ṛṣyaśṛṅga became ill at heart and restless due to sadness.

The next day, after thinking it over in his mind, the powerful and handsome son of Vibhāṇḍaka went to the place where he had met the beautifully adorned and mind-captivating courtesans. Seeing the brāhmaṇa coming, the women's minds were overcome with delight. They all approached him and spoke to him the following words. "Please come to our hermitage, O gentle one. Although there are many varieties of roots and fruits here, these things can be done in a special way there." Hearing their heart-moving words, he decided to go with them. Thus the women carried him off to the land of Aṅga.

As they brought the great soul there, the demigod Indra began pouring down showers of rain and the whole world became joyful. By the arrival of the rains, the king could understand that the ascetic brāhmaṇa was on his way. Going out to meet the sage, the king humbly bowed his head and prostrated himself on the ground. With his mind composed, he offered him the customary water for washing the hands. Then he requested a boon that the brāhmaṇa would never become angry. After they entered the city, the

king, with a peaceful mind, gave his daughter Śāntā to him in marriage in accordance with scriptural rule. Thereafter the king was greatly pleased. In this way, being honored by the king, the powerful R̥ṣyaśṛṅga lived there with his wife Śāntā and enjoyed all kinds of pleasures.

KING DAŚARATHA GOES TO AṅGA TO BRING BACK R̥ṢYAŚR̥ṅGA AND ŚĀNTĀ

Then Sumantra again spoke, "O king, please hear from me these beneficial words as they were spoken by the wise and best of gods Sanatkumāra:

In the dynasty of Ikṣvāku will be born a righteous and fortunate king named Daśaratha who will be true to his promise. He will strike up a friendship with the king of Aṅga. The king of Aṅga will have a highly fortunate daughter named Śāntā. The name of the king of Aṅga will be Romapāda. The famous King Daśaratha will go to him: "O righteous one, I am most unfortunate. By your order, let Śāntā's husband, R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga, attend the sacrifice which is being performed for the continuation of my dynasty." Thinking about what King Daśaratha had said, King Romapāda will hand over his son, the husband of Śāntā. On getting the brāhmaṇa, King Daśaratha will become rid of his anxiety. His mind will be joyful as he takes the brāhmaṇa to the sacrifice. Being desirous of fame, the virtuous King Daśaratha will join his hands and request three boons from the best of brāhmaṇas, R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga: the successful execution of the sacrifice, a son, and ascension to heaven. The protector of the people will achieve his desired goals by the words sprung from the mouth of the brāhmaṇa. The king will have four sons of immeasurable prowess. They will firmly establish the dynasty and will be famous throughout the world. Thus was this topic narrated in the previous Satya-yuga by the foremost and blessed sage Sanatkumāra. O Mahārājā, O tiger among men, going yourself with your army and retinue, properly honor the sage R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga and bring him here.

Upon hearing Sumantra's words, Daśaratha was very pleased. Informing Vasiṣṭha of Sumantra's words, he requested permission to carry them out. Accompanied by his wives and counselors, he proceeded to where the brāhmaṇa was residing. Gradually crossing many forests and rivers, they arrived at the land where that outstanding sage lived. They saw R̥ṣyaśr̥ṅga,

who was shining like fire, seated beside King Romapāda. Then, due to feelings of friendship with King Daśaratha, King Romapāda, with great elation, performed as best he could the ceremonial reception. King Romapāda informed the intelligent R̥ṣyaśṛṅga about his friendship with King Daśaratha, then R̥ṣyaśṛṅga also offered his respects to King Daśaratha.

Being thus honored, King Daśaratha remained there for seven or eight days, after which he said to King Romapāda: "O king and protector of the people, please allow your daughter Śāntā and her husband to visit my capital where a great sacrifice is being arranged." Conceding to the wise man's departure, King Romapāda replied, "So be it!" Then King Romapāda told the brāhmaṇa, "Go with your wife to King Daśaratha's capital." Hearing this, the son of the sage replied, "All right." With the consent of King Romapāda, he departed with his wife. The two kings shook hands, then embraced each other affectionately and rejoiced. Then, taking leave from his friend, King Daśaratha, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, departed.

Swift messengers were sent to inform the people of the king's arrival: "Immediately decorate the entire city. Fill the air with incense and sprinkle the streets with sweet-smelling perfumes. Decorate the city with flags." The citizens were glad to hear of the return of the king, thus they did everything that the king had requested through the messengers. The king then entered the beautifully decorated city to the accompaniment of drums and conchshells, with the foremost brāhmaṇa proceeding in front. All the townspeople were overjoyed to see the brāhmaṇa. The king, who was equal to Lord Indra in prowess, honored the brāhmaṇa upon his entrance into the city, just as Indra, the lord of the gods, received Vāmana, the son of Kaśyapa, in his heavenly realm. Entering into the inner chambers of the palace, the king thereupon received the brāhmaṇa in accordance with scriptural rule. Due to the presence of the brāhmaṇa, the king now considered himself successful. Seeing the broad-eyed Śāntā in the company of her husband, all the ladies of the palace were overcome with affection. After being honorably received by the ladies, and especially by the king, she lived there happily for some time with her husband R̥ṣyaśṛṅga.

THE KING ORDERS PREPARATION FOR THE SACRIFICE

After a very long time, when an exceptionally pleasant spring had arrived, it occurred to the king to begin the sacrifice. Bowing his head before the brāhmaṇa who was as effulgent as a god, the king requested him to perform the sacrifice for the continuation of the royal dynasty. R̥ṣyaśṛṅga said to the king who was the protector of the earth: "So be it. Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be prepared, the sacrificial horse be set free and the sacrificial arena be set up on the northern shore of the Sarayu River."

Then the king said: "Sumantra, immediately bring those brāhmaṇas who have completely mastered the Vedas, as well as the priests who are knowers of the Absolute. Bring Suyajña, Vāmadeva, Jābāli, Kāśyapa, Purohita, Vasiṣṭha and any others who are outstanding brāhmaṇas." Then the swift Sumantra quickly went and summoned all those Vedic scholars. King Daśaratha duly received them with honor and spoke to them with sweet and proper words that were conducive to virtue: "I have been burning with the desire for a son. Without one there is no happiness for me. Now it is my intention to perform a horse sacrifice in order to get a son. It is for this purpose that I wish to execute the ritualistic ceremony of the horse sacrifice. By the influence of the sage's son, I shall surely achieve my desires."

The brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha commended the words uttered from the mouth of the king by saying, "Very good!" Then R̥ṣyaśṛṅga and the other brāhmaṇas again said to the king: "Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be prepared, the sacrificial horse be set free and the sacrificial arena be set up on the northern shore of the Sarayu River." Then they further added: "You will by all means get four sons whose prowess will be immeasurable, because your intelligence is absorbed in the virtuous purpose of obtaining a son." Hearing what the brāhmaṇas said, the king was quite happy. With great pleasure he spoke to his ministers the following auspicious syllables:

"According to the order of my preceptors, immediately arrange for me the ingredients for the sacrifice. Let the sacrificial horse be released and let capable warriors and the officiating priest accompany it. Let the sacrificial arena be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. Let the initial propitiatory rites, such as the peace prayers, etc., be performed as is customary according to scriptural regulation. This sacrificial ceremony can be performed by all monarchs who are able to avoid committing any transgressions in its execution. The clever brahma-rākṣasas are ever vigilant to find any omission. Therefore, one who performs a sacrifice without regard for the rules at once perishes. Therefore, this sacrifice of mine should be performed according to the rules. You are all quite capable of executing such activities."

Thereafter all the ministers praised the king's order by saying "Let it be so." Then they did as they were commanded. The brāhmaṇas praised the glorious monarch who understood the principles of righteousness. Then, with his permission, they all departed as they had come. When the brāhmaṇas had gone, the king sent away the ministers and entered his own palace.

VASIṢṬHA PREPARES FOR THE SACRIFICE

After one whole year had passed, it was spring again. For the purpose of obtaining progeny, the powerful king approached Vasiṣṭha to initiate the horse sacrifice. Offering greetings to Vasiṣṭha, he received him according to rule, then told that best of the brāhmaṇas about his intention to procure offspring: "O brāhmaṇa, please perform my sacrifice as described in the scriptures. Perform all the different rituals in such a way that there is no obstruction in the completion of the sacrifice. You are very affectionate to me; you are my friend, guru and highly exalted. You are able to bear the burden of setting up the sacrifice. Vasiṣṭha replied to the king, "So be it. I shall do everything as well as I can."

Then Vasiṣṭha addressed senior practitioners of sacrificial rites and their assistants, skilled architects, senior brāhmaṇas fixed in the practice of the topmost religious duties, stone masons, carpenters, excavators, astrologers, artisans, as well as dancers, actors, scholars of the holy scriptures and highly learned persons: "By the order of the king, arrange for the sacrificial ceremony. Quickly bring thousands of bricks. Build palaces fit for royalty, along with all the subsequent requisite paraphernalia. Build hundreds of good, sturdy houses supplied with all kinds of palatable food and drink for the brāhmaṇas. You must also construct comfortable houses for the townspeople and palatial residences for the royal guests who will come from many distant places. Construct stables for horses and elephants, hospices for the common people and spacious barracks for the foreign soldiers. Supply the residences with abundant amounts of food and other desirables. In the same way, let the townspeople and common folk be supplied good quality food in accordance with scriptural rule, not whimsically. Thus let all the castes be respectfully honored. Never do anything disrespectful out of lust or anger. Similarly, special respect should be offered to those who are busily engaged in the actual activities of the sacrifice. Let all of them be properly

honored with wealth and food, that everything be properly done and nothing be overlooked."

Then they all approached Vasiṣṭha and said: "What you wish will be accomplished without any omission. We shall do as you have said without overlooking anything."

Then Vasiṣṭha said to Sumantra: "Please look after the righteous kings of the world, as well as the thousands of brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras who will attend this sacrifice. Summon the gentlemen from all countries here, treating them respectfully. Janaka, the ruler of Mithilā, is valiant and truthful. Personally bring him here with all due honor. Knowing his prior relation with King Daśaratha, I am telling you this first. In this way, personally bring the friendly and godlike lord of Kāśi, who speaks sweetly and upholds truth, they say. Then bring here the aged king of Kekaya along with his son. He is most virtuous and a lion among kings and is the father-in-law of King Daśaratha. Also bring with great honor the lord of Aṅga, the great archer King Romapāda, who is a dear friend of King Daśaratha, along with his son. Then bring the honorable Bhānumān, the king of Kosala. Bring the valiant lord of Magadha, King Prāptijña, who is expert in all scriptures, most magnanimous and the best of men. Accepting the order of the king, invite the rulers of the eastern lands and the monarchs of Sindhusāvira and Saurāṣṭra. Bring all the kings from the South and any other kings on the face of the earth who are friendly. Bring them quickly along with their followers and relations. Also, by the order of the king, bring their distinguished ambassadors."

Hearing these words of Vasiṣṭha, Sumantra quickly instructed suitable persons to summon the different kings. The very intelligent and virtuous Sumantra hastily departed to personally summon those kings whom Vasiṣṭha had mentioned in his instructions.

All the workers involved in the sacrifice informed the great sage Vasiṣṭha about the preparations' being done. Pleased to hear this, Vasiṣṭha said to those best of the brāhmaṇas: "Do not give anything to anyone with disrespect or whimsy, because that which is done with disrespect destroys the giver, without any doubt."

Some days later, the different kings of the world arrived bearing many valuable gifts for King Daśaratha, it is said. Vasiṣṭha was very pleased by this and said to King Daśaratha, "O tiger among men, by your order the kings have arrived. O best of kings, they have all been received by me as well as I was able. Everything connected with the sacrifice has been prepared with care by different persons. Please go to the sacrificial arena which is nearby to begin the sacrifice. O lord of kings, you should see the arena which is furnished on every side with all desirable things that were assembled there by the workers. It looks as if it were constructed by the power of your mental resolve."

As recommended by both Vasiṣṭha and Rṣyaśṛṅga, on a day with an auspicious constellation, the king went to the sacrificial arena. After that, the elevated brāhmaṇas headed by Vasiṣṭha, went to the sacrificial arena, placing Rṣyaśṛṅga before them. Then they began the sacrificial rites with due regard for the scriptural rules. The glorious king along with his wives underwent the initiation ceremony in order to be fit for participating in the sacrifice.

KING DAŚARATHA BEGINS THE SACRIFICE

When the sacrificial horse had returned after one year, the king began the sacrifice on the northern shore of the Sarayu River. King Daśaratha undertook the great horse sacrifice placing *Ṛṣyaśṛṅga* in front of the prominent *brāhmaṇas*. Having thoroughly studied the Vedas, the *brāhmaṇas* executed the rituals of the sacrifice according to scriptural injunction. The procedure and exact time sequence of the rituals were all carried out exactly according to scripture. The *brāhmaṇas* performed the *pravargya* rite according to scripture, then the *upasad* ceremony. In this way, all the activities were performed exactly as they should have been. After the *brāhmaṇas* worshiped the appropriate demigods, they were very pleased and pressed the morning's soma juice. They offered to Lord Indra his share of the sinless, freshly squeezed royal soma juice. At noon they again pressed soma juice according to regulation. At dusk the expert *brāhmaṇas*, after consulting scripture, executed the king's third pressing of soma juice.

The very intelligent *brāhmaṇas* headed by *Ṛṣyaśṛṅga* invoked the presence of Indra and other gods by the recitation of incantations whose syllables they had previously learned. With sweet songs of praise and pleasant incantations, the *hotā* priests invoked the appropriate demigods who reside in the heavenly realm and offered them their due share of the oblations of clarified butter. There was not one wrongly performed oblation in that sacrifice, nor was there any omission, for every action was performed with the proper chant and with great care. For as many days as the sacrifice lasted no one appeared tired or hungry. Among the *brāhmaṇas* who participated not a one was unlearned or had less than one hundred followers.

Every day the *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* were fed. Every day the ascetics and monks were fed. Similarly, the elderly, infirm, women and children were fed. The food was so tasty that those who ate it could never be

satisfied. Being encouraged with the instructions, "let food be given, let clothes of different varieties be given," people did as instructed. Every day, could be seen cooked food grains piled up in the traditional way in mounds that resembled mountains. In King Daśaratha's sacrifice all the men and women who had come from different countries were all fully satisfied with the food and drink. The good brāhmaṇas praised the food, saying, "This delicious food has been properly prepared." They all said to King Daśaratha, "We are so satisfied. All good fortune be upon you!" Well-dressed men served the brāhmaṇas, then others, who were wearing beautiful jeweled earrings, served them. At the conclusion of each ceremony, the learned brāhmaṇas who were skilled in rhetoric, urged by the desire to defeat the others, engaged in debate with each other.

Day after day, the brāhmaṇas who were all expert in Vedic rituals, executed all the ceremonies according to scriptural injunction. Among the brāhmaṇa participants in the king's sacrifice, there was no one who had not studied the six branches of Vedic learning (pronunciation, prosody, grammar, etymology, astronomy and ritual), who was not vastly learned or who was not skilled in speaking.

When the time arrived for erecting the sacrificial posts, they erected six posts of bilva wood and six of khādīra wood. Six posts of palāśa wood were erected next to the bilva. One post is also supposed to be of śleṣmāta wood and two more of cedar. The two cedar posts are supposed to be placed the distance of two arms stretched out. All the posts were prepared under the supervision of brāhmaṇas who were skilled in sacrificial performances and knowledgeable of the scriptures. They were decorated with gold for the auspiciousness of the sacrifice. The twenty-one posts were each twenty one cubits high. Each of them had also been decorated with cloth. The strong posts, well-fashioned by the craftsmen, were fixed in place according to rule. They were all octagonal in shape and had planed surfaces. They were covered with pieces of cloth and worshiped with flowers and sandalwood paste, they shone brightly like the stellar constellation known as the "Great Bear."

The bricks had been made to size according to regulation and were assembled into an altar for the sacrificial fire by those who were skilled in

ceremonial structures. The sacred fire had been established by expert brāhmaṇas. The sacrificial altar was shaped like an eagle with wings outstretched. Its wings were golden-colored. Being thrice the size of ordinary altars, it had eighteen fire pits, instead of the usual six. As indicated in scripture, animals, serpents and birds were tied to the posts corresponding to particular demigods. The horse, aquatics and other creatures were all brought there to be sacrificed and were then bound by the sages in accordance with scripture. Three hundred animals were bound to the sacrificial posts, including the super-excellent horse belonging to King Daśaratha, it is said. Queen Kausalyā then consecrated the horse by sprinkling it and its vicinity, then she touched it with great joy with three swords. Out of the desire to acquire virtue for bearing a son, Queen Kausalyā, with a calm mind, passed one night beside the horse.

After that, the hotā, adhvaryu and udgātā priests took Kausalyā and the other two wives of the king and made them touch the horse. Then the priest took the fleshy tuber of the aśvagandhā plant (which smells like a horse) and boiled it according to scriptural directions. The king then smelled, at the proper time, the odor of the steam rising from that tuber, thus driving away his sins.

The sixteen priests offered into the fire everything that was intended for that purpose as parts of the horse sacrifice. In other sacrifices the offerings are to be placed on boughs of the plakṣa tree, but in the horse sacrifice they are placed on stalks of sugar cane. According to the Kalpa-sūtra and the Brāhmaṇa section of the Vedas, a horse sacrifice has three days dedicated to the pressing of soma juice. On the first day the pressing ceremony is called catuṣṭoma, on the second day it is called ukthya and on the third it is called atirātra. Many other sacrifices were also performed according to scriptural recommendation. Eight sacrifices were performed on that occasion: jyotiṣṭoma, āyuṣṭoma, two atirātras, abhijit, viśvajit and two āptoryāmas.

King Daśaratha, expander of his dynasty, gave in pay to the hotā priest the eastern region, to the adhvaryu priest he gave the western region, to the brahma priest he gave the southern region and to the udgātā priest he gave the northern region. Thus did King Daśaratha pay the sacrificial fee

just as Lord Brahmā had done previously when he performed the great horse sacrifice. Having concluded the sacrifice in accordance with scriptural rules, the king, who was the best of men, gave the entire earth to the priests. Having given away the earth, King Daśaratha, the glorious descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, felt delighted. The priests all said to the sinless king: "You alone are capable of protecting the entire earth. It is not our duty to take care of the earth, nor are we able to. O king, as we are always engaged in studying, give us some other payment. O king, give us valuable gems, gold, cows or any other suitable things. We have no need of the earth."

Being thus instructed by the brāhmaṇas, the king presented them with 1,000,000 cows, 100,000,000 gold coins and four times that of silver coins. Thereafter the priests gave all the wealth to the sage Rṣyaśṛṅga and to the wise Vasiṣṭha. When the wealth had been equally divided, the topmost brāhmaṇas were pleased in mind and declared, "We are very satisfied!" Then the king, with a composed mind, also gave to those brāhmaṇas who had attended the sacrifice as observers 10,000,000 gold coins. King Daśaratha also gave his own exquisite gold bracelet to a poor brāhmaṇa who asked for a gift. Then the king, who was very fond of the brāhmaṇas, offered the customary prostrations to the dear brāhmaṇas, at which their senses were overcome with joy. As the king laid prostrate on the ground, the brāhmaṇas conferred upon him many different blessings.

The king was thoroughly delighted to have completed the wonderful sacrifice, which destroys all sins, leads to heaven and is very difficult to be performed by even great kings. Then King Daśaratha said to Rṣyaśṛṅga, "O powerful ascetic, you should now insure the prolongation of my dynasty." "So be it," said the best of brāhmaṇas to the king. "In the future, O king, you will have four sons who will continue your dynasty." Hearing the sage's sweet words, the poised king offered respects to him. The king became happy doing this and then reminded Rṣyaśṛṅga to do whatever was necessary to secure him a son.

ṚṢYAŚRṆGA PERFORMS A SACRIFICE FOR KING DAŚARATHA

After that, the intelligent sage contemplated the king's request for some time, then he returned to external consciousness and said to the king: "I shall do as you desire. In order to obtain a son we must perform the putreṣṭi sacrifice with prayers from the Atharva Veda." Then the powerful sage performed the sacrifice for attaining offspring by offering oblations into the sacred fire in accordance with the directions of the scriptures. At the end, the gods, gandharvas, siddhas and topmost sages assembled to receive their portions of the sacrifice.

Later, all the gods approached Lord Brahmā, the creator, in one group according to rank, they spoke to him the following words: "O lord, a rākṣasa named Rāvaṇa, with the strength granted to him by you, is causing us all trouble. We are unable to subdue him. A boon was conferred upon him by you, being pleased as you were, O lord. With that in mind, we have always overlooked his transgressions. The inimical and evil-minded Rāvaṇa is harassing the three worlds and hates the exalted. He wants to overpower Indra, the king of heaven. Infatuated by his boon and unassailable because of it, he is attempting to subdue the seers, yakṣas, gandharvas, brāhmaṇas and asuras. The sun does not scorch him, nor does the wind blow at his side. The ocean, which is by nature agitated with waves, does not move when it sees him. We are therefore very afraid of that fiercesome-looking rākṣasa. O lord, please make some arrangement to kill him."

Having been addressed by all the gods, Lord Brahmā thought for a while and then spoke: "What luck! The means by which that evil one can be killed is known by me. 'Let me be unkillable by any gandharva, yakṣa, god or rākṣasa,' was the boon he asked of me, and my reply to him was: 'So be it.' The rākṣasa did not consider human beings in his request due to his

contempt for them. Therefore he can only be killed by a human. No one else can be the cause of his death."

Hearing the pleasant words uttered by Lord Brahmā, all the demigods and great sages became very joyful. At that time arrived the Lord of the universe, Viṣṇu, who was highly effulgent, bearing in His four hands a conchshell, discus, mace and bow and wearing bright silken garments. He was mounted on His eagle carrier Garuḍa, like the sun on a cloud. He wore armlets of refined gold and was being praised by the foremost of the gods. Seeing Lord Brahmā, He stood there tranquilly.

Having praised Him and bowing down, all the gods addressed Him: "O Lord Viṣṇu, with the intent of doing good to the world we are going to charge you with a task. In Ayodhyā there is a powerful king of the name Daśaratha. He is a knower of righteousness, is magnanimous and equal in splendor to a great sage. From the womb of his three wives, who are equal to Your own consorts Hṛī, Śrī and Kīrtī, O Lord, manifest Yourself as four sons. Assuming a human-like form, O Viṣṇu, kill in battle Rāvaṇa, who has become powerful, is the scourge of the world, and cannot be killed by the demigods. The foolish rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, with his increased strength, is harassing the gods, gandharvas, siddhas and topmost seers. By dint of his anger he has caused sages, as well as the gandharvas and apsarās who frolic in the Nandana Gardens, to fall down to earth. To obtain his death we have come, in the company of sages, siddhas, gandharvas and yakṣas, and have taken shelter of You. You are the supreme destination for all of us, O destroyer of foes! Please decide to descend to the world of men to kill the enemy of the gods."

The residents of heaven praised the Lord of the demigods, Viṣṇu. Then Lord Viṣṇu, who was respected by all the worlds, spoke to all those gods headed by Lord Brahmā who had gathered there and who were dedicated to righteousness. "Abandon fear. Good fortune be unto you. For your benefit I shall fight Rāvaṇa. After killing his sons, grandsons, counselors, ministers, kinsmen and relatives, I shall slay the cruel, unassailable and fearsome demon. For eleven thousand years I shall remain in the mortal world to protect the earth."

Having thus granted that boon to the gods, the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu began to contemplate His future birthplace. Then the lotus-eyed Lord divided Himself into four and chose King Daśaratha as His would-be father. Thereafter, the gods, seers, rudras and bebies of apsarās praised Lord Viṣṇu, the killer of the Madhu demon, for His transcendental form: "Please eradicate the haughty Rāvaṇa, whose power is frightful. He has waxed in pride and is the enemy of Lord Indra. His appearance causes people to scream and he is tormenting the holy men and ascetics. After You kill the terribly powerful and frightening Rāvaṇa along with his army and kinsmen and being free from anxiety about Your devotees, please return back to Your eternal heavenly world which is well-protected by You and which is unmarred by imperfection."

VIṢṆU'S MESSENGER APPROACHES DAŚARATHA

After being addressed in this way by the foremost demigods, Lord Viṣṇu, who is also known as Nārāyaṇa, although knowing everything, spoke to them the following sweet words: "By resorting to what means, O gods, can I slay the king of rākṣasas, who is harassing the sages?" Being thus questioned, all the gods replied to the eternal Lord Viṣṇu: "Assuming a human-like form, slay Rāvaṇa in combat. He practiced severe austerities for a long time, O chastiser of enemies. Lord Brahmā, the first-born and creator of this universe, became very pleased by that. Being pleased, Lord Brahmā conferred a benediction upon the rākṣasa that he would have no cause of fear from any of the different species of life with the exception of humans. At the time when he requested the boon, he thought humans insignificant. Having thus received the boon from Brahmā, he has grown extremely conceited. He is afflicting the three worlds and abducting women. Therefore, O subduer of foes, he must be killed by a human."

Hearing these words of the gods, the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu desired King Daśaratha to be His father. At that time, the issueless king who was very effulgent, being desirous of a son, was performing a sacrifice for that purpose. Having made up His mind, Lord Viṣṇu, taking leave of Brahmā, disappeared as He was being worshiped by the gods and sages.

Right after that, from the sacrificial fire of King Daśaratha appeared a huge being of unequaled splendor possessing great prowess and strength. His complexion was swarthy, he wore reddish garments, his countenance was ruddy and his voice resounded like a drum. The hair on his body, beard and head was soft like a lion's. He was endowed with auspicious marks and decorated with celestial gems. He was as tall as a mountain peak and strode like a proud tiger. His form was as brilliant as the sun. He shone like a flame of fire. In his arms he held, as one would hold one's own dear

wife, a large gold jar full of celestial, milky rice pudding covered with a silver lid, as if it were some magical thing.

Looking at King Daśaratha, he spoke the following words: "Know me, O king, to be a messenger of the Lord of creatures, Viṣṇu, who has come here." Thereupon the king replied to him with folded hands: "I welcome you. What may I do for you?" The messenger of Lord Viṣṇu then spoke these words: "O king, by worship of the gods has this reward been achieved by you today. O tiger among kings, accept this rice pudding made by the gods which can not only procure a son, but can also increase wealth and good health. Give it to your appropriate wives and tell them to eat it. From them will you obtain sons for which purpose you have been performing sacrifice, O king."

The king joyfully accepted it with his head lowered and said, "So be it." He accepted that gold pot filled with spiritual foodstuff given by the Lord. He saluted that wonderful being of pleasing appearance and with great delight circumambulated him. Obtaining the rice pudding prepared by the gods from Viṣṇu's messenger, King Daśaratha became as joyful as a pauper on obtaining wealth. Then that most brilliant being of wonderful appearance, having accomplished his task, vanished from there. Shining with beams of delight, King Daśaratha went to the queens' quarters, which shone like the sky illuminated by the full moon in autumn. Entering the inner chambers, he said to Kausalyā: "Take this rice pudding which can bestow upon you a son." Then the king gave to Kausalyā one half of the rice pudding, and to Sumitrā he gave one half of what was left. For obtaining a son, he gave one half of what was left to Kaikeyī. After thinking for a while, the highly intelligent king gave to Sumitrā the remaining portion of rice pudding, which was equal to immortal nectar. In this way, the king distributed the rice pudding to his different queens.

When the king's noble wives received the rice pudding, they considered it an honor and their minds became overwhelmed with joy. After the king's consorts separately ate the rice pudding, they could feel before long the presence within their wombs of embryos whose splendor equaled fire or the sun. Seeing that his wives were pregnant and that his desire was to

be fulfilled, he felt as happy as does Lord Viṣṇu in the spiritual world. At that time, he was worshiped by Indra, siddhas and sages.

