

RAMAYANA

Translated by Robert Biggs

PART VII

UTTARA-KĀṆḌA

Edited by Josh Rutherford & Piotr Gajos

© *Robert Biggs* 2014

With love, respect and endless support
— *Sourcebits Family*

AUDIENCE OF RĀMA WITH GREAT SAGES

When, after slaying the rākṣasas, Rāma had regained His kingdom, all the great sages came to felicitate Him. From the east came the sages Kauśika, Yavakrīta, Gārgya, Gālava and Kaṇva, the son of Medhātithi. Svastyātreyā, the holy Namuci, Pramuci, the holy Atri, Sumukha and Vimukha came with Agastya and reside in the south. Nṛṣaṅgu, Kavaṣa, Dhaumya and the great sage Kauśeya, who reside in the west, came along with their disciples. Vasiṣṭha, Kaśyapa, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Jamadagni and Bharadvāja—the seven sages who always reside in the norther region, who were as brilliant as sacrificial fires, conversant with the different branches of Vedic learning and learned in different scriptures, arrived at Rāma's palace and waited at the door.

The righteous and best of sages Agastya told the doorkeeper: “Inform Lord Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha that we sages have come.” When the doorkeeper, who was skilled in decision-making and reading the minds of others, well behaved, expert and courageous, heard what Agastya said, he hurried to where Lord Rāma was. As soon as he saw Lord Rāma, who was as effulgent as a full moon, he informed Him of the arrival of the foremost of sages Agastya. Hearing of the arrival of that sage who was as effulgence as the newly risen sun, Rāma asked the doorkeeper to allow them to enter as they pleased.

Seeing that the sages had arrived, Rāma stood up with joined palms, respectfully offered them water to wash their feet and hands, and a cow. After greeting them, Rāma ordered seating to be arranged for them. When these best of sages were seated as they deserved on mats made of kuśa grass embroidered with gold trim and covered with deer skin, Rāma had enquired about their welfare and of that of their superiors and disciples. Then those great sages spoke as follows to Rāma:

“O strong-armed Rāma, we are well in every way. Fortunately we see that You are well after slaying Your enemy. Luckily, O king, You killed Rāvaṇa, who caused the world to wail. Undoubtedly Rāvaṇa and his sons and grandsons were no problem for You, who could conquer the three worlds with Your bow. Fortunately, O Rāma, You slayed Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas. By our good fortune we now see You victorious and accompanied by Sītā and Your righteous brother Lakṣmaṇa, who is always engaged in accomplishing what is beneficial to You. Today, O king, we see You in the company of Your mothers and brothers. Luckily You killed the night-stalkers Prahasta, Vikāṭa, Virūpākṣa, Mahodara and Akampana, who was difficult to overcome. Luckily You killed Kumbhakarṇa in battle, though there was no one greater than him in physical measurement. Fortunately, O Rāma, You killed the very powerful night-stalkers Triśīrā, Atikāya, Devāntaka and Narāntaka. Fortunately You also killed in battle the two rākṣasas Kumbha and Nikumbha, the fearsome sons of Kumbhakarṇa. Luckily You killed Yuddhonmatta and Matta, who were just like death personified, along with the mighty Yajñakopa and the rākṣasa named Dhūmrākṣa. Fortunately You killed these rākṣasas skilled in hand weapons and technological weapons when they were carrying out a frightful massacre with their arrows like death itself.”

“By good fortune You were victorious in the encounter with the lord of the rākṣasas, who could not even be killed by the gods. It is not at all surprising that You defeated him, but it is fortunate that You were able to kill his son Indrajit when he fought a duel with You. Luckily, O strong-armed one, You got free from Indrajit’s tangle of arrows when he was running towards You like death personified and were then able to defeat him. Hearing about Indrajit’s death, we all felicitate You. He was unkillable by any living being, and used his knowledge of the black arts in battle. We were really surprised to hear that You had killed Indrajit. Certainly it is our good fortune that You have given us this auspicious and kind gift of freedom from fear, O conqueror of enemies.”

When Rāma heard what the self-realized sages said, He was extremely amazed and questioned them with joined palms: “O holy ones, passing over the valiant night-stalkers Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa, why do you

praise Indrajit? Ignoring the valorous heroes Mahodara, Prahasta, Virūpākṣa, Matta and Unmatta and the mighty Devāntaka and Narāntaka, why do you praise Indrajit? Disregarding the gigantic and mighty Triśirā and the night-stalker Dhūmrākṣa, why do you praise Indrajit? How is his potency and what are his strength and prowess like? What is the reason he is considered greater than his father? If it is possible, I would like to hear, but I am certainly not ordering you to do so. If it is not a secret not to be told, I would like to hear it. Please tell me. How did he obtain his boons and how did he defeat Lord Indra? How did he become more powerful than his father, Rāvaṇa? O leader of sages, please tell Me right now everything about how Indrajit surpassed even his father in battle, how he managed to defeat Lord Indra and how he received his boons, for I am very inquisitive.”

PULASTYA AND THE BIRTH OF VIŚRAVĀ

When the powerful sage Agastya heard what the great soul Rāma said, he replied as follows: “O Rāma, hear of Indrajit’s activities and great strength, by which he slew his enemies and could not be slain by them. Meanwhile I shall tell You about the origin of Rāvaṇa’s dynasty, his birth, his boons and how he received them. O Rāma in the Kṛtayuga there lived a brāhmaṇa sage named Pulastya, who was a son of Lord Brahmā, the creator. Pulastya was exactly like his father. It is not possible to praise the qualities of his nature and good character. By saying that he was a son of Lord Brahmā is sufficient to describe his qualities. Because he was the son of Lord Brahmā, he was very dear to all the gods. By his good qualities this great intellectual became dear to everyone. Being devoted to virtue, that great sage went to the hermitage of Tṛṇabindu on the slope of Mount Meru and lived there. That righteous soul was engaged in the study of the sacred scriptures, the control of his senses and the practice of austerities. Because the twice-born