THE DEMIGODS ENGENDER MONKEY WARRIORS

When Lord Viṣṇu manifested Himself as the sons of Daśaratha, the self-born Lord Brahmā said to the gods: "Viṣṇu is true to His promise, valiant and our well-wisher. Procreate soldiers and assistants for Him with forms which they can change at will. They should be conversant with magical spells, brave, swift as the wind in speed, conversant in politics, endowed with intelligence, equal to Lord Viṣṇu in prowess, indestructible, conversant with devices, endowed with supernatural bodies, knowledgeable about all types of weapons and like the demigods who partake of the nectar of immortality. In the wombs of the principle apsarās and gandharvas, in the daughters of yakṣas and nāgas, in the wombs of bears and vidyādhārīs, kinnarīs and monkeys beget offspring equal to yourselves in prowess. I have already begotten Jāmbavān, the chief of the bears, from my mouth. He was born suddenly when I once yawned."

Having been thus instructed by Brahmā, they accepted his command and begot sons in the form of monkeys. The great souls, seers, siddhas, vidyādhāras, nāgas and cāraṇas begot heroic sons as forest creatures. Lord Indra begot Vāli, the lord of the monkeys, who was like Indra himself. The sun, which is the best of heat generators, begot Sugrīva. Bṛhaspati begot the great monkey named Tāra, the most intelligent of all the monkeys chiefs. The glorious monkey Gandhamādana was born as the son of Kuvera, the giver of wealth. Viśvakarmā begot a great monkey named Nala. Agni's son was the glorious Nīla, whose splendor was like fire and who surpassed everyone in splendor, fame and prowess. The two Āśvins, endowed with the wealth of physical beauty, personally begot Mainda and Dvidida. Varuṇa begot the monkey named Suśeṇa. The mighty Parjanya begot Śarabha. From the wind god, Vāyu, was born the glorious monkey named Hanumān, whose body was as strong as a thunderbolt and equal to Garuḍa in speed. He is the most intelligent and strong of all the various monkeys.

In this way, they gave birth to many thousands of monkeys prepared to kill the ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa. They had immeasurable strength, were heroic, outstanding, and able to assume any form at will. Their powerful bodies resembled elephants or mountains. The bears, monkeys and langurs (a long tailed monkey) took birth quickly. Each displayed a form, appearance and prowess like that of the demigod who begot him, but the langurs were endowed with slightly more prowess than the others. Thus, from the wombs of bears were warrior bears born, and monkeys from the kinnarīs. The famous gods, maharṣis, gandharvas, Garuḍa, nāgas, kimpuruṣas, siddhas, vidyādhara and serpents happily gave birth to many thousands of monkeys. The cāraṇas begot from the wombs of the principle apsaraś, vidyādharaś, daughters of nāgas and gandharvaś, heroic sons who were all forest-dwelling monkeys with gigantic bodies.

They could assume any form at will and were endowed with strength. They could wander wherever they wished. They were like lions and tigers in pride and strength. They could all use boulders as projectiles and mountains as weapons. They all had claws and teeth as weapons and were skilled in the use of various arms. They could shake great mountains and split standing trees. By their swift movement they could agitate the ocean, who is the lord of rivers. They could rend the earth with their feet and jump across great oceans. They could enter into the sky and even catch a cloud. They could even capture mad elephants wandering in the jungle. By their yells they could cause screeching birds to fall. One million such great-souled monkeys who could assume any form and lead the monkey troops were born. They were the leaders among the main troops of monkeys. They gave birth to valiant sons who were the best of generals. Others resorted to the peaks of Rkṣavān Mountain by the thousands. Others went to many different mountains and forests.

All the monkey generals rallied around the two brothers, Sugrīva, the son of the sun god, and Vāli, the son of Indra. Others followed Nala, Nīla and Hanumān. They were all endowed with the strength of Garuḍa and were skillful in combat. They could kill any lions, tigers or snakes roaming in the jungle. The strong-armed Vāli was endowed with great power and exceptional prowess. By the strength of his arms, he protected the bears, monkeys and langurs. Those heroes possessing many different bodily types

and distinguishing characteristics covered this earth with its mountains, forests and oceans. The earth was covered by these mighty leaders of the monkey chiefs who resembled masses of clouds or mountain peaks. They had fearsome bodily appearances and had taken birth to help Lord Rāma.

BIRTH OF RĀMA, BHARATA, LAKṢMAṆA AND ŚATRUGHNA

When the horse sacrifice and the sacrifice for procuring a son were concluded, the immortal demigods took their share of the offerings and departed as they had come. Having completed the period of consecration, accompanied by his wives, King Daśaratha entered the city with his servants and soldiers. Having been appropriately honored by the king, the monarchs of the world were satisfied and, offering respects to the great sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, returned to their own lands. Upon leaving the city of Ayodhyā to return to their own homes, the soldiers of the glorious kings, being overwhelmed with joy, shone brightly. When the kings had departed, King Daśaratha again entered his capital with the topmost brāhmaṇas walking before him. Being properly honored and followed by the wise king and his entourage, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga departed with his wife Śāntā. Sending them all away in this manner and completely achieving his desired goal, the king happily resided in Ayodhyā while thinking about the birth of his sons.

After the sacrifice had been completed, one year elapsed. Then in the twelfth month called Caitra (April), on the ninth day, when the asterism Punarvasu was in the ascendant, the five planets-Sun, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter and Venus-were exalted, and Jupiter and the Moon were in the sign of Cancer, the Lord of the universe who is worshiped in all the worlds appeared from the womb of Kausalyā as Rāma, possessing divine marks. Her son was manifested from the half portion of the rice pudding given by Lord Viṣṇu. He was the most fortunate son of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. His eyes were reddish, His arms strong, His lips red and His voice like the sound of a drum. Kausalyā shone with the immeasurable splendor of her son, like Aditi with her son Indra, the lord of the gods who carries a thunderbolt in his hand. To Kaikeyī was born a son of true prowess named Bharata. Being produced from the quarter portion of the rice pudding, he was endowed with all the transcendental qualities of Lord Viṣṇu Himself. Then, Sumitrā

gave birth to two sons-Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. They were valorous, expert in all weaponry and endowed with one eighth of the qualities of Lord Viṣṇu. Bharata was born when the constellation Puṣya was in the ascendant and the Sun was in Pisces. The two sons of Sumitrā were born when the constellation āśleṣā was in the ascendant and the sun was in Cancer. The four great-souled-sons of the king were born separately. They were endowed with all good qualities, and resembled one another. In splendor they were equal to the four stars of the constellation Bhādrapadā.

The gandharvas sang sweetly and the groups of apsarās danced. Celestial drums resounded and showers of flowers fell from the sky. There was a great celebration in the city of Ayodhyā by the people. In the streets crowded with people were troupes of actors and dancers. The broad streets echoed with the sounds of singers, musicians and other people and were strewn with all kinds of precious gems. The king presented worthy gifts to the rhapsodists, bards and ballad singers, and gave riches and thousands of cows to the brāhmaṇas. He then performed the name-giving ceremonies for his sons on the eleventh day after Their births. The sage Vasiṣṭha was pleased to name the eldest Rāma, Kaikeyī's son he named Bharata, and Sumitrā's two sons he named Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna.

The sage fed the brāhmaṇas, the townspeople and also the residents of the nation and gave many mounds of brilliant jewels to the brāhmaṇas. He had all his children's sacraments performed, beginning with the birth ceremony. The eldest of them was outstanding like a flag and was most dear to His father. Everyone considered Him to be just like Svayambhuva Manu. All four sons were conversant with the scriptures, heroic and engaged in the welfare of the world. They were all endowed with knowledge and adorned with all good qualities. Among them, however, Rāma was the greatest and of unfailing prowess. He was loved by everyone, even like the spotless moon. He greatly enjoyed riding on the backs of elephants and horses and was skilled at driving chariots. He delighted in the study of archery and was devoted to serving His father.

From his childhood, Lakṣmaṇa, the increaser of wealth, was always very affectionate to His elder brother Rāma, the joy of the world and served Him bodily. Lakṣmaṇa, who was endowed with good fortune, was like

another life force of Rāma outside of Himself. Without him that excellent Rāma would not sleep, without him He would not eat even tasty dishes when brought. Whenever Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, went out on horseback to hunt, Lakṣmaṇa would follow behind Him with bow and arrows to protect Him. Lakṣmaṇa's younger brother, Śatrughna, was to Bharata always dearer than life itself, and Bharata was equally dear to Śatrughna.

King Daśaratha was extremely pleased with his four highly fortunate sons, as Brahmā is with the demigods who guard the four directions: Indra, Varuṇa, Yama and Kuvera. When all four sons had acquired knowledge, they were adorned with all good qualities. They were shy, glorious, omniscient and far-sighted. King Daśaratha, the father of all of Them, who were potent and as bright as lamps, was as happy as Brahmā, the ruler of the universe. Those tigers among men were also devoted to Vedic studies. They were devoted to the service of their father and expert in the science of archery.

Now the righteous King Daśaratha, concerned about Their marriages, consulted with his family priests and relatives. While the great soul was thinking about this in the midst of his ministers, the powerful sage Viśvāmitra arrived. Desiring an audience with the king, he said to the doorkeepers: "Quickly tell the king that I, the son of Gādhi of the Kuśika Dynasty, have arrived." On hearing his message, they ran to the king's quarters with bewildered minds, impelled by the order of the sage. When they reached the king's quarters, they informed him of the arrival of the sage Viśvāmitra. Hearing this news from the guards, the king, being overjoyed, went with his family priest to greet him, just as Indra welcomes Lord Brahmā.

The king saw that the ascetic given to observing vows was shining with light. The king's face reflected delight as he offered the sage water for washing the hands. Accepting that handwash from the king as recommended in scripture, Viśvāmitra inquired about the health and well-being of the king. Then the virtuous sage inquired about the well-being of the city, the treasury, the state, the royal family and friends: "Are all your conquered surrounding enemies being submissive to you? Are the duties of sacrifice to

the gods and responsibilities to human beings being properly carried out?" The excellent and fortunate sage greeted Vasiṣṭha and the other sages, as was proper, and inquired about their welfare. With joyful minds, they all entered the king's court. After being honored by the king, they all took their seats accordingly.

Then the magnanimous king joyfully spoke to the great sage Viśvāmitra, honoring him: "Like the attainment of the nectar of immortality, rains in a drought-stricken land, the birth of a son from one's own wife in an issueless family, the retrieval of lost valuables, or the joy of a great celebration, so do I consider your arrival. Please be welcomed, O great sage. What desire of yours may I gladly fulfill and how? O brāhmaṇa, you are the most worthy person for me to serve. By luck you have arrived, O respectful one. Today my birth is successful and my life fortunate. My night has ended in a fortuitous sunrise now that I have seen you, the lord of the brāhmaṇas. Previously, you were honored with the title 'rājarṣi' (a royal sage), but you increased your effulgence through austerities and have now become a brahmarṣi (a brāhmaṇa sage). You are so deserving of my worship. Your visit has proven wonderful because it is so highly purifying for me. O master, my palace has now become a holy place because of your presence. Please tell me what it is you want. For what purpose have you come? Favored by you, I wish to promote your cause. You need not worry about its success, O sage of noble vows. I shall accomplish whatever you desire. You are like a god for me. O brāhmaṇa, I have this day attained such good fortune. By dint of your visit, I have fully achieved the results of the highest religious merit."

After the king had spoken in that way with humble words that were pleasing to the heart and ears, the most excellent sage, who was famous for his noteworthy qualities, became exceedingly happy.

VIŚVĀMITRA ASKS KING DAŚARATHA FOR RĀMA

Hearing the wonderful and detailed words of King Daśaratha, the splendorous Viśvāmitra's hair stood on end and he said: "O tiger among kings, in this world you alone are worthy of the praise you have spoken, no one else, because you are descended from such a great dynasty and are instructed by the sage Vasiṣṭha. Make a firm resolve to accomplish the purpose which I carry in my heart. I, O best of persons, stand consecrated for the execution of a sacrifice to attain my goal. But it is being obstructed by two rākṣasas who can assume any form at will. Each time, when the sacrifice has neared conclusion, the two rākṣasas, Mārīca and Subāhu, who are very powerful and learned in the skills of the demons, have caused huge amounts of flesh and blood to rain down upon the sacrificial altar. Because my undertaking is thus being interrupted, I left that place disappointed after having done so much hard work. O monarch, I do not have the mentality to give vent to anger. The nature of this sacrifice is that once started, no curse can be pronounced. Therefore, O lion among kings, your eldest and valiant son Rāma, whose prowess is unfailing and whose hair is blackish like the wings of a crow, should be given by you to me. Being protected by me, He is certainly capable by His own transcendental power to destroy the hostile rākṣasas. I will without a doubt reward Him manifoldly, whereby His fame will extend throughout the three worlds. Besides, upon meeting Rāma, the two rākṣasas do not stand a chance in any event. Other than Rāma, there is no one bold enough to kill them. Proud of their powers, the two sinful wretches are under the influence of the curse of time. O tiger among kings, they are no match for the great soul Rāma. Do not be too affectionate to your son, O king. I promise you, know that the two rākṣasas are already killed. I know that the great soul Rāma's prowess is undeterrable, and so do the glorious Vasiṣṭha and these other ascetics standing here. If you want to achieve lasting virtue and great fame in this world, O king of kings, you should give me Rāma. If, O descendant of Kakutṣtha, all your counselors

headed by Vasiṣṭha give you their consent, then let Rāma go. You should give your dear son, the lotus-eyed Rāma, who is Himself unattached, for the ten nights of the sacrifice. Act so that this sacrifice of mine does not exceed the allotted time. Bless you! Do not let your mind grieve."

After having spoken such virtuous words, the righteous and effulgent sage Viśvāmitra was silent. Hearing the good words spoken by Viśvāmitra, the king was overcome with grief, began to tremble and fainted. Regaining consciousness, he got up and became depressed, being overcome with fear. Thus hearing the sage's words, which were painful for the heart and mind, the great-souled king became mentally deranged and fell off his throne.

KING DAŚARATHA REFUSES VIŚVĀMITRA'S REQUEST

After hearing what Viśvāmitra had spoken, King Daśaratha remained unconscious for almost an hour. When he regained consciousness, he spoke the following: "My lotus-eyed Rāma is less than sixteen years old. I do not see how He is capable of fighting with rākṣasas. With this army of one akṣauhiṇī I, lord and protector, shall fight with those creatures of the night. My heroic soldiers are skilled in fighting with weapons and can perform extraordinarily in battle. They are able to fight with rākṣasas. You need not take Rāma. Positioned at the head of the army, I shall personally, with bow in hand, protect your sacrifice. As long as I have life I shall fight the rākṣasas. Your religious observance will be protected and free from interference. I shall go myself. You need not take Rāma. He is but a boy who has not yet finished His studies. Neither does He know how to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of His enemies. He does not possess the strength of weapons, nor is He experienced in battle. Neither is He a match for the rākṣasas, for they fight treacherously.

"Separated from Rāma, I cannot bear living more than an hour. O tiger among sages, you need not take Rāma. If you still wish to take Rāma, O brāhmaṇa of noble vows, take Him with me and my army of four divisions. O Viśvāmitra, descendant of Kuśika, I was born sixty-thousand years ago and it was only with great difficulty that I was able to obtain Rāma as my son. You need not take Rāma. Among my four sons, Rāma is the oldest and most virtuous, and I am therefore extremely affectionate to Him. You need not take Rāma.

"What strength do the rākṣasas have, who are their sons and who are they? O best of sages, how tall are they and who protects them? How can the rākṣasas be counteracted by Rāma, or by my troops, or by me, considering that the rākṣasas are such treacherous fighters? Tell me

everything about how I can defeat the rākṣasas in battle, for they are arrogant in their strength."

Hearing the king's words, the sage Viśvāmitra replied: "There is a rākṣasa named Rāvaṇa born from the dynasty of Pulastya. By dint of a boon he received from Brahmā, he is greatly disturbing the three worlds. He is very strong, of extraordinary prowess and surrounded by many rākṣasas. It is said, O mahārāja, that Rāvaṇa, the ruler of the rākṣasas, is the son of the sage Viśravā and therefore the actual half-brother of Kuvera. When the mighty rākṣasa does not care to disrupt sacrifices, he sends those two formidable rākṣasas, Mārīca and Subāhu to do so."

Thus addressed by the sage, the king then said to him: "I cannot stand in battle with that evil demon. Bestow your mercy, O knower of virtue, upon my son. For me who have little good fortune, you are a god and a preceptor. The gods, demons, gandharvas, yakṣas, birds, and serpents are unable to defeat Rāvaṇa in battle, what to speak of human beings! That Rāvaṇa actually takes away the power of the strong in battle. I am unable to combat with him or with his army, whether I am accompanied by my army or my sons, O best of sages. By no means, O brāhmaṇa, shall I relinquish my youthful son who resembles one of the immortal gods and who is unfamiliar with warfare. Now, if the sons of Sunda and Upasunda, Mārīca and Subāhu, who are equal in battle to Yamarāja, the lord of death, are the ones who are disrupting your sacrifice, I shall not give you my son. They are very powerful and well-trained. I, accompanied by my supporters, shall go into battle with either one of the two, otherwise I, along with my relatives, shall beg your forgiveness."

Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśika, was seized with a fit of rage because of the prattle spoken by the king. Like a sacrificial fire into which oblations of ghee have been poured, the sage burned with anger.

VIŚVĀMITRA'S ANGER AT DAŚARATHA'S REFUSAL

Having heard the king's words, which were full of mispronunciations due to affection for his son, Viśvāmitra angrily replied to the king: "O lord of the earth, after conceding to fulfill my purpose, you now wish to break your promise. This is improper for the descendants of Raghu and will lead to the destruction of the dynasty. If this is fine with you, O king, I shall leave as I came. As a breaker of promises, be happy in the company of your friends."

On account of Viśvāmitra's anger, the whole earth shook and the gods became extremely fearful. Realizing that the whole world was about to be devastated, the great sage Vasiṣṭha, who was sober and an executor of noble vows, said to the king: "Your Majesty, you are like a second Dharmarāja born in the dynasty of Ikṣvāku. As determined, dedicated to noble vows and glorious as you are, you should not obliterate righteousness. In all the three worlds it is known that you, King Daśaratha, are a righteous soul. Do your duty. Do not harbor unrighteousness. Not carrying out what you have promised to do will destroy the merit you have accrued from acts of piety. Therefore, let Rāma go. Whether they have mastered the use of weapons or not, the rākṣasas will not be able to defeat Rāma, for He will be protected by Viśvāmitra, as immortal nectar is protected by a circle of fire.

"Behold here Viśvāmitra, the personification of righteousness and endowed with superexcellent prowess. He is the wisest person in this world and engaged in the practice of austerities. He knows how to use different kinds of weapons. No one within the three worlds of moving and nonmoving things knows him, nor will anyone ever know him, neither gods, ṛṣis, immortals, rākṣasas, gandharvas, yakṣas, kinnaras or great nāgas. All weapons were born as the sons of the supremely righteous Prajāpati Kṛśāśva. These were given in the past to Viśvāmitra at a time when he ruled over a kingdom. Those sons of Kṛśāśva, being born from the daughters of Dakṣa, were

different looking, mighty, effulgent and victorious. Jayā and Suprabhā, the two daughters of Dakṣa, were well-proportioned. They gave birth to one hundred extremely effulgent missiles and weapons. By dint of a boon she had received, Jayā gave birth to fifty formless sons of immeasurable power for destroying the armies of demons. Suprabhā also gave birth to fifty sons, who were known as Samhāras (destroyers), and were insurmountable, unassailable and most powerful.

"This Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśika, is thoroughly familiar with those weapons. He is also capable of creating new ones. There is nothing not known in the past or future by this great soul and chief of sages, being the knower of righteousness, O king. Viśvāmitra has such prowess and splendor and is highly renowned. You should not, therefore, entertain any doubt about Rāma's going with Viśvāmitra. Of course, Viśvāmitra is personally able to destroy those rākṣasas. The purpose of his request to you is so that the glory will go to your son." The king's mind was pacified by the words of the sage and thus the best of the Raghu Dynasty rejoiced. He then wisely acquiesced to allow Rāma to accompany Viśvāmitra.

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA'S DEPARTURE WITH VIŚVĀMITRA

After the sage Vasiṣṭha had spoken in that way, King Daśaratha, his face shining with delight, personally summoned Rāma along with Lakṣmaṇa. He was then blessed by His mother and father, Queen Kausalyā and King Daśaratha, and consecrated with auspicious prayers by the family priest Vasiṣṭha. Smelling the head of his son, King Daśaratha then gave Him to Viśvāmitra with a joyful mind. Seeing the lotus-eyed Rāma following Viśvāmitra, a dustless breeze pleasing to the touch began to blow. There was a shower of flowers from the sky and the air reverberated with the sound of celestial drums and conchshells as Rāma departed.

Viśvāmitra walked in front, followed by Rāma of wide fame. Rāma's face was decorated with sidelocks of hair and He held a bow in His hands. Behind Him followed Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā. Carrying a quiver on Their backs and a bow in Their hands, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa shone brightly in all directions. They looked like a pair of three-headed serpents. Unhurriedly following the sage, as the Aśvinī-kumāras followed Brahmā, the two youths shone with glory, illuminating Viśvāmitra with Their effulgence, and were irreproachable. Following the sage Viśvāmitra, with bow in hand, They were well-dressed. Their hands were protected by alligator gloves, They carried swords and were splendid. The bodies of the two youthful brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, were attractive. They shone with glory, illuminating Viśvāmitra with Their effulgence, and were irreproachable. They resembled the two sons of the fire god Agni who follow the inconceivable Lord Śiva.

Having gone a distance of one and a half yojanas along the southern bank of the Sarayu River, Viśvāmitra spoke the following sweet words to Rāma: "Dear Rāma, sip some water from the river. Do not let any time be lost. Receive from me instruction in the use of the two mantras, *balā* and

atibalā, by which you will never become tired or feverish, nor will You ever lose Your beauty. Neither will You, while asleep or offguard, be overcome by the rākṣasas who frequent the night. No one will have arms as strong as Yours on this earth. In all the three worlds, O Rāma, there will be no one equal to You by the recitation of the two mantras, balā and atibalā. There will be no one equal to You in this world in good fortune, in cleverness, in knowledge, in resolute intelligence, or in answers and replies. When You have received instruction in these two mantras, there will be no one who can equal You, for balā and atibalā are the mothers of all knowledge. By reciting the two mantras You will never feel hunger or thirst, O Rāma. Accept these mantras, O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, for the protection of the whole world. By studying these spells, You will become famous in the world. These two powerful spells are sons of Brahmā, the grandsire of the world. I wish to bestow these mantras upon You, O descendent of Kakutstha, for You are qualified to receive them, O prince. There is certainly no one else who possesses the manifold qualities You do. When nourished with the practice of austerities, these two mantras will increase manifoldly in potency."

Then Rāma, who is already pure, sipped water three times, His face illuminated with joy. He accepted the instructions on the use of the two mantras from the great self-realized sage. Possessed of that knowledge, Rāma of formidable prowess shone brightly like the resplendent autumn sun surrounded by thousands of brilliant rays. After Viśvāmitra taught Rāma all the duties in relation to him as Their preceptor, the three of them passed the night there comfortably on the bank of the Sarayu River. The two excellent sons of King Daśaratha lay down upon beds of grass, which were unfit for Them. Because of being fondled by the words of Viśvāmitra, they passed the night happily.

PASSING THE NIGHT AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE GANGES AND SARAYU

When night was over at the crack of dawn, the great sage Viśvāmitra spoke to the two princes, descendants of Kakutstha, lying on Their beds of leaves: "O good son of Kausalyā, Rāma, it is day break. Please arise, O tiger among men. You must perform your daily spiritual duties." Hearing these noble words of the sage, the two supermen bathed, offered libations to the gods and ancestors, then recited the most excellent prayer. After finishing Their daily duties, the two valiant youths, being extremely satisfied, offered prayers of respect to Viśvāmitra, who was rich in austerity, and stood before him ready to go.

Proceeding along, They reached the auspicious confluence of the Sarayu and Ganges, from where They could see the divine Ganges which flows through the three worlds. Near there was a holy hermitage of self-realized sages who had practiced extreme austerities for many thousands of years. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were very pleased to see that holy hermitage. Then They spoke the following words to the great soul Viśvāmitra: "Whose holy hermitage is this? What person resides in it? O master, We two desire to know. We are both extremely curious."

Hearing Their words, the elevated sage laughed and said: "Listen, Rāma, whose hermitage this was previously. Cupid is the personification of love, so say the wise. Once Lord Śiva was engaged in the practice of strict penances here. After finishing his meditation, the lord of gods, Śiva, in the company of his consort Pārvatī and the maruts, went for a stroll. As he was going along, the foolish Cupid tried to overcome him, upon which Śiva let out a resounding roar. O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, Śiva threw a look of anger towards Cupid, causing all the limbs to fall off that fool's body. All Cupid's limbs were thus destroyed. So it was that he was rendered bodiless by Lord Śiva. Thus Cupid became known as Anaṅga (bodiless), O Rāma. The

place where he lost his body became known as the glorious land of Aṅga. This is that holy hermitage of the great Lord Śiva and these hermits engaged in the practice of virtue were previously the disciples of Śiva. They are completely sinless. Let us pass the night here, O handsome Rāma, at the confluence of these two holy rivers. Tomorrow we shall cross. Let us all go to the hermitage after cleaning ourselves in the river. Our stay here will be comfortable. We shall happily pass the night here after bathing, reciting prayers and offering oblations of ghee into the sacred fire, O best of men."

As they were talking there, the sages of the hermitage were able to see them by their mystic vision and began to rejoice. The sages then offered to Viśvāmitra water for washing his feet and hands, and everything else that was to be offered to a guest. Then they performed the ritual for receiving a guest for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. After being thanked by Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the sages delighted them with stories. Then, at sunset, they all together recited their evening prayers according to regulation. Being lodged by the sages of noble vows who resided there, they passed the night very happily in the hermitage associated with Cupid. The pious soul and best of sages Viśvāmitra entertained the two princes by telling them enjoyable stories.

HISTORY OF THE RĀKṢASĪ TĀṬAKĀ

Thereafter, at sunrise, when the two chastisers of enemies had finished Their morning duties, They, with Viśvāmitra leading, went to the bank of the Ganges. All the great souled sages who were observing severe vows presented Them with an excellent boat and then said to Viśvāmitra: "Your holiness, please get in the boat, followed by the princes. Have a safe journey. Do not delay." Viśvāmitra replied: "So be it." Then he offered respects to the sages and, along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, crossed the river. When they were in the middle of the river, they heard a sound that was agitating the water. The mighty Rāma, along with His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, wanted to know what was causing that noise. There in the middle of the river, Rāma asked the sage: "What is this tumultuous sound at the junction of the two waters?" Hearing Rāma's words of curiosity, the great soul Viśvāmitra related the cause of the sound: "On Mount Kailāsa, O Rāma, there is an excellent lake created by the mind of Lord Brahmā. For that reason, O tiger among men, it is called Mānasa-sarovara (Mental Lake). From that lake flows a river which encircles Ayodhyā. Because that river sprang from the lake (saras) created by Lord Brahmā, it is known by the good name "Sarayu." That unusual sound is caused by the entrance of the Sarayu into the Ganges. O Rāma, offer proper respects."

The two most virtuous youths then offered respects to the two rivers. Reaching the southern shore of the Ganges, they left the boat and began walking. Seeing a frightening forest devoid of any sign of human habitation, the prince said to the great sage: "O how dense this forest is! It is swarming with chirping crickets. It resounds with the terrifying sounds of ferocious beasts of prey and vultures and with the frightful shrieks of many other kinds of birds. It is infested with lions, tigers, boars, monkeys, and overgrown with dhava, aśvakaṇṇa, kakubha, bilva, tinduka, pāṭala and badarī trees. What is the name of this scary forest?"

The greatly powerful sage Viśvāmitra said to Him: "Hear, my dear descendant of Kakutstha, about to whom this frightening forest belongs. Previously there were two kingdoms here, called Malada and Karūṣa, which were created by the efforts of the gods. At the time when Indra killed the demon Vṛtrāsura, Indra became contaminated. Thereupon the thousand-eyed Indra, became afflicted with hunger and with the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa. The gods and sages who were wealthy in austerity freed Indra of his contamination by bathing him with pots of water from the Ganges. Depositing in this land the contamination arisen from the body of Lord Indra, the gods rejoiced. Indra thereby became pure and free from sin, as he had been before. Being pleased with this place, Indra conferred an excellent boon upon it: 'These two tracts of land will grow prosperous and will be known in the world as Malada (Dirtying) and Karūṣa (Filthy) because they carry the impurity arisen from my body.' 'Well done! Well done!' said the gods to Indra, after seeing how the wise Indra honored the land. The two kingdoms did prosper for a long time, O subduer of enemies. Malada and Karūṣa were joyful due to an abundance of food and wealth.

"Now when some time had passed, there appeared a yakṣiṇī who could assume any form at will. She had the strength of one thousand elephants. Her name is Tāṭakā, bless You child, and she is the wife of the rākṣasa Sunda. Her son, Mārīca, is as strong as Indra, has big round arms, a huge head, a wide mouth and a gigantic body. The rākṣasa of frightening form is always terrifying the people. The two kingdoms of Malada and Karūṣa are always being devastated by the wicked demoness Tāṭakā. She lives about half a yojana ahead, blocking our path. Therefore, we should proceed to where Tāṭakā's forest is. Relying on the strength of Your arms, slay that wicked demoness. By my order, make this land once again free from disturbance. Because of her, no one is able to visit this land. It has thus fallen into decay, O Rāma, due to the unbearable and horrible yakṣiṇī. Thus have I related to You everything regarding why this forest appears so frightening, how the yakṣiṇī devastated the entire land, and how she does not desist from such activity to this very day."

HOW TĀṬAKĀ MARRIED SUNDA AND GAVE BIRTH TO MĀRĪCA

Hearing the superb narration from the sage of immeasurable glory, the tiger among men inquired with sweet words: "Since it is said that yakṣiṇīs are not very strong, O best of sages, how is it that a weak female could have the strength of a thousand elephants?" Hearing the pleasantly sweet words spoken by Rāma, whose strength was immeasurable, Viśvāmitra replied to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: "Hear how she became so powerful. Though only a frail woman, she possesses great strength due to a boon which she received. Formerly there was a very powerful yakṣa named Suketu. Being issueless, the pious yakṣa performed tremendous austerities. Lord Brahmā became very pleased by the austerities of that lord of yakṣas. Therefore Brahmā gave to him a jewel-like young girl named Tāṭakā. Brahmā also gave to Tāṭakā the strength of one thousand elephants. He did not, however, give a son to the yakṣa. Just as her youthful beauty was beginning to increase, the yakṣa gave her as a wife to the demon Sunda, the son of Jambha. After some time, the yakṣiṇī gave birth to a son named Mārīca, who was insurmountable and who became a rākṣasa due to a curse.

"When the sage Agastya killed the demon Sunda by the strength of a mantra, Tāṭakā and her son wished to rush upon the sage. Enraged, Tāṭakā ran towards the sage, roaring fiercely, to devour him. Seeing her rushing towards him, the sage Agastya said to Mārīca: "Become a rākṣasa!" Full of anger, Agastya cursed Tāṭakā also: 'Become an ugly man-eating rākṣasī with a hideous face! Give up your present comely form and assume a frightening appearance!' Being cursed in this way, Tāṭakā became incensed with anger. Thus she ravages this land blessed by the activities of the sage Agastya. For the welfare of the cows and brāhmaṇas, O descendant of Raghu, kill this most cruel yakṣiṇī of evil conduct. No one dares to kill this cursed demoness, O descendant of Raghu, besides Yourself in all the three worlds.

O best of men, You should not feel contempt for the deed of killing this woman. For the sake of the four castes, a prince must perform such deeds. Whether with cruelty or without cruelty, with sin or fault, for the purpose of protecting the citizens, you must always execute Your duty. This is the eternal duty of one who carries the burden of royalty. O descendant of Kakutstha, kill the sinful wretch, for there is not the least piety in her. It is heard that previously Indra killed Mantharā, the daughter of Virocana (the son of Prahāda), when she wanted to destroy the earth. O Rāma, previously the mother of Śukrācārya and the devoted wife of Bṛghu wanted to rid the world of Indra. Knowing this, Viṣṇu killed them. These and many other women were killed by great-souled princes. Such sinful and ignoble women were killed by great persons. Therefore abandon any sympathy and slay her by my order, O prince."

RĀMA SLAYS TĀṬAKĀ

Hearing the impassioned words of the sage, Prince Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, being of firm resolution, joined His palms and replied: "My father King Daśaratha instructed Me in the midst of his preceptors, 'By my order and by the gravity of that order, You must carry out without any doubt the instructions of the descendant of Kuśika, Viśvāmitra.' I cannot disobey his instructions. Having heard these instructions of My father, by the order of you, a knower of the Absolute Truth, I shall doubtlessly slay the demoness Tāṭakā. For the benefit of the cows, brāhmaṇas and this land, I am prepared to carry out your instructions."

Speaking thus, Rāma, the subduer of enemies, grasped the middle of His bow with His fist and plucked the bowstring, producing a loud sound that penetrated all directions. All the creatures inhabiting the forest of Tāṭakā were terrified by the sound. Tāṭakā too was infuriated and bewildered by the sound. Thinking about that sound, the rākṣaṣī became overwhelmed with anger. Enraged, she ran in the direction from which the sound had proceeded. Seeing the furious, ugly demoness with a hideous face who was really huge in size, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Look, Lakṣmaṇa, at the terrible, frightening form of this yakṣiṇī. Seeing her can strike terror into the hearts of the timid. See how difficult she is to overcome, possessing magical powers. I shall repel her by severing off her ears and nose. I do not feel inclined to kill her because she is a woman. I shall therefore destroy her power and her ability to move. That is my idea."

Even as Rāma spoke, Tāṭakā, overwhelmed with anger, waving her arms wildly and roaring, ran towards Rāma. Threatening her with the sound "huṇi," the sage Viśvāmitra exclaimed: "Good luck to the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty! Victory to Them!" Tāṭakā threw up a terrible cloud of dust around the two princes. Thus she bewildered Them for almost an hour with the dense dust cloud. Then, by means of her magical powers, she caused a tremendous shower of stones to fall down upon the princes, at

which Rāma became very angry. By letting loose a shower of arrows, Rāma repelled her great deluge of stones. Then He cut off the approaching demoness' arms with arrows. Having her arms severed, the exhausted demoness stood nearby moaning. Out of anger, Lakṣmaṇa cut off her ears and nose. At that, the yakṣiṇī assumed many different forms and vanished from sight, bewildering Them with her magical power. Releasing another formidable shower of stones, she moved about unseen.

Seeing the two princes being covered all around by the shower of stones, the son of Gādhī, the glorious Viśvāmitra, spoke the following words: "Enough of Your pity, Rāma! This wicked creature is most sinful. Before this defiler of sacrifices increases in magical strength, kill her, for sunset is approaching. Rākṣasas become unassailable after sundown." Although the yakṣiṇī was invisible, Rāma found her out by sound and struck her with arrows, obstructing her on all sides. Although she had been counteracted by the network of arrows, because of her magical powers, she, bellowing loudly, was able to rush towards Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. As she rushed toward Them with the force of a thunderbolt, Rāma shot her in the breast with an arrow, and she fell dead. When Indra and the other gods saw that the fearsome demoness was dead, they offered respects to Rāma and praised Him saying, "Well done! Well done!"

Highly pleased, the thousand-eyed Indra and all the gods then said to Viśvāmitra: "O sage Viśvāmitra, descendant of Kuśika, bless you. Indra and all the gods are pleased by this deed. Please show affection to Rāma, the descendant of Raghu. O brāhmaṇa, please give to Rāma the weapons born as the sons of the lord of creatures, Kṛṣāśva, who are of unfailing prowess and might due to their practice of austerities. Rāma is a worthy recipient, O brāhmaṇa, for He is engaged in your service. A very great task must be executed by the prince for the gods." Speaking in this way, the jubilant gods offered their respects to Viśvāmitra and returned to the heavens. By then it was sundown.

After that, the best of sages, being pleased by the slaying of Tāṭakā, smelled the head of Rāma and said: "Let us spend the night here, O handsome Rāma. Tomorrow morning we shall go to the site of my hermitage." Hearing Viśvāmitra's words, the son of Daśaratha was pleased

and happily passed the night there in Tāṭakā's forest. Being released from its curse, that very day the forest shone wonderfully, like the forest of Caitraratha. Having killed Tāṭakā, the daughter of the yakṣa, and having been praised by the hosts of gods and siddhas, He rested there with the sage until He was awoken in the morning.

VIŚVĀMITRA BESTOWS DIVINE WEAPONS TO RĀMA

Having rested that night, the highly famous Viśvāmitra laughed and spoke sweet words to Rāma: "I am completely satisfied. Bless You, most famous prince. It is with great pleasure that I give You all the weapons. You shall be victorious, subduing Your enemies in this world, whether they be gods, demons, gandharvas or nāgas. I give You all the divine weapons. Bless You. First, the highly shining discus of chastisement I give to You, O descendant of Raghu, then the discus of righteousness, the discus of time, as well as the discus of Lord Viṣṇu. Then I give You the thunderbolt weapon, O best of men, and the trident of Lord Śiva also, the weapon called brahma-śiras and one called aiśika. I also give You the most powerful of weapons, the unexcelled brahmāstra. I also present You with two fine and very shiny maces, modakī and śikharī, O tiger among men. Dharma-pāśa (noose of righteousness) and kāla-pāśa (noose of time). I also give to You as well the most excellent noose of Varuṇa, the god of retribution. I give to You a pair of missiles, one dry and the other wet, O descendant of Raghu. I also give You a weapon called paināka that belongs to Lord Śiva and one which belongs to Lord Nārāyaṇa. I give You a weapon called śikhara of the fire god Agni and one called vāyavya, which belongs to the wind god Vāyu, O sinless one. I give You the pair of śakti weapons called hayaśiras (horse's head) and krāuñca. Kaṅkāla, the dreadful musala, a kāpālaka and a kiṅkiṇī, which are all fit for slaying rākṣasas. I give You, O noble prince, the vidyādhara's weapon called nandana, which is a jewel among swords. I give the gandharva's weapon called mohana, which bewilders the enemy, and also the two weapons of Soma, called prasnāpana and prasāmana, O descendant of Raghu. I give You the weapons varṣaṇa, śoṣaṇa, santāpana and vilāpana, as well as Cupid's favorite and difficult to counteract weapon called madana. I give You the dear weapon of the gandharvas called mānava and the favorite weapon of the witches called mohana, O royal prince. I give You the weapons called tāmasa, O tiger among men, and the very powerful saumana, the saṁvarta

and the indefeatable mausala, the satya weapon, the powerful m y maya weapon, and the sun god's weapon called teja prabha, which absorbs the enemy's strength. I give You the moon god's weapon called     , Tva   's called sud    , Bhaga's weapon d     and Manu's weapon      . Immediately accept these very powerful and useful weapons, which can be manipulated as You wish, O prince R    ."

Having cleansed himself and sitting facing east, the sage gladly revealed to R     those unexcelled mantras. He bestowed to R     those weapons whose full deployment was even difficult for the gods. Even as the wise sage Vi         was reciting the mantras, all the weapons dutifully came and stood before R    . With folded hands, they all joyfully addressed R    : "Here we are, O most merciful descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. We are Your servants. Whatever You wish, we shall do. Bless You." After R    , had been addressed by the highly powerful weapons, He took each one and stroked it with His hand. Then He commanded them: "Appear in My mind when I need you." Thereafter R     with a gladdened mind offered respects to the great sage Vi         and began the journey.

VIŚVĀMITRA TEACHES RĀMA HOW TO RETRACT THE WEAPONS

Having accepted the weapons, the sweet-faced and pure Rāma, just as He was about to start walking, said to Viśvāmitra: "O master, I have received weapons which make Me formidable even for the gods. Now, O best of sages, I wish you to teach me the method of retracting them." Speaking thus, Viśvāmitra, whose splendor was great and whose resolution was unbreakable, imparted to Rāma the knowledge of retracting the weapons:

"Satyavān, satyakīrti, dhṛṣṭa, rabhasa, pratihāratara, prāṇmukha, avāṇmukha, lakṣya, alakṣya, dṛḍhanābha, sunābha, daśākṣa, śatavaktra, daśaśīrṣa, śatodara, padmanābha, mahānābha, dundunābha, svanābha, jyotiṣa, śakuna, nairāśya, vimala, daityanāśaka, yaugaṇḍhara, vinidra, śucibāhu, mahābāhu, niṣkali, viruca, sārcimālī, dhṛtimālī, vṛttimān, rucira, pitrya, saumanasa, vidhūta, makara, paravīra, rati, dhana, dhānya, kāmarūpa, kāmaruci, moha, āvaraṇa, jṛmbhaka, sarpanātha, panthāna and varuṇa—all of these effulgent sons of Kṛṣāśva, who are capable of changing their forms at will, I bestow upon You, for You are worthy, O Rāma. Bless You."

"Very well," said Rāma, the descendant of Kakutstha, cheerfully. The bodies of those personified weapons were extremely effulgent and pleasing. Some of them were like burning coals; some were as dark as smoke; some were like the sun and moon. They stood there bent slightly forward with their hands joined. Standing respectfully, they addressed Rāma with sweet words: "Here we are, O lion among men, we shall do whatever we can." Rāma said to them: "You may go as you so wish. When I need you, be present in My mind to help Me." They replied: "So be it." Then they circumambulated Rāma and bid Him goodbye, leaving as they had come.

As they continued walking, Rāma spoke the following sweet words to the great sage Viśvāmitra: "What is that stand of trees resembling a mass

of clouds not very far from yonder mountain? I am extremely curious about it. It is very scenic looking, populated with wild beasts and mind-captivating. It is adorned with many kinds of melodious song birds. I can understand by the looks of this place that we have left the dreary forest of the frightful demoness Tāṭakā, who caused people's hair to stand erect. O master, please tell me all about this forest. Whose hermitage is it? Where do the sinful and wicked brāhmaṇa-killing rākṣasas pass on their way to disrupt your sacrifice, O great sage? Your holiness, where is the place that your sacrifice must be protected and where must I slay the rākṣasas? I wish to hear all this, O best of sages, my master."

THE HISTORY OF SIDDHĀŚRAMA AND THEIR ARRIVAL THERE

Hearing the unfathomable words of Rāma, the glorious Viśvāmitra began relating the history of Siddhāśrama: "O strong-armed Rāma, previously Lord Viṣṇu, who is worshiped by the gods, spent hundreds of yugas and many more years here engaged in the execution of penance. This, O Rāma, is the previous hermitage of the Supreme Lord Vāmana. It is known as Siddhāśrama, for it was here that He attained the perfection of His purpose. At that time, King Bali, the son of Virocana, had conquered the hosts of gods, including Indra and the Maruts, thus establishing his sovereignty over all the three worlds, it is heard.

The great asura Bali Mahārāja began a sacrifice. While Bali was engaged in that sacrifice, the gods headed by Agni personally came here to this hermitage and spoke to Lord Viṣṇu: "O Lord Viṣṇu, Bali, the son of Virocana, is performing a very wonderful sacrifice. Before the completion of his vow, let our goal be accomplished. To those who are coming from here and there with a request, he is fulfilling it exactly as they ask. By means of Your internal potency yoga-māyā, assume the form of a dwarf for the welfare of the gods and secure our good fortune."

"At that time, O Rāma, arrived Kaśyapa, who was as brilliant as fire, along with Aditi, who seemed to be glowing with his brilliance. Having concluded his vow of austerities with the help of his wife after a period of a thousand celestial years, he satisfied Lord Viṣṇu, the giver of boons: 'O Lord, You are the essence of austerity, the accumulation of austerity, the personification of austerity, and austerity itself. By the power of my austerity I now see You, the Supreme Person. O Lord, I see the whole world situated within Your body. You are beginningless and indescribable. I take shelter of You.' Hearing this, the Lord was pleased and said to the sinless Kaśyapa: 'Bless you. Choose a boon, for I consider you worthy of receiving one.' Hearing that, Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci said: 'O bestower of boons, being

so pleased with us, You should grant the request made by Aditi, the gods and myself, for Your vows are always good. Become the son of Aditi and myself, O Lord. Become the younger brother of Indra, O slayer of demons. You must help the demigods who are afflicted with grief. This hermitage will by Your mercy become known as Siddhāśrama, O Lord of the gods, because it was here that You achieved perfection in the practice of austerity. O Lord, You may now leave this place.'

"Then the almighty Viṣṇu took birth from the womb of Aditi. Assuming the form of a dwarf, He approached Bali, the son of Virocana. For the welfare of all the worlds, the Lord asked Bali for as much land as he could cover with three steps and then gladly accepted it by encompassing all the worlds. He returned everything to Indra after subduing Bali Mahārāja with His might. Thus the all-powerful Lord once again put the three worlds under the sovereignty of Indra. It was by Him that this hermitage was frequented in ancient times. Therefore it has the power to destroy the toils of worldly life. By devotion to the Lord as Vāmana I am able to remain here. To this hermitage come the rākṣasas to disrupt it. Here is where You must kill the wicked creatures. Today I shall enter, O Rāma, the unparalleled Siddhāśrama. That hermitage, O son, is as much Yours as it is mine."

Speaking in this way, the sage with great affection took Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by the hands and entered the hermitage. As he did so, he shone like the moon without fog accompanied by the two stars of the constellation Punarvasu. When all the ascetics residing at Siddhāśrama saw Viśvāmitra, they all rose in a hurry, one after the other, and respectfully welcomed him. They received Viśvāmitra the best they could. They also extended to the two princes the hospitality due guests.

After resting a while, the two princes with joined palms addressed the tiger among sages: Please initiate your sacrifice this very day. Good fortune be unto you, O foremost of sages! Let the name Siddhāśrama be fulfilled and your words become true." Being addressed in this way, the great sage Viśvāmitra, who had conquered his senses and was under sacred vows, consecrated himself for the sacrifice. After resting that night, at dawn the two youths rose, bathed and performed Their morning worship. Being thus clean, when They had finished reciting the sacred verse of the Gāyatrī

according to scriptural regulation, They offered respects to Viśvāmitra, who was seated, having just finished offering oblations into the sacred fire.

RĀMA PROTECTS VIŚVĀMITRA'S SACRIFICE

After that, the two princes, who knew how to act according to time and place, also knowing what to say according to time and place, said to Viśvāmitra: "O master, We both wish to know the time when the two rākṣasas will come in order for Us to protect the sacrifice from them. Tell Us so that the moment does not escape Us." Having spoken thus, the two descendants of Kakutstha, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, were impatient to fight with the rākṣasas. Being pleased with this, all the sages offered praise to the princes: "From today up to the sixth night be vigilant, O descendants of the Raghu Dynasty. The sage Viśvāmitra has already consecrated himself for the sacrifice and will therefore observe a vow of silence meanwhile." Hearing those words, the famous princes passed six days and nights without sleep while they guarded the hermitage. The two heroes, excellent archers that They were, remained near Viśvāmitra, protecting him.

When time had passed and it was the sixth night, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Be prepared and alert." Even as Rāma spoke, impatient with the desire to fight, the fire on the sacrificial altar flared before the presiding priest Viśvāmitra and his assistants. The fire illuminated everything around it: the kuśa grass, the camasa, the śruk, the firewood, the excellent flowers, the priests and Viśvāmitra. They began the sacrifice by chanting mantras according to rule; when, in the sky was heard a great, frightening sound. As clouds cover the sky during the monsoon rains, so did the two rākṣasas as they rushed forward wielding their magical powers. Māṛica, Subāhu and their followers—all of frightful appearance—came, hurling down showers of blood. Seeing the sacrificial altar drenched by a shower of blood, Rāma quickly ran and saw the rākṣasas in the sky. Seeing those two rākṣasas rushing towards Them, the lotus-eyed Rāma turned to Lakṣmaṇa and said: "Look, Lakṣmaṇa. As the wind disperses clouds, so shall I, with Manu's

weapon, disperse without a doubt these wicked rākṣasas that feed on raw flesh. I am uninclined to kill them as they are."

Having spoken thus, the forceful Rāma fixed upon His bow the highly powerful and brilliant weapon of Manu named ūteṣu. Being extremely angry, Rāma fired it into Mārīca's chest. Being hit with the tremendous strength of the mānava weapon, he was thrown to a distance of one hundred yojanas into the ocean. Seeing Mārīca senseless and reeling from the striking power of the ūteṣu weapon, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Lakṣmaṇa, see how the ūteṣu weapon owned and used by Manu bewildered the rākṣasa and carried him off without depriving him of life. Now I shall slay all these merciless wicked rākṣasas who are prone to sinful deeds, interrupt sacrifices and feast on human blood." Having spoken to Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma, showing His agility, quickly grabbed the intensely powerful āgneya weapon of the fire god. Rāma fired it into the chest of Subāhu. Being pierced by it, Subāhu fell to the ground. The widely renowned and magnanimous Rāma then killed the remaining rākṣasas, engladdening the sages. Having killed all the rākṣasas that were interfering with the sacrifice, Rāma was honored by the sages, as is Indra upon conquering a demon fortress.

When the sacrifice was completed and the great sage Viśvāmitra saw that all directions around were cleared of any threat, he said the following to Rāma: "I have accomplished my purpose, O strong armed one, and You have carried out the orders of your preceptor. You have fulfilled the name of this hermitage, Siddhāśrama." Praising Rāma in that way, they all went on to perform their evening prayers.

VIŚVĀMITRA, RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA DEPART FOR MITHILĀ

After finishing Their evening duties, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa spent the night there. Both heroes were very jubilant and joyful in Their hearts. When night ended at the crack of dawn, They rose to perform Their early morning duties. Then they approached Viśvāmitra and the other sages. Praising the best of sages who was shining like fire, the two sweet speakers said the following kind words: "Here We are, O tiger of sages. Your servants have arrived. Inform Us, O best of sages, what order We should carry out."

On such a request by the two princes, all the sages offered respects to Viśvāmitra and then said to Rāma: "Janaka, the king of Mithilā, is going to perform a most virtuous sacrifice, O best of men. We shall go there. You too must accompany us, O tiger among men. There You will see a wonderful jewel of a bow. It was given in ancient times to the king by the gods at a sacrificial assembly. Its power is immeasurable and it is intimidating and extremely resplendent. There is no god, gandharva, asura or rākṣasa who can string that bow, what to speak of a human. Desiring to know the bow's strength, many strong kings and princes came, but were unable to string it. That bow, O tiger among men, belongs to the great-souled king of Mithilā. There You will also see a most wonderful sacrifice. That superb bow was requested by the king of Mithilā as the fruit of his sacrifice. The well-formed bow was thus given by the gods. It is being worshiped in the king's palace with different kinds of unguents, incense and other fragrances. "

Then the best of sages Viśvāmitra in the company of the other sages and the princes, departed after taking permission from the forest gods. As he went, he said: "Good luck to you all! Having accomplished my purpose, I shall leave Siddhāśrama and proceed to the snow-packed Himalaya Mountains on the northern shore of the Ganges." Then the tiger among sages who was rich in asceticism started walking toward the north. Behind the departing sage went his followers, the knowers of truth, who were

driving one hundred ox carts. The herds of deer and flocks of birds that resided in Siddhāśrama also followed behind the great ascetic Viśvāmitra. Then Viśvāmitra, in the host of sages, sent the deer and birds back.

When they had gone a long distance and the sun was going down, the band of sages carefully set up camp on the bank of the Śoṇā River. At sunset they bathed and offered oblations into the sacred fire. Placing Viśvāmitra in front, the sages, whose splendor was immeasurable, sat down. After offering respects to the sages, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa also sat down in front of the wise Viśvāmitra. Then the powerful Rāma inquired enthusiastically from the ascetic Viśvāmitra: "O lord, whose is this place graced with a thriving forest? I wish to hear. Bless you! You must tell us truthfully." Impelled by Rāma's words, the noble ascetic began relating all about that place in the midst of the sages.

THE STORY OF THE FOUR SONS OF KUŚA

Viśvāmitra said: "There was a king known by the name of Kuśa, who was born from Lord Brahmā. His vows were always fulfilled without any hindrance. He knew righteousness and was honored by godly people. That great soul fathered four tremendously strong sons with his worthy wife who was from Vidarbha. Their names were Kuśāmba, Kuśanābha, Asūrtarajasa and Vasu. With the desire to encourage them to uphold their duty as kṣatriyas, Kuśa said to his virtuous and truthful sons: "Give protection, my sons. Then you will achieve abundant merit." Hearing Kuśa's words, the four princes, who were exceptional gentlemen, established four cities of old. The powerful Kuśāmba built a city named Kauśāmbī; the pious soul Kuśanābha built a city named Mahodaya; the highly intelligent Asūrtarajasa built a city named Dharmāraṇya; and Vasu built a city named Girivraja. This city built by the great soul Vasu later became known by the name of Vasumatī. It is surrounded by these five superb mountain peaks. This pleasant River Śoṇā flows from the land of Magadha. As such this river is also known as the holy Māgadhī. Flowing between those five main mountains, it looks like a necklace. This Māgadhī River, which is related to the great-souled King Vasu, O Rāma, flows eastwardly and is lined with fields full of crops.

"The royal sage Kuśanābha begot one hundred excellent daughters in the womb of the apsarā Ghṛtācī. They were all youthful, comely and well-dressed. Coming to the garden grounds, they resembled lightning during the monsoons. Singing, dancing and playing instruments, the girls, adorned with jewels, experienced immense delight. All the limbs of their bodies were charming. There was none equal to them in the world. Arriving at the garden grounds, they looked like stars within a mass of clouds. They were all endowed with good qualities and graced with beauty and youth. Seeing them, the all-pervading wind god Vāyu said to them: "I wish to possess you all and that you should be my wives. Give up the notion of being humans

and accept the longevity of the gods! Perpetual youth is especially fleeting among humans. Accepting undecaying youth, you will become immortal."

Hearing these words spoken by Vāyu, whose activities are always unhindered, the one hundred virgins ridiculed him, saying: "O best of the gods, you move about within all beings as the life air. We all are aware of your might. For what reason do you insult us? We all are the daughters of King Kuśanābha, O best of the gods. We could cause you to fall from your position as a god by cursing you, but we prefer to retain the merit accrued from our austerities. May the time never come, O fool, when we disregard our truthful father and of our own accord choose a match. Our father is indeed our master. He is our most worshipable god. Whomever he chooses will be our husband."

Hearing their words, the wind god Vāyu was infuriated. Entering them, he disfigured every limb of their bodies. Having become hunchbacks with twisted limbs, they were afflicted with fear. The virgins who had been deformed by Vāyu entered the king's palace. Upon entering the palace, they were dismayed and embarrassed, their eyes brimming with tears. Perplexed to see those dear young girls who had been so beautiful now deformed as hunchbacks, the king said: "My daughters, what is this? Who has slighted righteousness? Who made you all hunchbacks? Why, though gesturing, do you not speak?" Inquiring in that way, the king sighed and became pensive.

THE MARRIAGE OF KUŚANĀBHA'S DAUGHTERS TO BRAHMADATTA

Hearing the words of the wise Kuśanābha, they touched their heads to his feet and said: "The all-pervading wind wanted to violate us, Your Majesty. Resorting to the path of evil, he had no regard for righteousness. We said to him: 'Bless you. We are obedient to our father's will. We are not independent. Ask for our hands from our father. If he will give us to you, we are yours.' As we spoke thus, we were all hit hard by the wicked Vāyu, who did not heed our words." Hearing their story, the supremely righteous king replied to his excellent daughters: "The forbearance of which only great persons are capable has been demonstrated by you, my daughters. Being all of one mind, you guarded the honor of my family. Forbearance is an adornment for women, as well as for men. Such forbearance which you have all equally exhibited is very difficult to practice, even for the gods. Forbearance is charity; forbearance is truth and sacrifice, O daughters. Forbearance is glory; forbearance is righteousness; the world stands upon forbearance."

Having sent away his daughters, O Rāma, the king, who possessed the prowess of the gods, consulted with his ministers concerning the marriage of his daughters. They had to determine the place, time and suitor for the girls. At that time, there was a very effulgent celibate youth named Cūlī who was engaged in practicing penance and auspicious activities. While he was performing penance, a certain gandharvī named Somadā served him. She was the daughter of Ūrmilā. When the lucky time came, he said to her: "I am thoroughly pleased. Good fortune be unto you! What favor may I do for you?"

Knowing that the sage was pleased, the eloquent gandharvī spoke sweetly to the sage who was skilled in speaking: "O great ascetic, you have acquired the characteristics of God and are therefore godlike. I wish to have a religious son who is dedicated to spiritual austerity. I am unmarried, nor

shall I be the wife of anyone. Bless you! Since I have approached you, you should give me a son by dint of your spiritual power." Pleased by her service, the brahmaṛṣi gave her a spiritually inclined son sprung from his mind and known by the name Brahmaḍatta. King Brahmaḍatta then lived in the city of Kāmpilyā with the great splendor of royalty, as Indra lives in heaven. The virtuous King Kuśanābha decided to give his one hundred daughters to King Brahmaḍatta. Summoning the splendorous King Brahmaḍatta, King Kuśanābha with a joyful mind presented him with his one hundred daughters. King Brahmaḍatta, who was as brilliant as Indra, then accepted their hands according to the status of each one, O Rāma. At the touch of his hand, the one hundred girls were transformed and freed from being hunchbacks, their illness was alleviated, and they became endowed with the supermost characteristics. Seeing them freed from Vāyu's curse, King Kuśanābha became very happy and rejoiced again and again. When the marriage was consummated, King Kuśanābha sent King Brahmaḍatta off with his wives and priests. When the gandharvī Somadā saw that her son had gotten married, she greeted her daughters-in-law according to the status of each one. Embracing them again and again, she commended Kuśanābha.

THE BIRTH OF GĀDHI TO KUṢANĀBHA

After he was married, O descendant of Raghu, the childless Kuṣanābha decided to perform a sacrifice for procuring a son. As the sacrifice was about to be performed, the magnanimous King Kuśa, who was a son of Lord Brahmā, said to Kuṣanābha: "Son, you will have a righteous son like yourself. Having a son named Gādhi, you will achieve lasting fame in the world." Having spoken in that way to King Kuṣanābha, Kuśa ascended into the sky and entered the blessed world of Lord Brahmā. After some time, the supremely righteous Gādhi was born to the intelligent King Kuṣanābha. That most virtuous Gādhi is my father, O descendant of Kakutstha. I am a descendant of the Kuśa Dynasty and am therefore a Kauśika, O descendant of Raghu. I also have an elder sister of the name Satyavatī, who is devoted to good vows and who was given in marriage to the sage Ṛcika. Following her husband all her life, she went to heaven in her very body. Thus she became the highly magnanimous and great Kauśikī River. She is divine and her waters, holy and pleasing. She flows from the Himalaya Mountains. For the welfare of the world, my sister flows in the form of a river. That is why I always reside happily on the slopes of the Himalayas, for I am very affectionate to my elder sister Kauśikī, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. That pious woman Satyavatī was fixed in truthfulness and righteousness. She was devoted to her husband and was very fortunate. She is now in the form of the Kauśikī, which is the best of rivers.

"Because of a religious vow, O Rāma, I left that river and came to Siddhāśrama. Now, by Your power, I have achieved my goal. This, O Rāma, is the story of my origin, of my dynasty and of this land, O strong-armed one, just as You have asked me. Half the night has passed, O descendant of Kakutstha, with the telling of my story. Now go to sleep. Good fortune be unto You. Let there be no obstacles on our path. The trees are all motionless, the birds and beasts are all sunken into sleep, and the directions are all covered with the darkness of night, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. The twilight has gradually receded and the sky is shining with the

light of stars and planets, as if covered with so many eyes. The moon, which dispels the darkness of the world, is rising with its cooling rays. By its light it gladdens the minds of all the living beings in the world. All the nocturnal beings-yakṣas, and rākṣasas-which are fierce and feed upon human flesh, are wandering here and there."

Speaking in this way, the highly effulgent great sage remained silent. All the other sages applauded him saying, "Well done! Well done! The great dynasty of the descendants of Kuśa is always dedicated to righteousness. Those great souls born in the Kuśa Dynasty are equal to Brahmā. You are particularly so, O widely renowned Viśvāmitra. The best of rivers, Kauśikī, has illuminated your family. Being overwhelmed with joy and praised by the sages, Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśa, went to bed like the setting of the shining sun. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were also somewhat amazed by what They had heard. Praising the tiger among sages, They also went to sleep.

VIŚVĀMITRA NARRATES THE ORIGIN OF THE GANGES

Having slept the rest of the night on the bank of the Śoṇā River in the company of the sages, when the night ended at dawn, Viśvāmitra said: "Night has ended and it is now dawn. The morning twilight is showing. Please get up. Good fortune be unto You! Prepare to continue the journey." Hearing these words, Rāma performed His morning duties. When Rāma was ready to leave, He spoke the following words, so it is said: "O brāhmaṇa, this Śoṇā River is full of auspicious water, is unfathomable and adorned with sandy banks. By which of the two fords should we cross?" Having been addressed by Rāma, Viśvāmitra spoke the following: "As indicated by me, this is the way by which those great seers are crossing."

The sages, along with the wise Viśvāmitra continued their journey, seeing many different forests. After going a good distance, it was noon time. Then they saw the best of rivers, the Ganges, which is worshiped by holy men. Seeing her holy waters frequented by swans and geese, all the sages along with Rāma, became jubilant. There on her bank they set up camp. Then, after bathing according to scriptural rules, they offered libations of Ganges water to the forefathers and gods. Having offered oblations into the sacred fire, they partook of the cooked sweet rice which had been offered in the sacrificial fire and which was like nectar. Sitting on the bank of the Ganges, they shone with delight, having gathered around the great soul Viśvāmitra. When they were all seated properly including Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, with a joyful mind, Rāma said to Viśvāmitra: "O lord, I wish to hear about the River Ganges and how, after traversing the three worlds, it flows into the ocean."

Being prompted by Rāma's words, the great sage Viśvāmitra began to relate the history of the past birth of the Ganges: "O Rāma, the king of all mountains is named Himavān. He is a storehouse of all types of precious metals and stones. He had two daughters whose beauty was without equal in

the world. The lovely daughter of Mount Meru was their mother. This dear wife of Himavān was named Menā. The first daughter born to her was this Ganges. The second daughter born to her was known as Umā. All the gods, with the desire of fulfilling some affair, requested the king of mountains to let his eldest daughter become a river traversing the three worlds. With the intention of benefiting the three worlds, Himavān religiously gave to the gods his daughter Ganges, who could purify the world and carve her own path at will. Accepting her in the interest of the three worlds, the gods took Ganges and left.

Himavān's other daughter, who, though a virgin, was inclined to practicing terrible vows, performed austerities and was rich in asceticism. Being engaged in terrible austerities, Himavān gave Umā, who is honored by the world, in marriage to Lord Rudra, who has no equal. These two daughters of the king of mountains, Ganges, the best of rivers, and the goddess, Umā, are honored by the world. I have now explained to You everything about how the Ganges came about. Now hear how she came to flow through the three worlds. First of all, she flowed through the sky, my child, which grants a path for all moving things. Then this lovely and divine daughter of the king of mountains ascended to the world of the gods, carrying waters capable of removing all sins.

HOW UMĀ CURSED THE DEMIGODS AND EARTH

After hearing the sage speak, both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lauded the narration. Then the two heroes said to Viśvāmitra: "The story related by you is supremely virtuous, O brāhmaṇa. Now you should tell Us more about the elder daughter of the king of mountains. You know all the details thoroughly about the passage of the Ganges through the heavenly and earthly regions. Why has she pursued three courses, purifying the worlds? How did she become known by the name Tripathagā (following three courses)? O knower of virtue, what does she do in the three worlds?" After Rāma had spoken in this way to Viśvāmitra, Viśvāmitra related in the midst of the sages the story in its entirety.

"A long time ago, O Rāma, after the great ascetic Lord Śiva had married Umā, He looked at the goddess and began to have sex with her. Lord Śiva was engaged in loveplay for one hundred celestial years. Even after all that time, no child was born to Umā, O Rāma, chastiser of enemies. All the gods headed by Lord Brahmā were prepared to stop them. They thought: "If a child is produced from this union, what will be its power?" Arriving there and falling prostrate, all the gods said: 'O god of gods, O great god Śiva, you are concerned with the welfare of the world. You should be merciful because of the submissiveness of the gods. The worlds are unable to bear your effulgence, O best of the gods. Being possessed of spiritual potency, you are practicing austerities with the goddess Umā. With the intent of benefiting the three worlds, keep your potency within yourself. Please protect all these worlds. You should not destroy them."

Hearing the words of the gods, Śiva, the great lord of all the worlds, replied: "All right." He then said the following to them all: "Along with Umā, I shall hold back my potency with the very same potency. Let the gods and the earth be at ease. Now tell me this, you gods, who will hold the semen which has already become dislodged from its resting place?" Having

been addressed thus, the gods replied to Śiva, whose emblem is a bull: "Whatever semen is already loosened the earth will accept." Thereafter Lord Śiva released His great potency. By that semen the earth with its mountains and forests was covered. The gods then said to Agni, the fire god: "You and Vāyu, the wind god, go get Śiva's potency." When it had been gathered together by Agni, it congealed into a white mountain. On it grew a thicket of celestial reeds which was as effulgent as the sun and fire. At that place was born the mighty Kārttikeya, said to be born from fire. Then the gods, along with the hosts of sages, offered profuse respects to Umā and Śiva.

Thereupon, the daughter of the Himalayas spoke to the gods. With eyes red with anger, she cursed them all: "Because I have been prevented from uniting with my husband when I was desirous of having a child, you should be unable to beget offspring from your own wives. From today onward let your wives be childless." Having spoken in this way to the gods, she also cursed the earth: "O earth, your surface will become rough and uneven and you will have many masters over you. O wise earth, because you did not wish me to have a son, tainted by my anger, you will not be able to experience the happiness of having a son."

Seeing all the gods afflicted in that way, Lord Śiva then went in a westerly direction, which is presided over by Varuṇa. Having gone there, he practiced austerities on the northern slope of the Himavatprabhava Mountain accompanied by the goddess Umā. You have just heard in detail the story of Umā, the younger daughter of Himavān Mountain. Now You and Lakṣmaṇa listen to me as I explain the appearance of the Ganges.

THE BIRTH OF KĀRTTIKEYA FROM THE GANGES

While Śiva was absorbed in practicing austerities, all the gods headed by Agni approached Lord Brahmā to request him to give them a commander-in-chief for their troops. O Rāma, the pleasure of the gods, after prostrating themselves before Lord Brahmā, all the gods headed by Agni spoke the following: "O lord, previously Śiva granted us a commander-in-chief in seed form. In the company of his consort Umā, he is now engaged in practicing severe austerities. O knower of expedients, for the good of the world, please see that this task is fulfilled. You are our topmost shelter." Hearing what the gods had said, the grandfather of all worlds assuaged the gods with sweet words: "Because of the curse uttered by the daughter of the Himalayas, you can have no issue from your wives. Her clear words are factual, without any doubt. Here is the heavenly Ganges. The fire god Agni will cause her to bear a son who will be the commander-in-chief of the gods and the conqueror of enemies. Ganges, the eldest daughter of the king of mountains, will consider that child her son. Being her younger sister, Umā will make much of this affection, no doubt." O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, when all the gods heard what Brahmā had said, they considered their purpose accomplished, falling at his feet and offering him all respect.

O Rāma, going to the super-excellent Kailāsa Mountain, which is endowed with all types of precious metals, the gods entrusted Agni with the task of procuring the child: "O Agni, this task is for the gods. Please do it. Place within the Ganges, the daughter of the Himalayas, Lord Śiva's great potency which you are carrying." On the request of the demigods, Agni approached the Ganges and said: "O goddess, please bear this embryo. This will please the gods very much." Hearing these words of Agni, she accepted a divine form. Seeing her greatness, Agni completely surrounded her with Lord Śiva's potency. When Agni sprinkled Śiva's potency around the Ganges, all of her veins became filled with it. Then the Ganges said to Agni: "O leader of the gods, I am unable to bear this potency intensified by your own.

Being burned by the fire, her mind was bewildered. Thereafter, Agni spoke the following to the Ganges: "Just place the fetus here on the side of the Himalayan Mountains." Hearing Agni's words, the lustrous Ganges emitted the most resplendent baby from her veins, O sinless one. Because it sprang from the Ganges, who is the granddaughter of the golden Mount Sumeru, it shone with the brilliance of jambu fruits. On account of its intensity, the ground upon which the baby fell became gold with an unparalleled brilliance, and the area around where it laid became copper and iron. The baby's impurities became tin and lead. In this way, the earth acquired its different metals in abundance.

When the baby was born, its effulgence illuminated the thicket on the side of the mountain and turned it into gold. That is why, since then, gold has been called "jāta-rūpa," since it was then that gold was first produced. O tiger among men, all the grass, trees, vines and bushes became gold that was as brilliant as fire. Afterwards, Indra along with the Maruts brought the six Kṛttikās there to supply the newborn baby with milk. At that auspicious moment, milk flowed from their breasts and they suckled the baby. Thus they thought of the child as if it were their own. Thereafter all the gods declared: "This child will be called Kārttikeya. He will be known throughout the three worlds as your son. There is no doubt." Hearing what the gods had said, they bathed the baby who shone with a most exceptional brilliance and who had first trickled from Lord Śiva as a seed and who had then flowed from the Ganges. Because the baby trickled out of Śiva, the gods also called him Skanda (one who trickled out), O descendant of Kakutstha. When the most excellent milk began flowing from the breasts of the Kṛttikās, the child manifested six heads and sucked the breast milk of each mother simultaneously. After drinking that milk for only one day, though having only the body of a boy, he defeated with his own strength an army of demons. Then all the immortal gods headed by Agni assembled and installed the most glorious child as the commander-in-chief of the army of the gods. In this way, O Rāma, have I explained in detail the story of the Ganges. One who hears about the appearance of the child Kārttikeya achieves fortune and piety. O Rāma, those people in this world who are devotees of Kārttikeya will, along with their children and grandchildren, attain the same planet as Kārttikeya.

THE BIRTH OF KING SAGARA'S CHILDREN

After relating to Rāma the sweet story about the Ganges, Viśvāmitra began relating another story: "O heroic Rāma, once there was a king of Ayodhyā named Sagara. Though righteous, he was issueless, and so desired a son. The eldest wife of King Sagara was from Vidarbha and was known by the name of Keśinī. She was most righteous and truthful. King Sagara's second wife was known as Sumati. She was the daughter of Ariṣṭanemi (Kaśyapa) and was therefore the sister of Garuḍa. King Sagara went with his two wives to Bhṛgu-prasavaṇa Peak in the Himalaya Mountains and practiced severe austerities there.

When one hundred years had passed, Bhṛgu Muni, the best of the truthful, being pleased by King Sagara's austerities, offered him a boon: "O sinless king, you shall have many sons. O best of kings, you shall achieve unequalled fame in this world. O son, one of your wives will give birth to a son who will extend your dynasty. Your other wife will give birth to sixty thousand sons." After the great soul Bhṛgu had spoken in this way, the two queens became very pleased with him. Elated with joy, they joined their palms and then spoke: "O brāhmaṇa, which of us will give birth to one son and which of us will give birth to many? We wish to hear from you whose words are truthful."

Hearing this entreaty from the two queens, the supremely righteous Bhṛgu replied to them perfectly: "Let you herein choose according to your own will. To bear a son who will expand the dynasty or to bear many strong sons who will be famous and daring, who will choose which boon?" Hearing the sage's reply, Queen Keśinī chose a son who would extend the dynasty of King Sagara. Garuḍa's sister, Sumati, then chose to bear sixty thousand sons who would be famous and daring. After circumambulating the sage and

bowing their heads to him, the king and his wives returned to their city, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty.

After some time had passed, Keśinī, the senior wife, gave birth to a son known as Asamañja, sprung from King Sagara. O tiger among men, Sumati, on the other hand, produced a fetus in the shape of a gourd. When it was split open, sixty thousand sons issued forth. The nurses nurtured those babies in pots filled with clarified butter. After a long time they all attained puberty. Finally, after a very long time, King Sagara had another sixty thousand handsome and youthful sons. The eldest of these sons would grab the other sons and throw them into the water of the Sarayu River. He used to watch them drown, laughing heartily. When he was thus behaving so wickedly-disturbing the saintly persons and afflicting the citizens-his own father exiled him from the city. King Sagara's first son, Asamañja, had a son named Amśumān who was valiant, a sweet speaker and very dear to everyone.

After a great deal of time, King Sagara decided to perform a sacrifice. Having made up his mind, the king along with his scholars who were learned in the execution of sacrifice, began making the necessary preparations.

HOW KING SAGARA'S SONS DIVIDED THE EARTH

When Viśvāmitra had finished relating the story, Rāma, who was very pleased and shining like fire, said to the sage: "Bless you, O brāhmaṇa. I wish to hear in detail the story of how My ancestor King Sagara performed the sacrifice." Hearing these words of Rāma, Viśvāmitra was very enlivened. With a big smile he said to Rāma, the descendant of Kakutstha: "Listen in detail to the story of the great soul King Sagara. The mountain range known by the name Himavān which is the father-in-law of Lord Śiva, and the Vindhya Mountains overlook each other. The sacrifice was performed between these two mountain ranges, O best of men. That land, O tiger among men, is recommended for the performance of sacrifice. Aṁśumān was fixed on King Sagara's thoughts, thus the great warrior, with bow in hand, protected the king's sacrificial horse in its wanderings.

On the day of sacrifice, as the king was about to begin the ceremony, Indra in the guise of a rākṣasa stole the sacrificial horse. When the king's sacrificial horse had been stolen, all the learned priests addressed the king: "O descendant of Kakutstha, on this festival day the sacrificial horse has been forcibly taken away. Kill the thief and bring back the horse. If there is any fault in the sacrifice it will be very inauspicious for all of us. Please do this so that the sacrifice can be completed without any omission."

Hearing the words of the priests, the king, in the midst of the assembly, spoke to his sixty thousand sons as follows: "My sons, I do not see how the rākṣasa could have entered the sacrifice being performed by such great persons consecrated with the recitation of sacred hymns. Therefore, go and investigate what has happened. May you have good luck. Go all over the earth surrounded by oceans. Each one of you go and search a tract of one square yojana, O sons. By my order, excavate the earth in search of the horse thief until the horse is retrieved. Being consecrated for the sacrifice, I shall

remain here, along with my grandson Amśumān and the priests, until the horse is in sight. Good luck to you all."

Bound by the words of their father, all those greatly powerful princes traversed the earth with a happy mind, O Rāma. After crossing the entire earth without finding the horse, those mighty princes whose arms could strike with the force of a thunderbolt each began excavating a tract of land one square yojana. The earth moaned, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, as she was being rent by frightful plowshares and pikes as hard as thunderbolts. There was a loud roar of serpents, demons, rākṣasas and other beings who were being killed by the excavation. They excavated sixty thousand square yojanas of land, O Rāma, as if to reach the most excellent region of Rasātala. In that way, O tiger among kings, the princes went about excavated on all sides the earth surrounded by mountains.

Then all the gods, accompanied by the gandharvas, the asuras and the serpents, approached with a disturbed mind the grandfather of creation, Lord Brahmā. With sullen faces, they propitiated the great soul Brahmā and spoke the following words to him, greatly alarmed as they were: "O lord, the entire earth is being excavated by the sons of King Sagara. Many great souls and water creatures are being killed. Because their sacrifice has been interrupted by the theft of the sacrificial horse, they are killing all beings."

KAPILA DESTROYS THE SONS OF KING SAGARA

After hearing what the gods said, Lord Brahmā replied to them who were greatly alarmed and bewildered by the destructive ability of the sons of King Sagara: "This whole earth belongs to the all-knowing Lord Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu). She is a consort of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Mādhava (Viṣṇu). Having assumed the form of the sage Kapila, He is constantly upholding the earth. By the fire of His anger, He will burn to ashes King Sagara's sons. The excavation of the earth is eternally occurring and the destruction of the sons of King Sagara is known to those who are far-sighted." Hearing Lord Brahmā's reply, the thirty-three principal gods jubilantly departed in the same way they had come.

While the earth was being excavated by the sons of King Sagara, there arose a terrifying sound. After excavating the entire earth and having circled it too, all the sons of King Sagara said to their father: "The entire earth has been circumambulated and many gods, demons, rākṣasas, ghosts, serpents and other beings have been destroyed. Still we have not seen the horse nor the thief. What shall we do? Bless you. Please think of some plan." After hearing what his sons had said, King Sagara angrily replied: "Begin digging again. May you have good luck. Split open the surface of the earth and find the horse thief. When you accomplish your purpose, you may return." Accepting the order of their father, the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara dug down to Rasātala.

As they dug down further, they saw in the eastern quarter the elephant Virūpākṣa, as large as a mountain, holding up the earth. O descendant of Raghu, the great elephant Virūpākṣa holds up with his head the entire earth covered with mountains and forests. Whenever, due to exhaustion, the elephant shakes his head for relief, there is an earthquake. Circumambulating him, they honored the great elephant who guards the eastern quarter. Then, O Rāma, they began tunneling to Rasātala again.

Having penetrated the eastern quarter, they tunneled to the southern quarter. There they saw the great elephant Mahāpadma as large as a mountain holding up the earth with his head. Seeing him, they were extremely amazed. Circumambulating him, the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara tunnelled into the western quarter. There they also saw the great elephant Saumanasa, as large as a mountain, guarding the western direction. Circumambulating him, they inquired about his welfare. Then they began tunneling in the northern direction which is presided over by the moon. In the northern quarter, O best of the descendants of Raghu, they saw the great elephant Bhadra, as white as snow, who was supporting the earth with his beautiful body. Touching the elephant respectfully and circumambulating him, the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara began digging into the earth.

Proceeding in a north-easterly direction, all King Sagara's sons dug angrily. There they saw the eternal Lord Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu) in His form as the sage Kapila. They also saw the missing horse grazing not far from the sage. Thereupon they all experienced unequaled happiness, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Thinking that Kapila was the one who had interrupted their sacrifice, their eyes became red with anger. Holding shovels, plowshares, trees and rocks in their hands, they rushed towards Him angrily shouting: "Stop! Stop! You are the one who has stolen our sacrificial horse. You fool, know that we, the sons of King Sagara, have arrived." When Kapila heard what they said, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, He became extremely angry and vibrated the sound "hum." Thereafter all the sons of King Sagara were reduced to a heap of ashes by the great soul Kapila, whose power is immeasurable.

Amśumān RETRIEVES THE STOLEN HORSE

Realizing that his sons had been gone a long time, King Sagara said to his grandson Amśumān, who was shining with his own glory: "You are valiant, learned and equal to your predecessors. Search out the trail followed by your uncles along which the sacrificial horse was taken. Within the earth are powerful and monstrous creatures. Take a bow and arrows to counterattack them. To those who are respectable, offer respect, and to those who block your way, kill. Return successfully so that my sacrifice may be completed."

Having been instructed in this way by the great soul King Sagara, Amśumān grabbed a bow and sword and departed hastily. Impelled by the order of the king, he reached the passageway excavated by his intelligent uncles. At the end of the passageway he saw one of the great elephants that guard the directions being worshiped by demigods, dānavas, rākṣasas, ghosts, birds and serpents. After circumambulating that elephant and inquiring about his welfare, he asked him about his uncles and the horse thief. Hearing this, the guardian elephant replied: "O Amśumān, your search is almost over. You will soon return with the horse." Hearing this, he then proceeded to ask this same question of the other elephants guarding the directions, one after the other. He was received with honor by all of those wise guardian elephants, who told him that he would return with the horse. Hearing their words, he proceeded hastily until he arrived at the place where his uncles had been reduced to a pile of ashes. Amśumān, the son of Asamañja, became overwhelmed with grief and wept bitterly due to the pain caused by his uncles' death. While overcome with such tremendous grief, he also saw the sacrificial horse, which was grazing not far from there, O tiger among men. He wanted to perform the royal princes' funeral rites with an offering of water, but he saw no reservoir of water thereabout.

After looking all about with his penetrating vision, he saw the king of birds, Garuḍa, who was the maternal uncle of his uncles, and who is as swift as the wind. The greatly powerful Garuḍa said to him: "Do not worry, O tiger among men. Their slaughter was for the welfare of the world. They were burned to ashes by the immeasurably powerful sage Kapila. You should not offer them ordinary mundane water. O best of men, you should perform your uncles' funeral rites with water from the Ganges, who is the eldest daughter of the Himalayas. The holy Ganges, who can purify all the worlds, must flow over their ashes. When their ashes are moistened with the Ganges' water, those sixty thousands princes will attain the heavenly world. O most fortunate prince, take the sacrificial horse, return and finish your grandfather's sacrifice."

Hearing Garuḍa's words, the valiant Amśumān took the horse and speedily returned. Then, approaching the king who stood consecrated for the sacrifice, he related everything as it had happened, including the instructions of Garuḍa. Hearing the terrible news from Amśumān, the king concluded the sacrifice the best he could according to scriptural rules. Having finished the sacrifice, King Sagara, the sovereign of the world, returned to his capital. Once there, he was unable to devise any plan by which the Ganges could be brought down. Being unable to devise a plan for an extremely long period of time, and having ruled for thirty thousand years, he ascended to heaven.

AMŚUMĀN AND HIS GRANDSON PRACTICE AUSTERITIES

After the death of King Sagara, the citizens were pleased to install the highly righteous Amśumān as king, O Rāma. Amśumān was a very great king. His son, known as Dilīpa, was also very great. Turning over the kingdom to Dilīpa, Amśumān practiced severe austerities on the beautiful peaks of the Himalaya Mountains. The famous Amśumān, who was rich in asceticism, practiced austerities for three million two hundred thousand years and then achieved heaven. When Dilīpa heard about the death of his granduncles, he was unable to devise a plan for bringing down the Ganges with his intelligence because it was disturbed with grief. He was always thinking: "How can the Ganges be brought down? How can I perform the funeral rites of my granduncles? How can I deliver my granduncles?" While Dilīpa, who was known for his righteousness, was absorbed in thinking in this way, a highly righteous son named Bhagīratha was born to him.

The glorious Dilīpa performed many sacrifices and ruled for thirty thousand years. O tiger among men, not being able to devise a plan for delivering his ancestors, Dilīpa became ill and died. Having installed his son Bhagīratha as king, Dilīpa ascended to the abode of Indra by his own good deeds. Bhagīratha was righteous and a sage among kings, O descendant of Raghu. The great king was issueless. With the desire to attain a son, he entrusted the kingdom to his ministers and engaged himself in severe austerities at Gokarṇa in order to bring the Ganges down. With raised arms and five fires burning around him, he controlled his senses, eating only once a month. Thus he practiced terrible austerities for more than one thousand years.

Brahmā, the lord of creatures, was very pleased by this. Thereafter, accompanied by groups of demigods, Lord Brahmā went and spoke to the great soul Bhagīratha, who was engaged in practicing austerities: "O

Bhagīratha Mahārāja, I am pleased by the austerities you have performed. Choose whatever boon you wish, you whose vows are worthy." Then the powerful and glorious Bhagīratha stood with folded hands before Lord Brahmā, the grandfather of all the worlds, and said: "If Your Lordship is pleased with me, and if my austerities have fructified, let the dead sons of King Sagara receive Ganges' water from me. When the ashes of those great souls are moistened with water from the Ganges, they will all attain the endless heaven, O grandsire. O lord, I also request from you an offspring so that our dynasty does not end. For the sake of the dynasty of the descendants of Ikṣvāku, I ask this second boon, O lord."

Hearing the words of the king, Lord Brahmā replied with beautiful, sweet and eloquent words: "Your desire is very great, O mighty warrior Bhagīratha. Let it be so. Good fortune be unto you, O increaser of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. Behold the Ganges, the elder daughter of the Himalayas. Let Lord Śiva be engaged in supporting her as she descends to earth, O king. The earth will not be able to bear the impact of the falling Ganges, and I do not see anyone other than Lord Śiva who is cable of supporting her." Speaking in this way to the king, and having likewise instructed the Ganges, Lord Brahmā ascended to heaven with all the gods and maruts.

ŚIVA CATCHES THE GANGES ON HIS HEAD

When Brahmā, the god of gods, had left, O Rāma, Bhagīratha stood for one year on the tip of his big toe, pressing it on the earth, in order to worship Lord Śiva. When one year was completed, the world-honored Śiva, the husband of Umā and lord of beasts spoke the following to the king: "I am pleased with you, O best of men. I shall do you a favor. I shall bear on my head the Ganges born as the daughter of the king of mountains."

The eldest daughter of the Himalayas assumed a really huge form and began rushing downwards with great force. She fell from the sky, O Rāma, striking the head of Lord Śiva, it is said. The goddess Ganges, who is a transcendental river, thought to herself: "Having reached Lord Śiva's head, I shall now enter Pātāla-loka (the nether world)." Realizing her arrogance, Lord Śiva became very angry. Then the three-eyed Lord Śiva decided to conceal her. After falling on the meritorious head of Śiva, the pious Ganges remained immovable like the Himalaya Mountains, being trapped inside the bun of matted locks on his head. No matter how much she tried, she was unable to descend to earth. From inside Śiva's bun of matted locks, she was unable to find any exit. In that way, she remained detained for quite a number of years.

Seeing the Ganges in that condition, King Bhagīratha again began practicing severe austerities. By that, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, he pleased Lord Śiva very much. Then Śiva let the Ganges flow into the Bindusarovara lake. Being set free, she flowed in seven streams. The auspicious water of the Ganges flowed toward the East as three streams: Hlādinī, Pāvanī and Nalinī. The three auspicious streams-Sucakṣu, Sītā and the great river Sindu-flowed toward the West. The seventh stream followed King Bhagīratha in his chariot. Mounted upon a splendorous chariot, the royal sage Bhagīratha sallied forth followed by the highly glorious Ganges. Thus it was that the Ganges fell from the heavens to the head of Lord Śiva,

and from there to the earth. There she flowed, making a terrible noise. The earth was beautified by the fish, turtles and other aquatics that had fallen and were falling with the Ganges.

Seated in a multitude of vehicles, horses and elephants that resembled a city, the hosts of gods, sages, gandharvas, yakṣas and siddhas watched the Ganges descend from the heavens to the earth. Desirous of seeing the amazing descent of the Ganges to the earth, the gods, who possessed immeasurable strength, had assembled en masse. The host of celestials who shone due to the brilliance of their ornaments as they rushed down, resembled one hundred suns shining in a cloudless sky. With porpoises, snakes and flapping fish scattered across the sky, it looked as if it were filled with lightning. Many thousands of bits of foam churned up by the Ganges were strewn across the sky, like the white clouds of the autumn season or like a flock of swans in flight.

In some places the Ganges flowed very swiftly, in other places it flowed very tortuously. Some times she flowed very low, other times very high, and other times very gently. Sometimes, dashed by her own waters, she splashed upwards. Rising upwards continuously, she would again fall to earth. First she fell upon the head of Lord Śiva, then she fell upon the earth, thus her pure waters, which free one from all sin, shone beautifully. At that time, the sages, gandharvas and inhabitants of the earth sipped some of the purifying water of the Ganges that had fallen from the head of Lord Śiva. Those who had fallen from the heavens to earth due to a curse were freed from all contamination by sprinkling themselves with the Ganges' water. Having their sins washed off by her water, they acquired sufficient merit. Then they again entered the heavens and returned to their respective abodes. The sight of her sparkling waters gladdened everyone. They thus rid themselves of all sin by bathing in her waters.

Seated on a splendid chariot, the royal sage Bhagīratha drove forward with the Ganges following behind him. All the gods, sages, daityas, dānavas, rākṣasas, principal gandharvas and yakṣas, kinnaras, great serpents, and apsarās, as well as the aquatics, were pleased to follow the Ganges, O Rāma, proceeding along the path of King Bhagīratha's chariot. Wherever

King Bhagīratha drove, there followed the famous Ganges whose waters destroy all sin.

Then the Ganges flowed into the sacrificial arena of the great soul Jahnu, who could perform amazing feats and who was engaged in executing a sacrifice. Seeing the Ganges' pride, Jahnu became very angry, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Therefore he performed the amazing task of drinking all the Ganges' water. After that, the gods, gandharvas and sages were greatly astonished. They offered respects to the great soul and best of men, Jahnu, and then forced the Ganges to become the daughter of the great sage. Being pleased by this, the highly powerful sage allowed the Ganges to flow out of his ears. Thus, the Ganges is called the daughter of the sage Jahnu and is known as Jāhnvī. The Ganges again began following King Bhagīratha's chariot. Then that best of rivers reached the ocean. She thereafter entered Rasātala to fulfill the task of King Bhagīratha. King Bhagīratha also brought the Ganges there with great effort. Seeing his ancestors reduced to ashes, he fainted. Then the waters of the Ganges flowed over that pile of ashes. Being purified of all their sins, King Bhagīratha's ancestors attained heaven, O best of the Raghu Dynasty.

KING BHAGĪRATHA OFFERS GANGES' WATER TO HIS ANCESTORS

When King Bhagīratha reached the ocean, followed by the Ganges, he entered into the Rasātala region where his ancestors had been reduced to ashes. When the waters of the Ganges had flowed over those ashes, Lord Brahmā, the lord of all worlds, appeared and spoke the following to King Bhagīratha: "O tiger among men, the sixty thousand sons of the great soul King Sagara have been delivered and have attained forms as gods in heaven. This girl Ganges will become your eldest daughter and she will be known throughout the world by your name. The Ganges will be known by the name Tripathagā (following three paths: heaven, earth and Pātāla), Divyā (divine) and Bhāgīrathī (the daughter of Bhagīratha). O king, now you should offer water to all your great ancestors, thus fulfilling your duty towards them. Your highly renowned ancestor King Sagara was unable to fulfill his desire to bring the Ganges here. Even so, my child, King Amśumān, whose prowess was unparalleled, who was endowed with the good qualities of a royal sage, who shone with the splendor of a great sage, who was equal to me in the practice of austerities and who was fixed in the execution of the duties of a king, was unable to fulfill his vow, though he longed to bring the Ganges down. Your ancestor Dilīpa, who was very fortunate and powerful, O sinless one, was also unable to bring the Ganges down, though he desired to do so. That goal has been accomplished by you, O best of men. As such you have attained the highest possible fame within this material world. O defeater of enemies, you have succeeded in making the Ganges descend to earth. By this you have achieved the right to enter my own highly virtuous world Brahmaloaka. O best of men, bathe yourself in the Ganges whose waters are always pure. Purify yourself in that way in order to attain the fruit of piety. Offer libations of water to all your ancestors. Good luck to you. I shall now depart. You may return to your own home, O king."

Having spoken in that way, Brahmā, the lord of the gods and grandfather of all the worlds, departed for the world of the gods, in the same

way he had come. Then the royal sage Bhagīratha offered libations of water according to rule and according to seniority to all the descendants of King Sagara. After finishing the ritual, the king was also purified and so he entered his capital city. Having fulfilled his mission, he began ruling his kingdom, so it is said. The people rejoiced at the king's return, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. All of their grief was destroyed, their desires were fulfilled and they became free from all feverishness. This, O Rāma, is the story of the Ganges which I have related to You. May You achieve good fortune. Bless You. The sun has already set. This auspicious narration of the descent of the Ganges confers fortune, fame, longevity, children and the attainment of heaven upon the brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and any one else who hears it. It is pleasing to the forefathers and to the demigods. O descendant of Kakutstha, one who hears this story achieves all desires, is freed from all sins and achieves an increase in life and fame.

CHURNING THE OCEAN OF MILK

Wearing Viśvāmitra's words, both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were extremely astonished and said the following to Viśvāmitra: "O brāhmaṇa, the story told by you about the auspicious descent of the Ganges and the filling of the ocean by the Ganges is very amazing. While the two of us were contemplating all the stories told by you, O subduer of enemies, the night passed as if it were just a moment. I, along with my brother Lakṣmaṇa, have passed this whole night pondering these auspicious topics, O Viśvāmitra."

After that, the day broke with an unmarred sunrise and Viśvāmitra began his daily religious duties. When he had finished Rāma, the best of the Raghu Dynasty and chastiser of enemies, said to Viśvāmitra: "Last night was spent hearing a most worthy story. Let us cross this best of rivers, the holy Ganges. Here is a boat with a comfortable seat sent by the sages who are engaged in pious activities. Knowing that you had arrived here, it has immediately come."

Hearing the great soul Rāma's words, Viśvāmitra, in the company of the sages, had all of them ferried across the river. Upon reaching the northern shore of the Ganges, they were welcomed by the sages who resided there. While on the bank of the river they could see the city of Viśālā. Then the best of sages Viśvāmitra, accompanied by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, hurriedly proceeded towards the beautiful and splendid city of Viśālā, which was equal to heaven. At that time, joining His palms, the highly intelligent Rāma inquired from Viśvāmitra about the best of cities, Viśālā: "O great sage, bless you. I wish to hear about which dynasty of kings rules this city of Viśālā, for I am very curious." Hearing Rāma's words, the supermost sage began relating the ancient story of the city of Viśālā:

"Listen, O Rāma, to the story of Indra, which I shall narrate as I heard it. Listen to the actual events that happened in this land, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. In the previous Kṛta-yuga, O Rāma, the

sons of Diti were very powerful. The sons of Aditi were also highly fortunate, valiant and most righteous. In the course of time, O tiger among men, it occurred to those great personages:

How can we become immortal, youthful and free from disease?

As they were contemplating this, the following thought occurred to them:

If we churn the ocean of milk, we shall certainly obtain the elixir of immortality.

After deciding to churn the ocean of milk, those beings whose splendor was immeasurable took Mount Mandara as the churning rod and the celestial serpent Vāsuki as the rope and began churning. Now, when one thousand years had passed, the many-headed serpent who was being used as the churning rope began biting the stones of Mount Mandara with his fangs, after which he started vomiting profuse amounts of poison. At that time, there appeared a highly powerful poison called hālāhala, which burned like fire. The whole world, including the gods, demons and humans, was being burnt by it. At this, all the gods took shelter of the great Lord Śiva, the protector of beasts, and glorified him, saying: "Please protect us, please protect us." Being requested in this way by the gods, Lord Śiva appeared there. Thereafter Lord Viṣṇu, who bears a conchshell and discus, also appeared there. Smiling sweetly, Lord Viṣṇu said to Lord Śiva, who was holding a trident: "This first substance churned from the ocean of milk by the gods corresponds to you, O Śiva, for you are the foremost of these gods. Standing here, O lord, accept this poison as the first tribute."

Having spoken in this way, the best of gods Lord Viṣṇu vanished from there. Seeing the fear of the gods and hearing the advice of Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Śiva drank the terribly potent poison hālāhala as if it were nectar. Then the great Lord Śiva, left the gods and departed.

Then all the gods and demons again began churning the ocean of milk, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. At that time, the excellent Mount Mandara which they were using as a churning rod sank down to Pātāla-loka. Thereupon, the gods and gandharvas began praising Lord Viṣṇu, the slayer of

the Madhu demon: "You are the ultimate goal of all living beings, especially of the residents of heaven. Protect us, O strong armed one, and lift up this mountain." Hearing this, Lord Viṣṇu, the master of the senses, assumed the form of a tortoise. Taking the mountain on His back, He lied down there in the ocean. Then the Soul of the world, Lord Viṣṇu placed His hand on the top of the mountain and, standing in the midst of the gods, began churning the ocean of milk. When one thousand years had passed, the most righteous personification of the āyur Veda arose, bearing in His hands a stick and a kamaṇḍalu. His name was Dhanvantari.

After that there appeared apsarās (celestial nymphs) of great splendor. O best of men, because the churning produced them from the rasa (essence) of the apsu (waters), the nymphs were called apsarās. There were six billion splendid apsarās, O descendant of Kakutstha, and their lady attendants were innumerable. All the gods and demons refused to accept these women as their wives. Only because of this refusal, they became known as public women. O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, then there arose Varuṇī, the goddess of liquor and daughter of Varuṇa, the god of the sea. She was looking for a husband. The sons of Diti who were demons did not accept her, O valiant Rāma. But the sons of Aditi who are the demigods did accept her, as she was faultless. Because the sons of Diti did not accept the goddess of surā (liquor), they became known as asuras (those who did not accept surā). The gods felt overjoyed and exhilarated due to accepting Varuṇī.

Then appeared the excellent horse named Uccaiśravā, the chief of jewels, Kaustubha, and, in the same way, O best of men, the excellent elixir of immortality. Now, for the sake of that nectar there was a massive destruction of the two races. The sons of Aditi fought furiously with the sons of Diti. The demons were joined by the rākṣasas, thus a terrible battle ensued, O Rāma, which bewildered the three worlds. When all of the combatants were nearly destroyed, the most powerful Lord Viṣṇu appeared in the illusive form of a female named Mohinī, who quickly appropriated the nectar. Those who opposed the indestructible Lord Viṣṇu, who is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, were crushed in battle by the all-powerful Lord Viṣṇu. In this horrific battle, the sons of Aditi massacred the sons of Diti. When the sons of Diti were slain and Indra, the destroyer of the

demons, had regained his heavenly kingdom, he happily ruled over all the worlds with the sages and celestial beings.

DITI CONTRIVES TO KILL INDRA

Diti was extremely saddened by the slaughter of all her sons. She spoke the following words to her husband Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci: "I have been deprived of my sons by your powerful sons, the demigods, O lord. I wish to bear a son who, by the power of my prolonged austerities, will be able to kill Indra, the leader of the gods. I shall perform austerities. Please give me a child who can kill Lord Indra. You must give me your permission."

Hearing what she said, the glorious Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci, then replied with great sadness to Diti: "So be it. Bless you. If you remain pure for the allotted time of one thousand years, you will, by my seed, give birth to a son capable of destroying the three worlds." Having spoken thus, the powerful sage patted her with his hand. After touching and blessing her, the sage returned to his practice of austerities.

After Kaśyapa had departed, Diti went to Kuśāplava and jubilantly performed severe austerities. O best of men, while Diti was engaged in practicing austerities, Indra personally served her with great humility. The thousand-eyed Indra brought her fire, kuśa grass, firewood, water, fruit, roots and whatever else she wanted. Indra massaged her limbs, thus relieving her fatigue. Indra served Diti at all times, it is said, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. When ten years less than one thousand years had passed, Diti was extremely delighted and spoke the following to Indra: "I have only ten more years of austerity left, O best of the valiant. When the remainder has passed you will see your new brother. Good luck to you. My lad, I shall pacify the son for whom I have been endeavoring to have, for he will be born with the desire to conquer you. After that, you will enjoy the three worlds with him, as he will be free from the feverish desire to kill you. O best of the demigods, after being requested by me, your great-souled father granted me the boon of bearing a child at the end of one thousand years."

As Diti finished speaking, the sun reached high noon and Diti was overcome with slumber, placing her feet where her head ought to have been.

Seeing her impure because her hair was touching her feet and her feet were at the place where her head should have been, Indra laughed and rejoiced. Indra entered through her uterus and then cut the fetus into seven pieces, O Rāma. As Indra cut the fetus with his one hundred-spiked thunderbolt, the fetus began to cry with a shrill voice. Then Diti woke up. "Do not cry! Do not cry!" said Indra to the fetuses. Yet Indra continued cutting the dismembered fetus into smaller pieces. "Do not kill! Do not kill!" said Diti. By the gravity of his stepmother's entreaty, Indra came out from her womb. Holding his thunderbolt in his joined palms, Indra said to Diti: "You were impure as you slept with your hair touching your feet, my lady. Taking advantage of that opportunity, I cut into seven pieces he who was to be my assassin. Please forgive me for that."

HOW THE CITY OF VIŚĀLĀ WAS BUILT

When Diti realized that her fetus had been cut into seven pieces, she became overwhelmed with grief and pleaded with Indra, who was unassailable: "Because of my offense, O slayer of the Bala demon, this fetus was cut into seven pieces. It is no fault of yours, O Indra, lord of the gods. I wish that the dismemberment of my fetus by you should end in a way that will be pleasing to both of us. Let them take the place of the seven wind gods. Let these seven wander the heavens as the seven divisions of the wind, O Indra. My forty-nine children in their celestial forms will be known as Maruts. The first seven will blow in Brahmaloḥa, the next seven, in Indraloḥa, the next seven will be the famous winds which blow in the sky. My other four groups of sons, will traverse the four quarters at that time when you so command them, O best of the gods. Because of what you did to them, they will be known as the Maruts."

Hearing her supplication, the thousand-eyed Indra, with folded hands, spoke the following words: "Everything will be exactly as you have said. There is no doubt about this. Bless you. Your sons will roam about with the forms of gods." Thus, O Rāma, the mother and stepson both obtained their purposes in this sacred hermitage and then ascended to heaven, according to what I have heard. This is the land, O descendant of Kakutṣṭha, where the great Lord Indra served Diti as she perfected herself through the practice of austerities.

Now, Ikṣvāku, O tiger among men, had a son who was exceedingly pious born from the womb of Alambuṣā and known as Viśāla. By him was the city of Viśālā established at this place. Viśāla's son was the most powerful Hemacandra. Hemacandra's son was widely known as Sucandra. Sucandra's son was known as Dhūmrāśva. Dhūmrāśva's son was known as Śṛṅjaya. Śṛṅjaya's son was the glorious and powerful Sahadeva. Sahadeva's son was the most pious soul Kuśāśva. Kuśāśva's son was the effulgent and formidable Somadatta. Somadatta's son was known as Kākutṣṭha. His glorious son

named Sumati, who is widely renowned, powerful and undefeatable presently lives in this city. By the grace of Ikṣvāku all the kings of Viśālā are long-lived, great souls, powerful and pious. We shall comfortably pass one night here. Tomorrow morning, O best of men, You will see King Janaka.

Hearing that Viśvāmitra had arrived, the powerful, glorious and unexcelled King Sumati went to welcome him. In the company of his priests and family members, King Sumati bestowed great honors upon Viśvāmitra. With folded hands, King Sumati inquired about Viśvāmitra's welfare and then said to him: "I am most fortunate and obliged to you, O sage, for you have visited my kingdom and even come within my vision. There is no one more fortunate than I."

WHY AHALYĀ WAS CURSED

After meeting each other there, they inquired about each other's welfare and chatted with each other. Then Sumati said to Viśvāmitra: "Bless you, O sage. These two youths are equal to the gods in prowess. Their gait is like that of a lion or of an elephant. In valor They are equal to a tiger or bull. Their eyes are as broad as lotus petals. They bear swords, sheathes of arrows and bows. By Their bodily beauty They resemble the two Aśvinī-kumāras. They are in full youth. They resemble two immortal gods who have descended of Their own will from heaven to earth. How have they set foot here, for what reason, and whose sons are They, O sage? They are beautifying this land and are effulgent like the sun and moon. They are similar to each other in height, idiosyncrasies and physical movements. I wish to hear in detail the reason these outstanding men, being wielders of exceptional weapons, have undertaken the difficult journey here."

Hearing what King Sumati said, Viśvāmitra related to him the full story, including how They stayed at Siddhāśrama and slew the rākṣasas. On hearing Viśvāmitra's story, the king was highly astonished. The king then received the two powerful and worthy sons of King Daśaratha as his most honored guests, offering them all respect according to scriptural injunction. After the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty had received high honors from King Sumati, They passed the night there and then departed for Mithilā. Upon seeing the beautiful city of King Janaka, all the sages accompanying Viśvāmitra began praising the city of Mithilā, exclaiming "Excellent! Excellent!" Seeing there on the outskirts of Mithilā a lovely hermitage that was old and desolate in a grove of trees, Rāma asked Viśvāmitra: "What is this place that so resembles a hermitage, but is devoid of sages? I wish to hear, O master, whose hermitage this was previously."

Hearing what Lord Rāma said, the great sage Viśvāmitra, who was skilled at speaking, replied: "Alas! I shall tell you. Listen in detail, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, to which great soul this hermitage

belongs and by whose anger it was cursed. Previously this hermitage, which looked like heaven and was honored by all the gods, belonged to the great soul Gautama. At that time, the famous sage practiced austerities here with his wife, Ahalyā, for quite a number of years, O prince. Once, when Indra was aware that Gautama was absent from the hermitage, he came disguised as Gautama and said the following to Ahalyā: "Those who are anxious for sexual enjoyment do not wait for the proper time for conception of a child. Therefore, O shapely woman, I wish to unite with you." Recognizing him to be Indra disguised as her husband, she unwisely agreed, out of eagerness, to enjoy with the king of the gods.

Later, when she was inwardly gratified by her accomplishment, she said to Indra: "I have achieved my goal, O best of the gods. Leave this place quickly, my lord. Guard yourself and myself in every way possible from my husband Gautama." Laughing, Indra spoke the following words to Ahalyā: "Lovely lady, I am very satisfied. I shall depart just as I came." In that way, he began to leave the hut, hurrying due to fear, being apprehensive of Gautama's return. Just then he saw entering the hut, the great sage Gautama, who was difficult to overcome for gods and demons because of his strength acquired through the practice of austerities. He was drenched with water from the holy river and was shining like fire. In his hands he carried firewood and kuśa grass. Seeing Gautama, Indra was mortified and hung his head down.

Seeing Indra disguised as him and guilty of misconduct, the sage Gautama, who was well-behaved, spoke out of anger: "You, O fool, have disguised yourself as me. For this misconduct you shall lose your testicles." When the great soul Gautama had spoken these angry words, Indra's testicles fell to the ground at that very moment. As Indra had been cursed, even so did Gautama curse his wife: "You will remain here for many thousands of years without food, living on air alone, practicing austerities and sleeping on a pile of ashes. You will dwell in this hermitage unseen by all living beings. When, however, Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, comes to this terrible grove, you will be absolved. O immoral woman, by offering proper hospitality to Him, you will become free from lust and illusion. You will then regain your original body at my side, being overwhelmed with delight." Having spoken in this way to the immoral woman, the powerful Gautama

left this hermitage and went to the pleasant Himalaya Mountains that are frequented by siddhas and cāraṇas and began practicing austerities.

LORD RĀMA RELIEVES AHALYĀ OF HER CURSE

Being castrated, Indra, with fearful eyes, said to the siddhas, gandharvas, cāraṇas and gods headed by Agni: "I have performed a service for the gods by interrupting the great soul Gautama's austerities by invoking his anger. Now I have been castrated by his anger and Ahalyā has been made formless. By this did I interrupt his practice of austerities. Since I was only engaged in the welfare of the gods, you, O best of gods, accompanied by the sages and cāraṇas, should restore my testicles."

Hearing the supplication of Indra, the performer of one hundred horse sacrifices, the gods, headed by Agni and accompanied by the Maruts, approached the celestial forefathers and said: "Here is a ram with testicles and Indra has been deprived of his testicles. Taking the testicles from the ram, immediately attach them to Indra. The castrated ram will please you greatly. To those men who to propitiate you offer you a castrated ram, you will bestow an undecaying and abundant reward."

Hearing Agni's request, the assembled celestial forefathers removed the testicles from the ram and attached them to Indra. From then on, O descendant of Kakutstha, the celestial forefathers have enjoyed offerings of castrated rams and have conferred upon the offerers suitable rewards. Since then, O Rāma, by the strength of the great soul Gautama's austerity, Indra has had the testicles of a ram. Now step inside the hermitage of the pious sage and deliver the highly blessed Ahalyā, who previously had a celestial form."

After hearing Viśvāmitra's words, Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, entered the hermitage, being lead by Viśvāmitra, so it is said. There Rāma saw the fortunate lady who was glowing due to the practice of austerities and who was unable to be seen by the gods and demons, much less by ordinary people, even when approached closely. Her heavenly form was originally

created by Lord Brahmā with great effort and resembled a creation of magical powers. She resembled a blazing tongue of fire enveloped in smoke, like the halo of the full moon covered by mist or a cloud, or like the undeterrable radiance of the sun shining through a cloud. By the curse of Gautama, she had been rendered invisible to the three worlds until she would be seen by Rāma. The period of the curse had now come to an end as she was seen by them all.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa then caught hold of her feet with delight. Remembering the words of Gautama, she welcomed the two princes. With a composed mind, she offered the two water for washing the feet and hands and other acts of hospitality according to scriptural rule. At that time, the gods showered down flowers and beat kettle drums, while the gandharvas and apsarās celebrated jubilantly. Exclaiming "Very good! Very good!" the gods honored the lady Ahalyā, whose body was purified by the power of her austerity and who had remained obedient to Gautama. Gautama was also happy to be reunited with his glorious wife Ahalyā. After offering proper respects to Lord Rāma, the great ascetic engaged himself in the practice of austerities. After personally receiving the highest honors from the great sage Gautama, Rāma proceeded to Mithilā.

RĀMA AND HIS ASSOCIATES ENTER MITHILĀ

Placing Viśvāmitra in the lead, Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa, departed from the hermitage in a north-easterly direction and reached the containing wall of King Janaka's sacrificial arena. Then Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa, addressed the tiger among sages, Viśvāmitra: "Excellent indeed are the preparations made by the great soul Janaka for the sacrifice. Many thousands of brāhmaṇas who are scholars of the scriptures have come from many different lands. You can see their enclosed camps and their carts by the hundreds. Find a place where we can set up camp, O brāhmaṇa."

Hearing Rāma's words, the great sage Viśvāmitra selected a campsite with water. On learning of Viśvāmitra's arrival, King Janaka humbly followed his family priest, Śātānanda, who was the son of Gautama. The assistant priests also brought with them the ingredients for reception as they hurried along. Reaching Viśvāmitra's encampment suddenly, the king humbly and religiously received Viśvāmitra. After accepting the welcome offered by King Janaka, Viśvāmitra inquired about the king's health and about the unimpeded progress of the sacrifice. Viśvāmitra then inquired about the welfare of the sages, scholars and family priest who accompanied the king. Receiving them all according to his ability, he was overjoyed. Then the king, with folded hands, addressed the best of sages Viśvāmitra: "O lord, please be seated along with all these other honorable sages." Hearing Janaka's request, the great sage sat down. Then the family priest Śātānanda, the sacrificial priests, the king and his ministers all sat down according to their status.

While gazing at Viśvāmitra, the king said: "Today the gods have vouchsafed the prosperity of this sacrifice. By the sight of you at this moment I have obtained the fruit of the sacrifice. I am blessed and obliged that you have arrived at this sacrificial arena with your great ascetics. O brāhmaṇa sage, my scholars have informed me that the sacrifice is to last

another twelve days. After that, O descendant of Kuśika, you will see the gods who appear to receive their share of the sacrifice."

Speaking in this way to the tiger among sages, the king, with a joyful countenance, joined his palms and again humbly inquired from the sage: "Bless you, sage. These two youths are equal to gods in prowess. Their gait is like an elephant's, and in valor They are like tigers or bulls. Their eyes are as broad as lotus petals and They bear swords, sheaths of arrows and bows. By Their beauty they resemble the two Aśvinī-kumāras, They are situated in full youth. By Their own desire They have come to the earth as do immortal gods descend from heaven. How, for what purpose or for whose sake have They come here on foot, O sage? They are wielding excellent weapons. Whose sons are these two valiant youths, O sage? I wish to hear in truth about these two warriors who are beautifying our land like the sun and moon in the sky. They resemble each other in height, characteristics and movement and have sidelocks of hair like the wings of a crow."

After hearing the great-souled King Janaka's inquiry, Viśvāmitra explained: "These are the two sons of King Daśaratha. They stayed for some time at Siddhāśrama and slew the rākṣasas who were interfering with my sacrifice. They arrived leisurely at the outskirts of Viśālā, from where They could see the city. There They saw Ahalyā and met the sage Gautama. After that, They have come here in order to investigate the great bow which you have." Explaining all this to the great soul Janaka, Viśvāmitra then remained silent.

ŚATĀNANDA BEGINS TO RELATE TO RĀMA THE STORY OF VIŚVĀMITRA

Hearing the story related by the wise Viśvāmitra, the hair of the glorious and austere Śatānanda, the eldest son of Gautama, stood on end with delight. His bodily effulgence was heightened by the practice of austerities. The very sight of Rāma left him astonished. Seeing that the two princes were comfortably seated, Śatānanda then said to Viśvāmitra: "O tiger among sages, did you happen to show my famous mother, who was engaged in austerities for a long time, to the prince Rāma? Did my glorious mother offer worship to Rāma, who is worthy of the worship of all embodied beings, with fruits and flowers from the forest? O great sage, did you relate to Rāma the old history about how Indra deceived my mother? O descendant of Kuśika, bless you. Was my mother reunited with her husband after being relieved from the curse by the sight of and service to Śrī Rāma? Did my father, the son of Kuśika, offer respect to Rāma? Did the great soul Rāma come here after receiving such worship? Upon Rāma's arrival and reception there, did He greet my father with a tranquil mind, O descendant of Kuśika?"

Hearing these inquiries, Viśvāmitra, who was skilled in speaking, wisely replied to Śatānanda: "O best of sages, whatever should have been done, I did. Nothing was omitted. Your father Gautama was reunited with your mother, even as Jamadagni was with Reṇukā."

On hearing the wise Viśvāmitra's words, the glorious Śatānanda said to Rāma: "Welcome, O best of men. It is by our good fortune that You have come here, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, following the undefeatable great sage Viśvāmitra. The glorious Viśvāmitra's activities are inconceivable. By his austerities he attained the position of being a brahmarṣi. His bodily effulgence is immeasurable. I know that he is the topmost shelter for the world. There is no one more fortunate than You in this world, for You are protected by the son of Kuśika, Viśvāmitra, being an ascetic who has

performed tremendous austerities. Listen and I shall tell the actual history of the great soul Viśvāmitra according to my ability. Listen to that narration:

For a long time, Viśvāmitra was a righteous king who kept his enemies at bay. He was conversant with the principles of religion, had completed all his studies, and was engaged in the welfare of the citizens. The son of Prajāpati was a king named Kuśa. Kuśa's son was the strong and most righteous Kuśanābha. Kuśanābha's son was the renowned Gādhī. Gādhī's son is the glorious and great sage Viśvāmitra. The powerful King Viśvāmitra protected the earth and ruled it for many thousands of years. Once, however, he assembled his army and, accompanied by one akṣauhiṇī, went around the world. Passing many towns, countries, rivers, mountains and hermitages, the king at last arrived at the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha, which was decorated with many different flowers and creepers. It abounded in many different forest animals and was frequented by siddhas and cāraṇas. Its beauty was magnified by the gods, dānavas, gandharvas and kinnaras that were visiting there. There were herds of gentle deer. Many brāhmaṇas, brahmaṛṣis and devaṛṣis resided there. The place was beautified by the great souls who, by perfecting themselves through austerities, were like blazing fire. It was always crowded with great souls who were just like Lord Brahmā. Some of them lived on water, some on air, some on dry leaves, while others had conquered their senses and eliminated all disease by eating fruits and roots. The vāḷakhilya sages were engaged in reciting prayers and in offering oblations of clarified butter into sacrificial fires. It was also decorated on all sides with vaikhānasa sages. The superpowerful Viśvāmitra, who was the greatest of conquerors, saw the site of Vasiṣṭha's hermitage which was just like Brahmāloka.

VAŚIṢṬHA RECEIVES KING VIŚVĀMITRA

Greatly delighted to see Vasiṣṭha, the foremost among those who chant mantras, the valiant warrior Viśvāmitra humbly bowed down. The king was welcomed by the great soul Vasiṣṭha, who then offered him a seat to sit on. When the intelligent Viśvāmitra had sat down, the best of sages accordingly offered him food prepared from forest fruits and roots. After accepting this honor from Vasiṣṭha, that best of kings Viśvāmitra inquired about the condition of Vasiṣṭha's austerities, fire sacrifices and disciples, and then about the vegetation. Vasiṣṭha told the king about the condition of everything. Then Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters and son of Lord Brahmā asked the radiant King Viśvāmitra who was seated comfortably:

"O king, I hope all is well with you and that you are satisfying the citizens by your righteousness and protecting them by the proper execution of your royal duties, O righteous king. Are you maintaining your servants properly, and are they obedient to you? Are all your enemies subdued, O conqueror of foes? Is all well with your military forces, finances and allies, O tiger among men, not to mention your sons and grandson, O sinless one?"

Then the splendid Viśvāmitra replied to the cultured Vasiṣṭha that all was well with him. The two pious souls delightedly began talking with each other for quite some time, striking up a deep affection between themselves. After they finished conversing, Vasiṣṭha said to Viśvāmitra while laughing slightly: "O great king, I wish to entertain your immeasurable self and your army as well as I am able. Please agree to this. O king, you are the foremost of guests and therefore I am bound to offer you respect. Please accept the honorable reception presented by me."

After Vasiṣṭha had spoken in that way, the wise King Viśvāmitra said: "I have already been received by your hospitable world. O master, the things from your hermitage-the fruit, roots, footbath, mouthwash and the sight of you-are a sufficient reception for me. O greatest of the wise, you are

always worshipable by me, but you have already offered me such honor. I offer my respects to you. I shall always see you as my friend."

The pious soul Vasiṣṭha again requested the king, who repeatedly spoke as previously. Then Viśvāmitra said to Vasiṣṭha: "All right. Let it be as you so please, O foremost of sages." Pleased at being addressed in this way by Viśvāmitra, Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters, called for his spotted cow, which was freshly washed: "Come on, come on. O Śabalā, hurry along and listen to what I say. I am determined to entertain this royal sage and his army with a sumptuous feast. Give each one, according to his desire, dishes of the six varieties of tastes (namely, pungent, sweet, salty, bitter, sour and astringent). Supply all of that for my sake, O cow of plenty. Produce quantities of flavorsome food, O Śabalā, including those that are chewed, drunk, swallowed and sucked. Be quick."

VIŚVĀMITRA ASKS VASIṢṬHA FOR THE DESIRE COW

Having been commanded in this way by Vasiṣṭha, Śabalā, the desire cow, provided everyone with what they desired. She supplied pieces of sugar cane, honey, fried grains, rum, wine, and a wide variety of other costly drinks and foods. There were heaps of steaming rice resembling mountains; there was sweet rice, lentil soup. Similarly, there were rivers of yogurt. There were many varieties of tasty fruit juices and sweetmeats and thousands of silver plates piled high with food. The entire army of Viśvāmitra was thoroughly satisfied, O Rāma, consisting as it did of joyful, well-fed men. By then the royal sage Viśvāmitra, along with his queens, brāhmaṇas, priests, ministers, counselors and servants, was pleased and satiated by the entertainment offered by Vasiṣṭha.

Viśvāmitra then joyously spoke the following to Vasiṣṭha: "I have been greatly honored and entertained by you, O brāhmaṇa, who are yourself most worshipable. Now I would like to say something. Listen, O eloquent speaker. You should give me Śabalā in exchange for one hundred thousand cows. She is a jewel, my lord, and it is the prerogative of a monarch to take jewels. Therefore, give Śabalā to me, O brāhmaṇa, as she rightly belongs to me."

After Viśvāmitra said this, the foremost sage Vasiṣṭha replied to him: "I shall not give you Śabalā for one hundred thousand cows, not even for millions of cows, O king, nor for piles of silver. She cannot be taken from me, O subduer of enemies. Śabalā is perpetually mine, as fame adheres to a self-realized soul. My offering of oblations to the gods and forefathers, as well as the support of my life itself, depends on her. She is the support for the sacrificial fire, the oblations of clarified butter, the sacrifices themselves, the chanting of the mantras svāhā and vauṣaṭ and the manifold knowledge of these. She supplies the ingredients, as well as the food that gives me the

strength to do these. She is the basis of all these without any doubt, O royal sage. She is everything to me and as such she is my source of pleasure. For these many reasons I shall not give you Śabalā, O king."

Addressed in this way by Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, who was skilled at speaking, spoke with great exasperation: "I will give you fourteen thousand elephants with solid gold chains, adornments and goads. I will also give you eight hundred gold chariots, each driven by four white horses and decorated with small tinkling bells. I further offer you eleven thousand spirited horses from lands noted for their breeds. I can also give you one million young cows of many different colors. Let Śabalā be given to me. I will give you as much gold and jewels as you desire, O brāhmaṇa. Just give me Śabalā."

After the clever Viśvāmitra had spoken, Vasiṣṭha said: "O king, I shall under no circumstance give you Śabalā. She is indeed my only jewel, my only wealth. She is everything to me. She is my very life. The new moon and full moon sacrifices, the sacrifices with remunerations and varieties of rituals-she is all of these for me, O king. Without a doubt, all my activities are based on her. No matter how much you prattle, I shall not give you my desire cow."

VIŚVĀMITRA FORCIBLY TAKES THE DESIRE COW

When the sage Vasiṣṭha did not give up the desire cow, Viśvāmitra took her away by force, O Rāma. As Śabalā was being lead away by the king, she was afflicted with grief and began moaning. She thought: "Have I been abandoned by the great soul Vasiṣṭha, that I am being taken away by the king's servants, wretched and forlorn as I am? What offense could I have possibly committed against the self-realized sage that, seeing me innocent and devoted to him, he is abandoning me?"

Thinking in this way, the cow sighed again and again. She then ran to the supremely powerful Vasiṣṭha. Shaking off the king's hundreds of servants, she ran as swiftly as the wind to the feet of the great sage. Crying and bellowing like the rumbling of clouds, Śabalā stood before Vasiṣṭha and spoke as follows: "O son of Brahmā, have I been abandoned by you, that the king's servants are taking me away from you?"

Having been addressed in this way, the brahmarṣi Vasiṣṭha said to the cow whose heart was burning with grief like a sorely afflicted sister: "I am not abandoning you, O Śabalā. You have not offended me in any way. This powerful king is leading you away of his own accord. My strength is not equal to his. Today, having been honored by me, he is particularly strong. Besides, this powerful king is a warrior and the ruler of the earth. By this entire akṣauhiṇī, consisting of so many festooned elephants, horses and chariots, he is most powerful."

Being answered in this way by Vasiṣṭha, she humbly replied to the brahmarṣi whose effulgence was unparalleled: "The strength of a warrior is not greater than that of a brāhmaṇa. The power of a brāhmaṇa is far greater than that of a warrior. Your strength is immeasurable. The mighty Viśvāmitra is not stronger than you. Your power is insurmountable. Command me.

Fortified by your brahminical power, O glorious sage, I shall destroy the pride, strength and efforts of this wicked king."

When Śabalā had spoken in this way, Vasiṣṭha replied: "Produce an army capable of crushing his army." Hearing his command, the desire cow produced it. By her bellow were produced Pahlava warriors by the hundreds. They began to destroy Viśvāmitra's army as he watched. The king became enraged with his eyes dilated due to anger. Using his various weapons of destruction, Viśvāmitra then began slaying the Pahlava warriors by the hundreds. Seeing this, Śabalā then produced hordes of formidable Śakas, who were related to the Yavanas. The earth was covered by these Śakas. They were splendorous and most powerful. Their complexion resembled the filaments of campaka flowers. They were carrying sharp swords and spears and were dressed in yellow garments. The entire army of Viśvāmitra was consumed by them as if by blazing fires. Then the mighty Viśvāmitra released a number of missiles. These threw the forces of the Yavanas, Kāmbojas and Barbaras into confusion.

VIŚVĀMITRA PERFORMS AUSTERITIES TO DEFEAT VASIṢṬHA

When Vasiṣṭha saw how the army was thrown into confusion by Viśvāmitra's missiles, he commanded the desire cow to produce more soldiers by her mystic power. From her belly arose Kāmboja warriors who were as brilliant as the sun. From her udder appeared Barbaras with weapons in their hands. From her womb sprang Yavanas, and from her anus, Śakas. From the pores of her skin came Mlecchas, Harītas and Kirātas. They immediately began destroying Viśvāmitra's army of foot soldiers, elephants, horses and chariots. Seeing their father's army destroyed by the great soul Vasiṣṭha, the sons of Viśvāmitra rushed towards Vasiṣṭha by the hundreds, bearing many different weapons in their hands. By chanting the word "hum" the great sage burned them all to ashes. The sons of Viśvāmitra, along with their horses, chariots and foot soldiers, were reduced to ashes in a moment by Vasiṣṭha.

Seeing both his army and his glorious sons destroyed, Viśvāmitra was overcome with anxiety mixed with shame. Like a motionless ocean, a serpent with broken fangs or the eclipsed sun, he was deprived of his personal splendor. After the destruction of his sons and army, he was as miserable as a bird with clipped wings. With all his strength and enthusiasm crushed, he became terribly despondent. He entrusted his only surviving son with the rule of the kingdom, instructing him to govern the world with the principles of righteousness, and then departed for the forest. He went to the slopes of the Himalaya Mountains that are frequented by kinnaras and serpents. There he began practicing austerities in order to please Lord Śiva. Some time later, Lord Śiva, who bears a flag with the emblem of a bull, appeared to Viśvāmitra to offer him a boon: "O king, why are you practicing austerities? Tell me what you want. I am the bestower of boons. The boon which you desire may be known by me."

Having been spoken to in this way, the highly austere Viśvāmitra bowed down to Lord Śiva and said the following: "If you, O lord of the gods,

are pleased, bestow upon me knowledge of the Dhanur Veda, along with its corollaries and mystical explanations. Let the weapons of the gods, dānavas, mahārṣis, gandharvas, yakṣas and rākṣasas be given to me, O sinless one. Fulfill my desire by your mercy, O god of gods." Lord Śiva said: "So be it." Then he departed.

Having acquired those weapons, the mighty Viśvāmitra became very proud. Having waxed in strength like the ocean during the full moon, he considered Vasiṣṭha already dead. The monarch, firing weapons as he came, returned to the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha. The hermitage was scorched by the heat of those weapons. Seeing the skillful Viśvāmitra discharging weapons against them, the frightened ascetics fled by the hundreds in all directions. Afraid of the danger, the disciples of Vasiṣṭha and the forest creatures ran by the thousands from all sides. Within an hour or so, the site of the Vasiṣṭha's hermitage was thoroughly abandoned and devoid of any sound. All during this, Vasiṣṭha repeatedly exclaimed: "Do not fear. I shall destroy Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Gādhi, even as the sun dispels fog." Having finished speaking, Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters, angrily said to Viśvāmitra: "You have been wreaking havoc on this hermitage for quite some time. Because you are a wicked wretch and a fool, you shall cease to be." Speaking in this way, Vasiṣṭha quickly raised his staff, which was like a second staff of Varuṇa, the god of justice, and stood there angrily, like the fire of devastation without its smoke.

VAŚIṢṬHA DEFEATS VIŚVĀMITRA WITH HIS STAFF

After being addressed in that way by Vasiṣṭha, the greatly powerful Viśvāmitra took a fire weapon and said: "Stay where you are!" Raising his brahminical staff, which was like Time's own rod of chastisement, Vasiṣṭha said: "Here I am, O lowest of warriors. Show me what your strength is! Today I shall destroy your pride in weaponry. What is the strength of a warrior when compared to the great strength of a brāhmaṇa? See my divine brahminical power, O disgrace to the warrior caste!"

The terrible fire weapon released by Viśvāmitra was counteracted by the brahminical staff of Vasiṣṭha, as the strength of fire is reduced by water. Then Viśvāmitra angrily fired the vāruṇa, raudra, aindra, pāśupāta and aiśika weapons. Viśvāmitra then released all the following weapons: mānava, mohana, gāndharva, svāpana, jṛmbhaṇa, mādana, santāpana, vilāpana, śoṣaṇa, vidāraṇa, sudurjaya, vajrāstra, brahmapāśa, kālapāśa, vāruṇapāśa, paramapriya, pinākāstra, sūkhī-gīlī, two kinds of aśani, daṇḍāstra, paiśāca, krauñcāstra, dharmacakra, kālacakra, viṣṇucakra, vāyavya, mathanāstra, hayaśiras and two kinds of śaktis. He also released kaṅkāla, musala, vaidyādhara, mahāstra, the terrible kālāstra, the frightful triśūla, kāpāla and kaṅkaṇa. As these weapons were being discharged against Vasiṣṭha, Vasiṣṭha performed a miracle: he neutralized all the weapons with his brahminical staff.

When those weapons had been counteracted, Viśvāmitra hurled the brahmāstra. Seeing that missile launched by Viśvāmitra, the gods headed by Agni, the sages, the gandharvas and eminent serpents were bewildered. All the three worlds were fearful. Even that most frightful brahmāstra weapon was completely counteracted by Vasiṣṭha through the use of his staff and brahminical power. While the great soul Vasiṣṭha was tackling the brahmāstra, he assumed an angry form that was most frightening and

disturbing for the three worlds. From all the pores of Vasiṣṭha's skin shot forth flames of fire covered in smoke as if they were the rays of his effulgence. The brahminical staff raised in the hand of Vasiṣṭha was glowing like the fire of devastation without smoke or like a second rod of chastisement for the lord of death.

Thereafter, Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters, was praised by the hosts of sages: "O brāhmaṇa, your strength is unassailable. Please withdraw your splendor by your own power. The mighty Viśvāmitra has been defeated by you, O brāhmaṇa. Your power is unfailing. Let the worlds be free of anxiety." Having been addressed in this way, the highly powerful Vasiṣṭha became calm. Being defeated, Viśvāmitra heaved a sigh and exclaimed: "What is the use of a warrior's power? The power of a brāhmaṇa is real power. By a single brāhmaṇa's staff, all my weapons were destroyed. Seeing this, I shall engage myself in severe austerities to control the mind and senses for the purpose of becoming a brāhmaṇa."

TRIŚANKU'S DESIRE FOR BODILY ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

Remembering how he had been defeated by Vasiṣṭha, with whom he had struck up enmity, Viśvāmitra's heart was burning, and he sighed again and again. He departed for the southern region accompanied by his principal queen, O Rāma. There the great ascetic Viśvāmitra practiced extremely difficult penances. Living only on fruits and roots and conquering his senses, he practiced very advanced austerities. At that time were born to him four sons who were dedicated to righteousness. Their names were Haviṣpanda, Madhuṣpanda, Dṛḍhanetra and Mahāratha. After the completion of one thousand years, Lord Brahmā, the grandfather of all the worlds, appeared and spoke to Viśvāmitra, who was rich in asceticism, the following sweet words: "O descendant of Kuśika, by your austerities you have conquered the worlds attainable by rājarṣis (royal sages). By this austerity I recognize you as a rājarṣi too." After saying that, the splendorous Lord Brahmā, the chief administrator of the different worlds, accompanied by many demigods, departed for the heaven of Indra en route to his own abode in Brahmaloka.

Hearing this, Viśvāmitra slightly lowered his head in shame. Filled with sadness and indignant, he said: "After performing such tremendous austerities, all the gods and sages have only recognized me to be a rājarṣi. I think this austerity was fruitless." Having concluded this in his mind, the great ascetic again began to practice austerities.

At the same time, there was a king of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty who was truthful and self-controlled known by the name of Triśanku. The following idea occurred to him: "Let me perform a sacrifice and go to the supreme abode of the gods in my very body." Summoning Vasiṣṭha, he told him what he was thinking. The great soul Vasiṣṭha replied: "That is impossible."

Rejected by Vasiṣṭha, Triśaṅku went to the southern region. For assistance in obtaining his goal, the king approached the sons of Vasiṣṭha, who were engaged there in prolonged austerities. The glorious Triśaṅku saw the one hundred extremely radiant, high-minded sons of Vasiṣṭha, who were engaged in penances. Approaching the great-souled sons of his guru Vasiṣṭha, he greeted them all. Then, with folded hands, he spoke to them, his head bent down due to embarrassment: "I, in whom others take shelter, seek the shelter of you, the sons of my guru. Bless you. My desire to perform a great sacrifice was rejected by Vasiṣṭha. Please agree to do it. Bowing down to all my guru's sons, I seek your favor. Touching my head to the ground, I implore you brāhmaṇas engaged in austerities. Please perform with concentrated minds a sacrifice by which I may attain my goal of ascending to the world of the gods in this very body. Having been rejected by Vasiṣṭha, I do not see any other recourse than you, the sons of my guru, who are rich in austerities. For all the descendants of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, our family priest Vasiṣṭha has been the chief resort. Besides him, you are all like God for me."

CURSED BY VASIṢṬHA'S SONS, TRIŚANKU APPROACHES VIŚVĀMITRA

Angered on hearing Triśanku's request, the one hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha, O Rāma, said to the king: "When your truthful guru has denied your request, O fool, how could you disregard him by approaching others? Vasiṣṭha is certainly the chief resort for the kings of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. As such, the truthful sage's words cannot be ignored. You are very childish, O best of men. You should go back to your city. Vasiṣṭha is capable of performing sacrifices for all the three worlds, O monarch. How can we disregard him?" Hearing their retort filled with angry words, the king again addressed them: "I have been rejected by my guru and even so by his sons. I shall therefore look for another priest. Good luck to you ascetics." When the sage's sons heard the dreadful statement of the king, they angrily cursed him: "Become a cāṇḍāla (untouchable)!" After that, they all entered their respective huts.

After the night had passed, the king became a cāṇḍāla. His skin turned swarthy, his clothes darkened and his hair fell out. He was wearing a garland from a crematorium and his body was smeared with ashes from a crematorium. Instead of jewel-encrusted gold ornaments, he was adorned with iron. Seeing that he had become a cāṇḍāla, all his ministers and subjects who formerly followed him abandoned him and ran away. Burning day and night, the king then went by himself to Viśvāmitra who was rich in asceticism. Seeing the frustrated king with the form of a cāṇḍāla, Viśvāmitra felt compassionate. Out of compassion, the very powerful and supremely righteous Viśvāmitra said: "Bless you, O king with frightful appearance. What is the purpose of your visit, O mighty prince? How were you, the valiant ruler of Ayodhyā, cursed to become a cāṇḍāla?"

Hearing Viśvāmitra's inquiry, the king who had become a cāṇḍāla spoke with joined palms words to the eloquent sage: "I was rejected by my guru, as well as by his sons. I was unable to realize my desire, but instead

achieved an opposite result. I wanted to perform one hundred sacrifices in order to ascend to heaven in my physical body, O sage of pleasant appearance, but I was unable to carry it out. I have never previously spoken a lie, nor will I ever do so, even when in hard times. I swear by my adherence to the principles of chivalry. Worship has been performed by various kinds of sacrifices and the citizens have been governed under righteousness. The elders of society have been satisfied with my virtuous conduct. My preceptors, however, were not pleased with me, even though I struggled for the cause of righteousness and wanted to undertake a sacrifice. I therefore consider fate alone as supreme and personal effort useless. Everything is surpassed by fate. Fate is, thus, the ultimate shelter. Please bestow your mercy upon me, who desires it, for I am sorely afflicted by the obstruction of my efforts by fate. Bless you. I shall seek the shelter of no one else. Indeed, I have no other shelter. Please avert my misfortune by your personal efforts."

VIŚVĀMITRA AGREES TO PERFORM THE SACRIFICE FOR TRIŚANKU

When the king who had become a cāṇḍāla finished speaking, Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśika, kindly spoke sweet words to him: "Welcome, O descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. I know you are righteous, my child. I shall as such give you shelter. Do not worry, O best of kings. I shall invite all the great sages who are engaged in acts of piety to come and assist in this sacrifice. Then, O king, you will perform your sacrifice without any difficulty. In this very form inflicted with the curse of your guru you will ascend to heaven. I consider the attainment of heaven as already in your hands, O monarch, in as much as you have come to take shelter of me, for I am capable of giving shelter to others."

After saying this, the glorious Viśvāmitra commanded his supremely righteous and intelligent sons to prepare for the sacrifice. Summoning all his disciples, he spoke to them the following words, it is said: "By my order, bring all the sages well-versed in the scriptures, including the sons of Vasiṣṭha, not to mention their disciples, friends and assistants. If anyone makes any disrespectful remark on account of what I have said, relate it to me in its entirety."

Hearing his instructions, they departed in all directions by his order. Then exponents of the Absolute Truth began to arrive from all different lands. His disciples also returned to him, glowing as he was due to his asceticism. They related to him everything the exponents of the Absolute Truth had said: "Hearing your request, all the twice-born brāhmaṇas are coming from all lands, except Mahodaya and the one hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha. Hear, O best of sages, all the words filled with anger exactly as they were spoken:

When the performer is a warrior and the beneficiary a cāṇḍāla, how could the gods and sages accept the offerings? Or how will the brāhmaṇas

and mahātmās go to heaven if they eat the remnants of food eaten by a cāṇḍāla in a sacrifice patronized by Viśvāmitra?

"The sons of Vasiṣṭha, accompanied by Mahodaya, spoke these harsh words with eyes red with anger, O tiger among sages."

After hearing what they had said, Viśvāmitra's eyes turned red with ire, and he angrily said: "Because they vilify me, who am faultless and engaged in the execution of severe austerities, these rascals will be burned to ashes without a doubt. This very day they will be dragged by the noose of time to the abode of death. Let them be born for seven hundred lives as the unfortunate bearers of corpses known by the name of muṣṭikas that feed on dog's flesh. Let them wander in the world, deformed and hideous. The evil-minded Mahodaya who vilified me though I am faultless, will be disparaged in all worlds and will become a niṣāda. By my anger he will become merciless, eking out a living by causing suffering to other living creatures, suffering misfortune himself for a long time." Speaking in this way, the powerful ascetic Viśvāmitra remained silent, standing in the midst of the great sages.

THE ELEVATION OF TRIŚAṆKU AND OTHER FEATS BY VIŚVĀMITRA

Upon learning of the elimination of the accumulated mystic power of Mahodaya and the sons of Vasiṣṭha, the glorious Viśvāmitra spoke as he stood there in the midst of the sages: "See here Triśaṅku, the heir of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, who is well-known, righteous and magnanimous and who has taken shelter of me with the desire to ascend in his physical body to the world of the gods. Let a sacrifice now be undertaken by you, as well as by me, which will elevate him in his physical body to the world of the gods."

When Viśvāmitra had finished speaking, all the great sages conferred among themselves and quickly made the following righteous observation: "This sage Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśika, is highly irritable. His proposal must undoubtedly be carried out, or else the sage, who is like fire, will pronounce a curse upon us out of anger. Therefore, let the sacrifice be executed that will raise Triśaṅku to heaven in his material body by virtue of Viśvāmitra's own power. Hence, let the sacrifice begin. All of you take your positions."

Speaking in this way, the great sages took charge of their respective duties. The most glorious Viśvāmitra was the chief priest in that sacrifice. The other priests, who were expert in the recitation of mantras, began chanting the appropriate prayers in order and performed all the rituals exactly according to the rules and regulations of scripture. Then, for a long time, the mighty ascetic Viśvāmitra invoked the presence of all the gods to accept their share of the offerings, but none of them came. Infuriated, Viśvāmitra raised his sacrificial spoon and said to Triśaṅku: "See the power of my austerities achieved by my own efforts, O king. Look, I send you to heaven with your present material body by dint of my spiritual potency. Go to heaven, O king, which is difficult to attain in a material body. Whatever reward I may have acquired by my austerities, O king, on the strength of that go you now physically to heaven!"

When Viśvāmitra finished saying this, the king began physically rising up to heaven, O Rāma, as the sages watched. Seeing that Triśaṅku had reached heaven, Indra, along with all the hosts of gods, spoke the following: "Triśaṅku, go back. There is no place for you in heaven, you fool. Cursed by your guru, fall head-first to earth!" Triśaṅku then began to fall back to earth, calling out to Viśvāmitra for help. Hearing Triśaṅku's cries, Viśvāmitra became extremely angry and said to Triśaṅku: "Stop! Stop!" Standing in the midst of the sages, Viśvāmitra, as if he were another Brahmā, created a duplicate of the constellation Great Bear in the Southern Hemisphere. He then created a whole mass of constellations there, incensed as he was with anger. Having created those constellations in the Southern Hemisphere, out of wrath he said: "I shall make another Indra, otherwise let those worlds remain without any Indra." Then he began creating other gods.

After that, all the gods, asuras and hosts of sages, being greatly perturbed, humbly addressed the great soul Viśvāmitra: "O fortunate sage rich in asceticism, this king devastated by the curse of his guru does not deserve to go to heaven in his physical body." Hearing their entreaty, Viśvāmitra, the descendant of Kuśika, gave the following noble reply to the gods: "Bless you all! I promised King Triśaṅku that I would raise him physically to heaven. I do not dare break my word. Let Triśaṅku always remain physically in the heaven I created for him. Also let all the constellations that I created remain permanently. So long as these worlds created by Brahmā exist, so also should those created by me. O gods, please agree to this."

Upon receiving this request, they all replied to the best of sages: "So be it. Bless you! Let them all remain. Let those constellations remain in the sky outside the elliptical path of the sun. Let Triśaṅku be fixed shining among those stars with his head downwards, enjoying like a god. Indeed, those stars will circumambulate Triśaṅku, who, having accomplished his goal, will be as glorious as the denizens of heaven." Being praised by all the gods, the righteous soul Viśvāmitra, standing among the sages, replied to the gods: "All right." Then, at the end of the sacrifice, the gods, mahātmās, sages and ascetics departed as they had come, O best of men.

HOW ŚUNAḤŚEPA WAS TAKEN TO BE SACRIFICED

Seeing that the forest-dwelling sages were all about to depart, Viśvāmitra said: "The sky over this southern region is marred by the presence of Triśaṅku. We shall resort to another region and practice austerities there. We shall easily practice austerities in the forests on the banks of the lakes at Puṣkāra in the extensive western region." Having spoken thus, the highly effulgent sage began performing difficult austerities at Puṣkāra, eating only fruits and roots.

At this time, the great ruler of Ayodhyā, known as Ambarīṣa, had begun a sacrifice. Even as he was performing the sacrifice, Indra stole the sacrificial horse, so it is said. After the loss of the sacrificial animal, the priest said to the king: "The animal brought here to be sacrificed has been lost due to your negligence, O king. The faults of a king who does not protect his sacrifice destroy him, O ruler of men. In order to atone for this offense, quickly bring back the animal or a human substitute so that the sacrifice can be concluded."

Hearing the instructions of the priest, the king went in search of the stolen horse, bringing with him thousands of cows to exchange for a sacrificial victim. After searching in many lands, principalities, towns, forests and pious hermitages, the king saw at Bhṛgutūṅga the sage Ṛcīka sitting with his wife and sons, so they say, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. Bowing down to the sage Ṛcīka, who was glowing due to the austerities he had performed, and pleasing him by inquiring about his welfare, the king said:

"If you will sell me your son as a sacrificial victim for the price of one hundred thousand cows, I will consider my purpose accomplished, O most fortunate descendant of the sage Bhṛgu. I have traversed all countries

but have not recovered the sacrificial horse. As such, you must sell me one of your sons."

To this, the splendidous Ṛcīka replied: "I am under no circumstance prepared to sell my oldest son, O best of men." Hearing Ṛcīka's words, the mother of the boys said to King Ambarīṣa: "My husband has declared our eldest son as unsellable. Know that our youngest son, Śunaka, is my favorite, O lord. Therefore I shall not give you the youngest boy, O king. Usually the oldest son is dearer to the father and the youngest is dearer to the mother. Therefore, I shall protect the youngest."

When the sage had spoken thus, and his wife also, Śunaḥśepa, the middle son, spoke of his own accord as follows: "My father says his eldest son cannot be sold, and my mother says the same of her youngest. I therefore conclude that the middle son can be sold. O king, take me away."

Taking Śunaḥśepa, who was conversant with spiritual teachings, in exchange for heaps of gold coins and jewels and one hundred thousand cows, the king, being highly pleased, departed. The glorious royal monarch Ambarīṣa quickly placed Śunaḥśepa in his chariot and hurriedly left.

ŚUNAḤŚEPA APPROACHES VIŚVĀMITRA FOR HELP

Bringing Śunaḥśepa, the glorious king rested at Puškāra when it was noon. While the king was resting, Śunaḥśepa made his way to the principal lake. There he saw his maternal uncle Viśvāmitra practicing austerities in the company of other sages. Being sorely pained, with a distressed look in his face, and wretched due to thirst and exhaustion, he fell into the sage's lap and said: "I have no mother. I have no father. Where are my kinsmen and friends? By the principles of righteousness you must protect me, O best of sages. You are the protector of everyone and the source of all desired things, O best of men. Let the king attain his goal and let me enjoy a long, flawless life engaged in austerities until I attain the topmost heavenly world. With a peaceful mind, be my protector, for I have been abandoned. You must protect me from this sin, O righteous soul, as a father would his son."

On hearing the boy's plea, Viśvāmitra consoled him in many ways and then said to his own sons: "The time has come for achieving our good fortune in the other world, for which purpose fathers beget sons. This child, being the son of a sage, has taken shelter of me. Do him a favor, my sons, by giving your lives. You are all engaged in pious activities and are devoted to duty. Taking the role of sacrificial victims, give satisfaction to the sacrificial fire of the king. Let Śunaḥśepa be protected and the sacrifice be completed. Thus the gods will have been propitiated and my promise fulfilled."

Hearing the sage's request, his sons headed by Madhucchanda replied haughtily and derisively: "How is it that you reject your own sons to protect someone else's son? We consider this almost as abominable as including dog's flesh in one's food." When the sage heard what his sons said, he began to curse them, his eyes red with anger: "Disregarding my request, your reply is defiant, devoid of virtue, harsh and shocking. May you all be born on this earth for a full thousand years as dog-eaters, like the sons of Vasiṣṭha."

After cursing his sons, the foremost of sages said to the distressed Śunaḥśepa in order to afford him complete protection: "When you are decorated with a garland of red flowers, smeared all over with red sandalwood paste and bound with ropes of kuśa grass to the sacrificial post which is sacred to Lord Viṣṇu, pray to Viṣṇu and to Indra. Sing these two divine hymns during King Ambarīṣa's sacrifice, O son of the sage, and you will achieve your goal."

After learning those two hymns with a composed mind, Śunaḥśepa returned to King Ambarīṣa and hurriedly said to him: "O lion among kings, O most intelligent monarch, let us go quickly. Consecrate yourself for the sacrifice and conclude it." When the king heard these words spoken by the sage's son, he was delighted. Throwing off his lethargy, the king quickly proceeded to the sacrificial arena. Under the advice of the chief priest, the king bound the boy with ropes of kuśa grass, dressed him in red clothes and decorated him with other marks of a sacrificial victim. Being bound, the son of the sage duly glorified with the choicest hymns the two divinities, Indra and his younger brother Vāmanadeva, who was an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. Being pleased by those confidential hymns in praise of Viṣṇu, Indra granted long life to Śunaḥśepa. King Ambarīṣa was also able to achieve the manifold fruit of his sacrifice by the grace of Indra. The righteous soul Viśvāmitra again engaged himself in the execution of austerities on the banks of the lakes at Puṣkāra for another thousand years.

VIŚVĀMITRA BECOMES A ṚṢI AND THEN A MAHĀRṢI

After one thousand years had passed, all the gods went to visit Viśvāmitra, who had just finished bathing on the completion of his vow, in order to bestow a boon upon him. The most splendid Brahmā spoke the following sweet words: "By dint of the pious acts you have performed, you are now a ṛṣi. Bless you." Saying so, the lord of the gods returned to his heavenly abode. The glorious Viśvāmitra again began practicing great austerities. After a long time Menakā, the foremost of apsarās, came to Puṣkāra to bathe in its lakes. There Viśvāmitra saw the illustrious Menakā, whose beauty was unmatched, like lightning in a cloud. Coming under the influence of Cupid, the sage spoke as follows: "Welcome, O apsarā. Please stay in my hermitage. Bless you. Be gracious to me, infatuated as I am by love."

Accepting the sage's request, the lovely Menakā took up residence there. Indeed, a great obstacle to austerity had been encountered by Viśvāmitra. She resided happily for ten years in Viśvāmitra's hermitage, O Rāma. When that time had passed, the great sage Viśvāmitra felt ashamed and became overcome with anxiety and grief. The sage angrily realized that all this was an arrangement by the gods to rob him of his great austerities: "Ten years have passed like one day while I was infatuated with love. This is an obstacle for me." Sighing deeply, the best of sages was sad due to remorse. Seeing the apsarā Menakā standing before him with folded hands, trembling with fear, Viśvāmitra sent her off with sweet words. Then he departed for the northern slopes of the Himalaya Mountains.

Deciding to observe complete celibacy for the purpose of conquering his passions, the illustrious sage went to the shore of the Kauṣīkī River and engaged himself in very difficult austerities. Seeing him seated on the northern slopes of the Himalayas practicing severe austerities for thousands of years, the gods became frightened. All the gods and sages approached Lord Brahmā and beseeched him: "This holy man Viśvāmitra,

the descendant of Kuśika, wants to attain the title of mahārṣi." Hearing their plea, Brahmā, the grandfather of all the worlds, spoke the following sweet words to Viśvāmitra, who was rich in austerity: "Welcome, O great sage. I am very pleased by your gruesome austerities. I therefore bestow upon you the title of mahārṣi, O descendant of Kuśika."

Hearing Brahmā's words, the austere Viśvāmitra joined his palms, bowed and then replied to Brahmā: "If you bestow upon me the unparalleled title of brahmarṣi as a reward for the auspicious activities I have performed, I will know that I have conquered my senses and mind." Then Brahmā replied to him: "You have not yet conquered your senses. Continue trying, O tiger among sages." Having spoken thus, Brahmā returned to the heavenly world. When the gods had left, the great sage Viśvāmitra undertook austerity by standing with his arms raised above his head and eating only air. During the hot season he exposed himself to the sun while sitting between four blazing fires. In the rainy season he lived in the open air without any shelter. In the cold season he stood in water for days and nights. Thus he spent one thousand years engaged in difficult austerities. While the great sage Viśvāmitra was performing such austerities, the gods headed by Indra became perturbed. Indra, accompanied by all the Maruts, addressed the apsara Rambhā with words that were injurious to Viśvāmitra.

VIŚVĀMITRA CURSES RAMBHĀ

You must perform for the gods the great task of beguiling Viśvāmitra, bewildering him with lust, O Rambhā." After Indra said this to the apsarā, O Rāma, being embarrassed and with folded hands, she said to Indra: "O lord of the gods, this great sage Viśvāmitra is dangerous. He will doubtlessly unleash his terrible wrath upon me. Therefore, my lord, I am frightened. Be merciful to me." When she had finished speaking, gripped as she was with fear, Indra addressed her, who stood trembling before him with her palms joined: "Do not be afraid, Rambhā. Bless you. Carry out my instruction. I, accompanied by Cupid shall stay at your side in the guise of a nightingale that captivates the heart with its song, as it does in the spring when the trees are covered with fragrant flowers. Dressing yourself gorgeously with resplendent ornaments, divert the ascetic sage Viśvāmitra, O lady."

After decorating herself superbly, Rambhā, with a lovely smile, began alluring Viśvāmitra. He heard the warbling notes of the nightingale and, seeing Rambhā, became doubtful of her intentions. Realizing that this was an arrangement of Indra, Viśvāmitra became furious and cursed Rambhā: "Because, O unfortunate Rambhā, you tried to seduce me, who am desirous of conquering lust and anger, you must stand as a stone for ten thousand years. At that time, the most glorious brāhmaṇa endowed with the strength of austerity and known by the name Vasiṣṭha will deliver you from my anger aroused by your foul deed." Speaking in this way, the powerful sage Viśvāmitra, having been unable to restrain his anger, began to lament.

By his mighty curse, Rambhā became stone. When Indra and Cupid heard Viśvāmitra's curse, they fled. Seeing how his anger had deprived him of the strength of his austerities, Viśvāmitra had no peace of mind because he had failed to conquer his senses. After losing his pious credits, he began thinking: "I shall never again become angry like that, nor shall I speak under any condition. Or else I shall not even breathe for hundreds of years. In order to conquer my senses, I shall decimate my body. I shall remain for

countless years without breathing or eating until I attain by my efforts the status of a brāhmaṇa. Nor will my limbs become atrophied while I am engaged in austerities." Thus the best of sages swore to observe for one thousand years a vow unequaled in this world.

VIŚVĀMITRA ATTAINS THE STATUS OF A BRĀHMAṆA

Leaving the northern region of the snow-packed Himalayas, the great sage Viśvāmitra went to the southern region and began practicing the most severe austerities. Taking the supreme vow of remaining silent for one thousand years, he embarked upon austerities that were unequalled because of their great difficulty. After one thousand years, he remained as firm as a wooden post. Although confronted with many obstacles, anger could not overcome him. Having decided to remain in unending austerity, the mighty sage fulfilled his vow of one thousand years. Just as he was about to eat his first food, Indra appeared before him in the guise of a brāhmaṇa and asked him for the cooked food. Viśvāmitra gave all the cooked food to the brāhmaṇa. With no food left for himself, the austere sage remained without eating. Because he was still bound to observe his vow of silence, he did not say anything to the brāhmaṇa. Thus he again began observing his vow of silence and not breathing.

The foremost of sages passed another thousand years without breathing. While he restrained his breath, smoke rose from his head. This scorched and bewildered all the three worlds. Thereafter the gods, ṛṣis, gandharvas, snakes, serpents and rākṣasas were bewildered by his austerities, and their splendor was diminished by his brilliance. Overwhelmed with alarm, they addressed Lord Brahmā: "Although tempted in many ways by lust and anger, the great sage Viśvāmitra is increasing in austerity. One can not find even the slightest flaw in him. If what he desires in his mind is not given to him, he will destroy the three worlds of moving and nonmoving beings by the strength of his austerities. Already his smoke has covered the universe and nothing can be seen. The oceans are turbulent, all the mountains are shattered, the earth is quaking and the wind blowing violently. We cannot find the means to counteract this. Therefore people are becoming atheists. The three worlds are baffled and confused about what to

do. The brilliance of that great sage outshines that of the sun. O Lord Brahmā, give the great sage, whose form is resplendent like fire, whatever he desires, before he sets his mind on destroying all the three worlds, just as they were previously by the fire of annihilation. Grant him whatever he wants, even if it be sovereignty over the gods."

Then Lord Brahmā led all the gods to the great soul Viśvāmitra and spoke the following sweet words: "Greetings, O brahmarṣi. We are very pleased with your austerities. O descendant of Kuśika, by your awesome penances you have attained the position of a brāhmaṇa. Accompanied by the Maruts, I grant you longevity, O brāhmaṇa. May you achieve good fortune. Bless you, child. Now go happily."

Hearing Lord Brahmā's words, Viśvāmitra was overjoyed and offered respects to all the denizens of heaven, saying: "If I have achieved the status of a brāhmaṇa, as well as longevity, let the sacred syllable om, the sacrificial mantra vauṣaṭ and the Vedas choose to come to me. Let Vasiṣṭha, the son of Brahmā, being the wisest of those with military knowledge or spiritual knowledge also call me a brāhmaṇa. If this supreme desire is fulfilled, you may depart, O best of the gods."

Being placated by the gods, Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters, accepted Viśvāmitra's status as a brāhmaṇa, saying, "So be it. You are no doubt a brāhmaṇa. Everything you desire is fulfilled." When Vasiṣṭha finished speaking, all the gods departed as they had come. After the righteous soul Viśvāmitra attained the supreme position of being a brāhmaṇa, he offered respects to Vasiṣṭha, the best of chanters. Having realized his goal and remaining fixed in the practice of austerities, he wandered the earth. Thus, O Rāma, did the great soul become a brāhmaṇa. Viśvāmitra is the best of sages; he is the personification of austerity; he is supreme righteousness and the eternal shelter of prowess.

Having spoken thus, the super-excellent brāhmaṇa Śatānanda remained silent. Hearing this narration by Śatānanda, King Janaka, with folded hands, spoke to Viśvāmitra in front of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: "O topmost sage, I am most fortunate and obliged that you have come to my

sacrifice, bringing the two sons of King Daśaratha. I am purified just by seeing you, O brāhmaṇa. By seeing you I have acquired manifold good qualities. By attending this assembly with my counselors, O brāhmaṇa, I, in the company of the great soul Rāma, have heard at length the many qualities of your glories and great austerities. Immeasurable is your austerity and immeasurable is your power. Your qualities too are always immeasurable, O descendant of Kuśika. O master, I am never satiated by the wonderful stories about you. The time for the evening rites is drawing near, O best of sages, as the sun is about to set. Tomorrow morning please see me again, O glorious sage. You may then give me instruction. Welcome to our city."

Having been addressed in this way, Viśvāmitra was quite pleased and praised the joyful King Janaka, then soon bid him farewell. Then Janaka, the king of Mithilā, accompanied by his priest and relatives, circumambulated the sage before departing. The righteous Viśvāmitra, having been honored by those great souls, also went to his camp with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

JANAKA RELATED TO RĀMA THE APPEARANCE OF SĪTĀ

The next day at sunrise when King Janaka had finished his morning duties, he summoned the great soul Viśvāmitra, along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. After honoring Viśvāmitra and the two sons of King Daśaratha according to the dictates of scripture, he spoke as follows: "Welcome, my lord. What can I do for you? Tell me what I should do. I am at your command."

Having been addressed in this way by King Janaka, the righteous soul Viśvāmitra, being an eloquent speaker, replied as follows: "These two world-renowned princes, sons of King Daśaratha, are eager to see the excellent bow which now rests with you. Show it to the two princes so that Their desire will be satisfied. Bless you. After seeing the bow, They will leave as They came."

King Janaka then replied to the great sage: "Listen to the reason why this bow is here with me. King Nimi's eldest son was known as Devarāta. This bow was entrusted into his hands by the gods, my lord. It is said that previously Lord Śiva playfully plucked this bow to destroy Dakṣa's sacrifice. He angrily said to the gods:

'Because you have not offered me my share of the sacrifice, even though I desired it, I shall cut off your most worshipable heads with this bow.'

All the gods became alarmed at this and began propitiating Lord Śiva, after which he became pleased with them. Feeling compassion, he gave the bow to them. This is that jewel of bows which belonged to Lord Śiva. It was deposited as a trust with my powerful ancestor Devarāta.

Afterwards, as I was plowing the site for a sacrifice, a baby girl arose from the furrow. Because I got her by plowing the field, she became known

by the name Sītā. Although She came out of the earth, She has grown up as my own daughter. I have established that my daughter, though not born from anyone's womb, will be given in marriage for the price of valor. Sprung from the earth, She is maturing. Kings are constantly coming to seek Her hand, O best of sages. To all those monarchs who came seeking Her hand I said "O lord, except at the price of valor, I do not give my daughter." Then all the princes came in a group to Mithilā and inquired as to how their valor would be judged. After they made this inquiry, Śiva's bow was brought before them. They were, however, unable to lift it, what to speak of holding it in order to ascertain its weight. Seeing those princes to be deficient in valor, I rejected them. Hear, O great sage, what those princes did after that.

Considering themselves insulted by me, those kings, extremely enraged as they were, laid siege to the city of Mithilā. After a full year had passed, all my resources were exhausted, for which I was extremely distressed. As such, I propitiated all the gods by practicing austerities. Highly pleased, the gods gave me a complete army of horses, elephants, chariots and infantry. When the siege was broken and their soldiers slaughtered, the evil-acting princes whose valor had been brought into question fled like cowards in all directions with their ministers. This is that supremely effulgent bow, O tiger among sages. I shall also show it to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, O sage of noble vows. If Rāma can string that bow, I shall give Him my daughter Sītā.

RĀMA BREAKS THE BOW

After King Janaka finished speaking, the great sage Viśvāmitra said to the monarch: "Show the bow to Rāma." Then King Janaka instructed his counselors: "Bring the divine bow smeared with sandalwood paste and draped with flower garlands." Being ordered by King Janaka, the shining ministers entered the city and carrying the bow before them, came out of the city. Five thousand big, strong men somehow or other managed to push the eight-wheeled box holding the bow. Bringing that iron box that held the bow, the ministers said to King Janaka, who was like a god: "O king, here is the bow honored by all kings. O ruler of Mithilā, if you wish, you may now show it."

When King Janaka king heard their announcement, he joined his palms and said to Viśvāmitra as well as to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: "Here is the excellent bow, O brāhmaṇa, which has been worshiped by my ancestors and by very powerful kings who were unable to bend it. The hosts of gods, as well as the asuras, rākṣasas, gandharvas, yakṣas, kinnaras and celestial serpents were unable to bend it. As such, how can any human bend this bow, string it, fix an arrow to it, pluck its string or weigh it in his hands? That very bow has been brought, O best of sages. Show it to the two princes."

Thereafter, Viśvāmitra said to Rāma: "My child, go see the bow." On the order of that great sage, Rāma opened the box in which the bow rested. Seeing it, He said: "I now grasp with my hand this divine bow. I shall also try to weigh it in My hands and even bend it." "Very well," said both the king and the sage. By the sage's word, Rāma sportingly grabbed the bow in the middle. As many thousands of people looked on, Rāma strung the bow, as if in jest. Having strung the bow, the most glorious and excellent of men began to bend it. At that moment, the bow broke in two. The noise was tremendous, like a clap of thunder, causing the earth to tremble, as when a mountain is shattered. Everyone was knocked over by the blast of that sound, except the sage, the king and the two sons of King Daśaratha. When

the people were reassured that everything was all right, the king, whose misgivings had been removed and was expert in speaking, spoke with joined palms to Viśvāmitra: "O master, now I have seen with my own eyes the prowess of Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha. This is amazing, unbelievable and most glorious. Having achieved Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha as Her husband, my daughter Sītā will bring fame to the dynasty of the Janakas. My pledge to give Sītā in marriage only in exchange for an act of valor has been fulfilled. My daughter, Sītā, who is dearer to me than life, remains to be given to Rāma. With your permission, O brāhmaṇa, let my counselors immediately leave for Ayodhyā. Bless you. Let them bring King Daśaratha to my capital with courteous words. Let them also tell everyone about Rāma's payment in valor and Sītā's betrothal to Him. Let them relate about the two descendants of Kakutstha who are protected by yourself. Moreover, let them affectionately bring King Daśaratha with haste."

Viśvāmitra said: "So be it." Summoning his counselors, the king dispatched them to Ayodhyā with instructions to narrate everything that had happened and also to bring King Daśaratha.

KING DAŚARATHA INFORMED OF RĀMA'S IMPENDING MARRIAGE

Ordered by King Janaka, the envoys rested their tired horses for three days on the way and entered the city of Ayodhyā. By King Daśaratha's command, they were brought inside the royal palace. There they met the aged King Daśaratha, who was like a god.

Their misgivings dispelled, all the envoys, with joined palms, spoke words that were sweet and courteous to the king: "Janaka, King of Mithilā, with the sacred fire placed before him, is constantly inquiring with sweet words full of affection about the perpetual welfare of you, your priests and attendants. Having inquired about your welfare, Janaka, the king of Mithilā, with the permission of Viśvāmitra, sends you the following message:

You must be familiar with my promise to give my daughter's hand for the price of valor. The kings became jealous for Sītā, but lacking sufficient valor, were turned away. My daughter has been won by your son Rāma, who came by luck to my capital, being led by the sage Viśvāmitra. That divine jewel among bows was broken in the middle by the great soul Rāma in a grand assembly of people. Sītā, who was won through a feat of valor, remains to be given by me to the great soul Rāma. I wish to fulfill my pledge. Please give your consent. Accompanied by your preceptor, with the family priest placed before you, please come quickly to see the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty. Bless you. Allow my pledge to be fulfilled, O lord of kings, thus you will be able to see the present blissfulness of your two sons.

"Thus are the sweet words spoken by the King of Mithilā, which were confirmed by Viśvāmitra and Śatānanda."

Hearing the message of the envoys, King Daśaratha was overjoyed. He said to Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva and his counselors: "Protected by Viśvāmitra,

the son of Kuśika, Rāma, who increases the bliss of His mother Kausalyā, along with His brother Lakṣmaṇa, is staying among the residents of Mithilā. The prowess of Rāma has been seen by the great soul Janaka. Now he wants to give his daughter in marriage to Rāma. If this news pleases you, let us go at once to King Janaka's city. Do not delay." The counselors, along with all the sages, said: "Very well." Highly pleased, the king said to Janaka's envoys: "Tomorrow we shall start." King Janaka's counselors, who were endowed with all good qualities and highly honored by King Daśaratha, passed the night happily in Ayodhyā.

DAŚARATHA PROCEEDS TO MITHILĀ FOR THE WEDDING

After the night was over, King Daśaratha, who was accompanied by his preceptors, relatives and friends, jubilantly addressed his minister Sumantra: "Today, let the treasury officials adorned with many jewels take abundant wealth from the treasury and carry it in the lead. Let my entire army of horses, elephants, chariots and infantry also proceed with haste. As soon as I command, let palanquins and horse-drawn vehicles be prepared. Let the brāhmaṇas Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, Jābāli, Kaśyapa, the long-lived Mārkaṇḍeya and Katyāyana lead the procession. Prepare my chariot. Do not tarry long. I am being hurried by King Janaka's envoys."

By the order of the king, the fourfold army followed behind the king, who was accompanied by the sages. After four days on the road, they reached the land of Videha where Mithilā is. When King Janaka heard of their arrival, he prepared everything for their reception. Approaching the elderly King Daśaratha, King Janaka experienced supreme bliss. In ecstasy, he said to King Daśaratha: "Welcome, O best of men. By our good fortune you have come, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. You will be able to see the blissfulness of your two sons, acquired through Their prowess. By our good fortune the great sage and most glorious Vasiṣṭha has come, along with all of the best brāhmaṇas expert in sacrificial performances and who are almost like gods. By good fortune my obstacle has been removed. By good fortune my dynasty has been honored by its relation with the descendants of the Raghu Dynasty, who are unexcelled in prowess and strength. Tomorrow morning, O king, at the conclusion of the sacrifice, you ought to celebrate the wedding with the help of these eminent sages."

Hearing his request, King Daśaratha, who was standing among the sages, himself an eloquent speaker, replied as follows to King Janaka: "I have heard in the past that a gift depends on the giver. We shall do whatever you say, O knower of righteousness." Hearing this virtuous and glorious reply

from the truthful king, the ruler of Mithilā was highly astonished. Filled with joy at meeting each other, the host of sages spent the night there comfortably. Then Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, with the sage Viśvāmitra leading, came before His father and touched his feet. Greatly delighted to see his two sons and duly honored by King Janaka, King Daśaratha passed the night most happily. After dutifully concluding the rites of the sacrifice and betrothing his two daughters to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, the glorious King Janaka retired for the night.

VAŚIṢṬHA RECOUNTS THE LINEAGE OF KING DAŚARATHA

After finishing his morning duties with the help of the great sages, the eloquent King Janaka said to his family priest Śatānanda: "My glorious brother known as Kuśadhvaṇa, who is valorous and righteous, is residing in the auspicious city of Sāṅkāśyā, which, with its formidable surrounding walls, resembles the celestial Puṣṭaka airship of Kuvera. He drinks the water of the Ikṣumatī River which flows nearby. I wish to see him here because I consider him the protector of this sacrifice. He will enjoy with me this joyous occasion."

When Janaka said this in the presence of Śatānanda, several grave attendants arrived and Janaka instructed them. By the order of the king, they proceeded on swift horses in the same way that Indra's servants went to bring Viṣṇu in His incarnation as Vāmana. Reaching Sāṅkāśyā, they saw Kuśadhvaṇa and informed him about what had happened and about what Janaka was thinking. When the king heard from the swift messengers what had taken place, at the behest of King Janaka, Kuśadhvaṇa went to Mithilā. There he saw the great soul Janaka, who is fond of righteousness. Greeting Śatānanda and the most virtuous King Janaka, he sat down upon a brilliant throne fit for royalty.

Having both sat down, the two brothers of immeasurable brilliance dispatched their foremost counselor Sudāmana: "Go quickly, O chief of counselors, to the insurmountable King Daśaratha, whose bodily effulgence is immeasurable, and bring him, along and his sons and ministers." Reaching the tent where the members of the Raghu Dynasty were staying, he saw King Daśaratha and greeted him by bowing his head. Then he said: "O ruler of Ayodhyā, Janaka, the ruler of Mithilā, desires to see you along with your preceptor and priests."

Hearing the counselor's message, King Daśaratha went with his accompanying sages and relatives to where King Janaka was waiting. King Daśaratha then spoke the following words to King Janaka: "O Mahārāja, it is known that Vasiṣṭha is the worshipable deity of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. The mighty sage Vasiṣṭha is our spokesman at all occasions. In the presence of all these great sages and with the consent of Viśvāmitra, the virtuous Vasiṣṭha will recount my genealogy." When Daśaratha was silent, the great sage Vasiṣṭha began speaking to Janaka in the company of his family priest:

"Sprung from the Unmanifested, Lord Brahmā is eternal, immortal and undecaying. From him was born Marīci, and from Marīci was born Kaśyapa. Vivasvān was born from Kaśyapa, and Vivasvān's son was known as Manu. Manu was the first prajāpati and Ikṣvāku was his son. You may note that Ikṣvāku was the first king of Ayodhyā. Ikṣvāku's glorious son was the well-known Kuśi. To Kuśi was born a glorious son named Vikuśi. Vikuśi's son was the mighty and splendorous Bāṇa. Bāṇa's son was the powerful Anaraṇya. From Anaraṇya, Pṛthu was born, and from Pṛthu, Triśaṅku. Triśaṅku's son was the highly famous Dhundhumāra. From Dhundhumāra was born the mighty warrior Yuvanaśva. Yuvanaśva's son was the world emperor Māndhātā. Māndhātā's son was the glorious Susandhi. Susandhi had two sons-Dhruvasandhi and Prasenajit.

"The famous Dhruvasandhi's son was known by the name Bharata. From Bharata was born a most powerful son named Asita. Against him stood the kings of the Haihaiyas, Tālajaṅghas and valiant Śaśabindus. While engaged in war with them, Asita was defeated in battle and banished from his kingdom. He went to the Himalaya Mountains with his two wives. Very few of his forces survived to accompany him. Eventually he met his death there. His two wives had meanwhile become pregnant, so it is heard. One of the queens administered poison to the other in order to abort her fetus. Then the descendant of Bhṛgu, known by the name Cyavana, came to that pleasant mountain peak, desiring to reside there. At that time, one of the queens, Kālindī by name, whose eyes were as broad as lotus petals, being desirous of bearing a noteworthy son, approached the sage, who was as effulgent as a god, and praised him. Regarding the birth of a son, the sage said to her: "From your womb, O most fortunate lady, will be born after

some time a virtuous and most powerful son. He will have tremendous prowess and strength. The glorious child will be born along with the poison that was administered to you. Do not worry, O lotus-eyed lady." After offering homage to Cyavana, the widowed queen who was devoted to her husband returned to her residence. After some time she gave birth. The other co-wife of King Asita had given her poison to kill the fetus. Because the child was born along with that poison, it was named Sagara. Sagara had a son named Asamañja, and from Asamañja was born Amśumān. Dilīpa was the son of Amśumān, and Dilīpa's son was Bhagīratha. From Bhagīratha, Kakutstha was born; and from Kakutstha, Raghu was born. Raghu's son was the powerful Pravṛddha, who later was cursed to become a man-eating rākṣasa. After that he became known as Kalmāṣapāda. From Pravṛddha was born Śaṅkhaṇa. Sudarśana was born from Śaṅkhaṇa, and Agnivarṇa from Sudarśana. Śighraga was the son of Agnivarṇa, and Śighraga's son was Maru. Maru's son was Praśuśruka, and Ambarīṣa was born from Praśuśruka. Ambarīṣa's son was Emperor Nahuṣa. Nahuṣa's son was Yayāti, and Nābhāga was born from Yayāti. From Nābhāga was born Aja, and from Aja was born Daśaratha. From this Daśaratha were born the two brothers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

"I request your two daughters for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who are descendants of the kings of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, who, from the very beginning, are pure, supremely righteous, valiant and truthful. You should give your daughters to such worthy suitors, O best of men."

JANAKA RECOUNTS HIS GENEALOGY

When Vasiṣṭha finished speaking, King Janaka, with folded hands, replied: "Bless you. Please listen to the glories of my dynasty. Before giving away one's daughter, the genealogy of the dynasty must be recounted by one born in it, O best of men. Therefore, learn it from me.

"There was a king famous throughout the three worlds for his activities. He was the most righteous person and the best of those endowed with all good qualities. His name was Nimi. His son was named Mithi. Janaka was the son of Mithi. He was the first king to bear the name Janaka. From Janaka was born Udāvasu. From Udāvasu was born the righteous-minded Nandivardhana. The son of Nandivardhana was a warrior known by the name Suketu. From Suketu was born the powerful Devarāta. From King Devarāta was born a son known as Bṛhadratha. From Bṛhadratha was born a mighty warrior named Mahāvīra. Mahāvīra's steadfast and valiant son was Sudhṛti. Sudhṛti's virtuous son was Dhṛṣṭaketu. King Dhṛṣṭaketu's son was known as Haryaśva. Haryaśva's son was Maru, and Maru's son was Pratīndhaka. Pratīndhaka's son was the righteous King Kīrtiratha. The son of Kīrtiratha was known as Devamīḍha. Devamīḍha's son was Vibudha, and Vibudha's son was Mahīdhraka. The son of Mahīdhraka was the most powerful King Kīrtirāta. From King Kīrtirāta was born Mahāromā. From Mahāromā was born the virtuous Svarṇaromā, and from King Svarṇaromā was born Hrasvaromā.

"That pious and great-souled king had two sons. I am the oldest son and my younger brother is the valiant Kuśadhvaṇa. Being the eldest son, my father installed me as king and, entrusting Kuśadhvaṇa in my care, went to the forest. When my aged father ascended to heaven, I dutifully executed the affairs of the kingdom, looking after my brother Kuśadhvaṇa with affection, as if he were a god. Some time later, however, came the powerful King Sudhanvā from the city of Sāṅkāśyā to besiege the city of Mithilā. He sent me this message:

'Deliver to me the excellent bow belonging to Lord Śiva, and also your daughter Sītā, whose eyes are like lotus flowers.'

When I did not deliver these to him, he declared war against me. In the ensuing battle, I personally killed Sudhanvā with my own hands. Having eliminated King Sudhanvā, O best of sages, I installed my own valiant brother Kuśadhvaṇa on the throne of Sāṅkāśyā.

"My brother is the younger, O great sage, and I, the older. It is with the greatest pleasure that I give you, O best of sages, these two maidens. Sītā is for Rāma, and Ūrmilā is for Lakṣmaṇa. Bless you. I declare three times that I gladly give to you, O best of sages, the two maidens: Sītā, who could only be gained by a feat of valor and who is like the daughter of a god, and my second daughter Ūrmilā."

Then King Janaka addressed King Daśaratha: "For the good fortune of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, give away cows in charity and perform the obsequial rites of your ancestors. Then you can perform the marriage ceremony. Today the asterism Maghā is in the ascendant. Perform the wedding on the third day, O king, when the asterism Phalgu is in the ascendant. After that, distribute gifts to procure the future happiness of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa."

WIVES FOR BHARATA AND ŚATRUGHNA

To King Janaka, who had just finished talking, Viśvāmitra, accompanied by Vasiṣṭha said the following: "Inconceivable and immeasurable are the dynasties of Ikṣvāku and Vaideha, O best of men. There is no equal to them. The matching of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with Sītā and Ūrmilā is similar in virtue and physical beauty. There is still more to be said, O best of men. Listen to my words. Here is your younger brother King Kuśadhvaṇa, a knower of righteousness. I seek the hands of Kuśadhvaṇa's two daughters whose beauty is unequalled in this world, O king. I ask these two maidens as wives for these princes-the youthful Bharata and the wise Śatrughna. These four sons of King Daśaratha are endowed with exceptional beauty and youth. They are equal to the protectors of the world, and are equal to the gods in prowess. By the auspicious marriage of these four couples, let the Ikṣvāku Dynasty be bound by this relation to you, O king. Do not be perturbed by this."

Hearing Viśvāmitra's request, which was seconded by Vasiṣṭha, King Janaka, with joined palms, addressed the two sages: "I consider my dynasty fortunate indeed that you two great sages have personally ordered us to join our families by these perfect matches. Let it be so. Good fortune be unto you all! Let these two daughters of Kuśadhvaṇa be accepted as wives by Bharata and Śatrughna. Let all four princes accept the hands of these maidens on the same day, O great sage. It should be done on the fourth day, for the wise extol a marriage on the day when the Pūrvā Phalgunī and Uttarā Phalgunī asterisms are in the ascendant, since Lord Brahmā presides over that day."

Having made this humble request, King Janaka stood up with folded hands and addressed the two distinguished sages: "The highest merit has been conferred on me. I am the disciple of you two, just as King Daśaratha is. Please seat yourselves on these comfortable thrones, O best of sages. As this city is King Daśaratha's, so also is the city of Ayodhyā mine.

There is no doubt about your authority in these matters. Therefore do whatever is necessary."

While King Janaka of the Videha Dynasty was speaking in this way, King Daśaratha, a descendant of the Raghu Dynasty jubilantly addressed the king: "You two brothers, the rulers of Mithilā, possess incalculable qualities. You have greatly honored the assembled sages and kings. May you attain good fortune. Bless you both. We shall now retire to our quarters, where we shall perform the funeral rites of our ancestors according to the scriptural rules."

Taking leave of the emperor and placing the two great sages before him, the famous King Daśaratha departed. Going to his residence, the king performed the obsequial rites according to the rules. The next day, at sunrise, he gave away cows in charity. On behalf of each son, the king gave one hundred thousand cows to the brāhmaṇas, in accordance with the principles of religion. Each cow was with a calf, had her horns plated with gold and a brass bucket for milking. King Daśaratha, who was very affectionate to his sons, thus gave four hundred thousand cows in charity to the brāhmaṇas. After that act of charity was performed, King Daśaratha was surrounded by his four sons. Thus he resembled Lord Brahmā when he sits peacefully, surrounded by the guardians of the worlds.

VASIṢṬHA PERFORMS THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

In that very day when King Daśaratha gave cows in charity, Yudhājit, the son of the king of Kaikeya and Bharata's maternal uncle, arrived. Seeing the King Daśaratha and inquiring about his welfare, he said: "Out of affection, the king of Kaikeya has inquired about your welfare, adding that everything is fine with those whose well-being you desire. The king was desirous of seeing my nephew, O lord of kings. For that purpose I went to Ayodhyā. But in Ayodhyā I heard that you had accompanied your sons to Mithilā for Their marriage. In a great hurry I have come, desiring to see my sister's son."

Then King Daśaratha, seeing that this dear guest had arrived and that he was worthy of honor, entertained him with the greatest respect. Then King Daśaratha passed the night in the company of his great-souled sons. At the break of day, he got up and performed his morning duties. Then, placing the sages before him, he went to the sacrificial arena. When the right moment arrived, Rāma, decorated with all kinds of ornaments and accompanied by His brothers, performed rituals for auspiciousness. With Vasiṣṭha and other sages leading Them, They entered the arena. After Vasiṣṭha arrived, he spoke as follows to Janaka: "King Daśaratha and his exceptional sons who are dressed festively for this auspicious occasion are waiting for you, the donor, for gifts can only occur when there are both a donor and a receiver. In this regards, to perform the marriage rites, you must carry out your corresponding duties."

When the magnanimous Vasiṣṭha had spoken thus, King Janaka, who was conversant with the principles of righteousness, replied: "Who stands guarding my door, and whose order does the king seek? What hesitation should there be in entering one's own home? This kingdom is as much yours as it is mine. Having performed the preliminary auspicious rituals, my daughters, shining like flames of fire, are seated at the foot of the altar, O best of sages. I am presently waiting for you at the altar. Please

perform the ritual for warding off inauspiciousness. Why is everything being delayed?"

Hearing King Janaka's reply, King Daśaratha ushered in his sons and all the sages. Then Janaka, the king of the Videhas, said to Vasiṣṭha: "O pious sage, please perform the marriage ceremony of Rāma, the joy of the world, with the help of the sages." Saying "Let it be so," the great sage Vasiṣṭha placed Viśvāmitra and the pious Śatānanda before himself and prepared a sacrificial altar in the center of the pavilion according to scriptural directions. He decorated the altar all around with sandalwood paste and flowers. He also placed around it gold plates and different colored pots filled with sprouts, earthenware bowls filled with sprouts, incense holders with billowing clouds of incense, conchshells on stands, sacrificial spoons and ladles, cups filled with liquids for the ritual washing of the hands, feet and mouth, and other articles of worship. There were also baskets filled with parched rice and whole grains of rice stained with turmeric powder. Vasiṣṭha spread blades of kuśa grass of equal length around the sacrificial altar and placed the sacred fire upon it.

After escorting in Sītā, who was completely decorated in golden ornaments, and seating her before the sacred fire at the side of Rāma, King Janaka addressed Rāma: "Here is my daughter Sītā to be Your assistant in executing Your sacred duties. Take her hand and accept her. Good luck to You. This fortunate lady will be devoted to You, following You always like a shadow."

After the king said this, he poured water consecrated with prayers from the spout of a copper vessel over Rāma's hand. At that moment the gods and sages exclaimed: "Very good! Very good!" The air reverberated with the beating of celestial drums and showers of flowers fell from the sky. After giving his daughter Sītā to Rāma by the pouring of water consecrated with prayers, King Janaka, overjoyed as he was, said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Come, Lakṣmaṇa. Good luck to You. I offer You Ūrmilā. Take her hand and accept her. Do not waste time." King Janaka then addressed Bharata: "Please take the hand of Māṇḍavī, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty." Then the righteous lord of Mithilā said to Śatrughna: "With Your hand, take the hand of Śrutakīrti. All four of You are gentlemen and have observed the appropriate vows. Let Yourselves be married, O descendants of Kakutstha. Do not delay."

Hearing Janaka's words, the four princes, who were obedient to Vasiṣṭha's instructions, grasped with Their hands the hands of Their brides. After circumambulating clockwise with Their brides the sacred fire, the sacrificial altar, King Janaka and the sages, They underwent the marriage ceremony as described in the scriptures. A tremendous shower of brilliant flowers fell from the sky, accompanied by the beating of celestial kettledrums and the sounds of singing with musical instruments. The celestial maidens danced ecstatically and the gandharvas sang sweetly. Such were the wonderful occurrences during the wedding of the sons of King Daśaratha. While such musical instruments were playing, the four princes went around the fire three times and married Their brides. Then They, being the source of joy for the Raghu Dynasty, went with Their wives to Their tents. Beholding Them, King Daśaratha followed behind with the sages and family relations.

THE WEDDING PARTY MEETS PARAŚURĀMA

When the night had passed, the great sage Viśvāmitra took leave of the two kings and set out for the northern mountains. After Viśvāmitra had left, King Daśaratha took leave of King Janaka and prepared to return to his own capital. Then Janaka, the king of the Videhas, gave a rich dowry to the princes: many hundreds of thousands of cows, premium carpets, silk cloth and thousands of garments, elephants, horses, chariots and foot soldiers, one hundred maidens adorned with celestial beauty as companions for the brides, male and female servants, as well as gold, silver, pearls and coral. The king gladly gave this most excellent dowry. After giving presents profusely, King Janaka took leave of King Daśaratha and entered his palace in Mithilā. Accompanied by his sons, King Daśaratha left for Ayodhyā, with the sages leading the way and the army following.

As they proceeded on their way, they suddenly heard from the sky the frightful shrieks of birds. On the ground, the deer all crossed their path from the left. Seeing this, the tiger among kings inquired from Vasiṣṭha: "I hear the frightful shrieks of birds, which is a bad sign, and deer cross my path from the left, which is a good sign. What is this that causes my heart to quiver? My mind is disturbed." The great sage Vasiṣṭha answered with a mellow voice: "Hear what it indicates. The shrieking birds portend that a great danger is imminent. The passing of the deer will allay that danger. Abandon your anxiety." As they were talking there, a storm rolled in. The whole earth shook and huge trees fell to the ground. The sun was covered in darkness and no one could see in any direction. Covered all over with dust, the army was dumbfounded. With the exception of Vasiṣṭha and the other sages and the king and his sons, everyone else fell unconscious on the spot. In that terrible darkness the army became covered in dust.

Then the king saw Jāmadagni, the descendant of Bhṛgu, the destroyer of kings, whose appearance was fearful, with his dreadlocks tied in

a bun on his head. He was as unassailable as Mount Kailāsa and as unbearable as the fire of annihilation. Blazing as he was with his effulgence, he was difficult to be seen by common people. With an axe resting on his right shoulder and a bow on his left, he held in his hand a lance that was like a bolt of lightning. Thus he resembled Śiva, the destroyer of the three cities of demons. Seeing him with his frightening appearance blazing like fire, the leading sages headed by Vasiṣṭha gathered together and discussed among themselves: "Let us hope, out of indignation over the murder of his father by warriors, he will not wipe out the warrior caste. Having already mitigated his anger by massacring the warrior caste in the past, surely he does not intend to do so again." Speaking in this way and bringing water to wash his hands, the sages approached Paraśurāma, whose appearance was terrifying, and addressed him sweetly, saying: "Rāma! Rāma!" After accepting the worship offered by the sages, the formidable Paraśurāma, the son of Jamadagni, addressed Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha:

PARAŚURĀMA CHALLENGES RĀMA TO STRING VIṢṆU'S BOW

O Rāma, son of Daśaratha, I have heard of Your wonderful prowess. I have heard all about how You broke Lord Śiva's bow. It is inconceivable that someone could have broken that bow. Hearing about that, I have come here, bringing another excellent bow. To this awesome bow which was given to me by my father Jamadagni, fix an arrow and draw it. Show us Your strength. After seeing Your strength in drawing the bow, I shall offer You a fight which will give credit to Your valor."

Hearing his challenge, King Daśaratha, with a downcast face and joined palms, said the following: "O glorious brāhmaṇa, after giving up your anger against the warrior caste and becoming pacified, you should assure the safety of my juvenile sons. Born in the line of the Bhārgavas, who are distinguished in erudition and vows, you put down your weapons, promising so to Indra. You then dedicated yourself to piety, giving the earth to Kaśyapa. Going to the forest, you took up residence on Mount Mahendra. You have come here to totally destroy me, O great sage. If you so much as kill Rāma, we shall all be unable to live."

When King Daśaratha had said this, the mighty Paraśurāma disregarded his plea and said to Rāma: "The two divine bows honored by the whole world are superb, firm, strong, outstanding and well-made by Viśvakarmā. The first is the bow given by the gods to Lord Śiva when he wanted to fight the demon Tripura, the same having been broken by You, O descendant of Kakutstha. The second unassailable bow was given by the foremost gods to Lord Viṣṇu. This is that bow of Viṣṇu, O Rāma, which can destroy the enemy's stronghold. It is in fact equal in strength to Śiva's bow.

"When Lord Śiva killed the Tripura demon, all the gods approached Brahmā with the desire to know the strengths and weakness of Śiva and Viṣṇu. Understanding their intention, Brahmā, the foremost of those

dedicated to truth, instigated enmity between Śiva and Viṣṇu. On account of the enmity, a great and electrifying battle ensued between Śiva and Viṣṇu, who were eager to conquer each other. During the fight, the fearsome bow of Śiva was loosened and Śiva himself dazed by the roar of Viṣṇu. Then all the gods, sages and cāraṇas came there to pacify the two great divinities. Seeing that Śiva's bow was slackened by the prowess of Viṣṇu, the gods and sages considered Viṣṇu greater. Angered at being slighted, Lord Śiva delivered the bow and arrows into the hands of the glorious royal sage Devarāta of the Videha Dynasty.

Lord Viṣṇu, however, by His mercy, entrusted His bow, which is capable of shattering the enemy's stronghold, to Ṛcika, the descendant of Bhṛgu. The glorious Ṛcika bestowed that divine bow upon his son Jamadagni, who was my father, although he was too meek to retaliate against anyone. My father, who was invested with the strength of austerities, entrusted that weapon to me. Afterwards, Kārtavīryārjuna, considering my father an ordinary man, killed him. Hearing of my father's most cruel and undesired death, out of anger I liquidated the warrior caste many times, even as they were born. After acquiring the whole earth in this way, at the end of the sacrifice which I performed to rid myself of the sin of murder, I gave the earth as charity to Kaśyapa. Having done so, I went to Mount Mahendra to increase my strength through austerities. This is that bow of Viṣṇu which belonged to my illustrious grandfather, O Rāma. Placing foremost Your duty as a warrior, take this excellent bow. Put an arrow to it and draw it. If You are able to do so, I shall thereafter engage in battle with You."

PARAŚURĀMA RECOGNIZES RĀMA TO BE LORD VIṢṆU

Upon hearing Paraśurāma's challenge and seeing what effect it had on His father King Daśaratha, Rāma was tongue-tied for some time. Then He said to Paraśurāma: "O descendant of Bhṛgu, I have heard what you have done to pay the debt to your father, and I approve of it. Since you despise Me, who am devoted to the duties of a warrior, as if I were devoid of potency, now see My strength and My prowess."

Saying this, in anger Rāma swiftly grabbed the bow and arrow from the hands of Paraśurāma. Rāma raised the bow, placed an arrow on it and drew it. Then He angrily said to Paraśurāma: "You are worshipable by Me because you are a brāhmaṇa, and also because of your kinship with Viśvāmitra. Therefore, I cannot shoot the deadly arrow at you, O Paraśurāma. I shall therefore take away either your ability to move swiftly everywhere, or the unequaled worlds which you have attained by dint of your austerities-this is My idea. This transcendental arrow of Lord Viṣṇu, which can crush an enemy's stronghold or smash the pride of an adversary by its power, never misses its target."

Placing Lord Brahmā before them, all the gods and sages came there to see Rāma wielding that excellent bow of Viṣṇu. All the gandharvas, apsarās, siddhas, cāraṇas, kinnaras, yakṣas, rākṣasas and nāgas came to see that wonderful event. When Rāma raised the excellent bow, everyone was dumbfounded. Paraśurāma himself was rendered powerless and gazed at Rāma. Dazed and rendered powerless by the brilliance of Rāma, whose eyes were like the petals of a lotus, Paraśurāma spoke with a slow and deep voice: "When I previously gave the earth to Kaśyapa, he commanded me: "You may no longer inhabit my kingdom." Obeying the words of my guru, I do not remain on the earth at night, for I have promised this before him. As far as my movement is concerned, do not deprive me of that, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. I shall forthwith go at the speed of the mind to the

super-excellent Mount Mahendra. You may, O Rāma, destroy with the arrow the unparalleled worlds which I have achieved by my austerities. Do not delay. By Your seizing and bending this bow, I can understand that You are the imperishable Lord Viṣṇu, the slayer of the Madhu demon and Supreme Lord of the gods. All glory to You, O chastiser of foes. All these hosts of gods gathered here are looking at You, whose activities are unparalleled and who is unmatched in combat. My defeat before You is not a cause of embarrassment for me, for I have been reduced by You who are the Lord of the three worlds. Release that unequaled arrow, O Rāma, then I shall retire to the excellent Mount Mahendra."

After Paraśurāma had spoken to Rāma in that way, Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, fired that supermost arrow. Rāma saw it destroy all the worlds which Paraśurāma had acquired by means of his austerities. Paraśurāma thereafter immediately left for Mount Mahendra. Then all directions were cleared of darkness and the gods and sages praised Rāma, who stood holding the bow. Circumambulating Rāma, Paraśurāma offered all respect to the honorable son of King Daśaratha, and then went on his way.

THE RETURN OF THE WEDDING PARTY TO AYODHYĀ

After the departure of Paraśurāma, the peaceful-minded Rāma, son of Daśaratha, delivered the bow into the hands of the immeasurable Varuṇa. After offering obeisances to Vasiṣṭha and other outstanding sages, and seeing that His father Daśaratha was in a daze, Rāma said to him: "Paraśurāma has gone. Under your protection, let this army return to Ayodhyā."

Hearing Rāma's words, King Daśaratha embraced Him and smelled His head. The news of Paraśurāma's departure delighted the king, who felt as if he and his son had been born again on that occasion. Urged onward by King Daśaratha, the army soon reached the capital, which was festively decorated with flags and banners and resounding with the music of trumpets. Its streets were freshly washed and heaps of flowers scattered over them. The citizens' faces shone with satisfaction over the entry of their king, and they carried auspicious articles in their hands. The people of the city, accompanied by the resident brāhmaṇas, came out a long distance to greet the king.

Followed by his glorious sons, the exalted king entered his delightful palace, which was as huge as a Himalayan mountain. Entertained with luxuries by his own people, the king was jubilant. Kausalyā, Sumitrā, the shapely Kaikeyī and other royal women engaged themselves in preparing the reception of the brides. Then the royal women received the highly fortunate Sītā, the noteworthy Ūrmilā, and the two daughters of Kuśadhvaja, Māṇḍavī and Śrutakīrti. The beautiful ladies dressed in silken garments attended a function in which auspicious hymns were chanted and the oblations of clarified butter were offered in the sacred fire. Later they all went to the temples to worship. Offering respects to those who deserved it, they all dwelt happily in the palace with their husbands. Newly wedded, skilled in weaponry, possessed of wealth and surrounded by well-wishers, those exceptional princes engaged Themselves in the service of Their father.

Some time after this, King Daśaratha said to his son Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī: "My son, your maternal uncle Yudhājit, the son of the king of Kaikeya, has come to take You to his father." Hearing King Daśaratha's statement, Bharata prepared to leave with His brother Śatrughna. Taking leave of His valiant father, of Rāma, who accomplished things with no trouble, and of His mothers, He set off with Śatrughna. Overjoyed at getting Bharata along with Śatrughna, Yudhājit, entered his capital, highly pleasing his father.

When Bharata had left, Rāma and the strong Lakṣmaṇa engaged Themselves in worshiping Their father, who was like a god. Placing His father's order before everything else, Rāma thoroughly executed the affairs of the state in a manner that was enjoyable and beneficial for the citizens. Personally doing the duties of His mothers, Rāma, who was the most self-restrained, from time to time looked after the affairs of His elders. In this way, King Daśaratha, the brāhmaṇas, the merchants and all the residents of the kingdom were pleased by the character and conduct of Rāma. In this world, Rāma, whose valor was unfailing, surpassed His other brothers in good qualities, as Brahmā surpasses all beings.

The wise Rāma, whose mind was absorbed in Sītā, having offered Himself to Her heart, enjoyed with Her for many months. Sītā was most dear to Rāma, having been made His wife by Her father. Because of Her exceptional qualities and physical beauty, His affection for Her was ever-increasing. Her husband too, by His fine qualities and good looks, established a firm hold on Her heart. Sītā, the daughter of the King of Mithilā, whose beauty was like a goddess and who resembled the goddess of fortune Herself, was able to delineate in minute detail with Her mind what was in the mind of Lord Rāma. Having married that unexcelled princess, who was the object of His love and thereby experiencing great delight, He shone excessively, as does the all-powerful Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord of the immortal gods, in the company of the goddess of fortune.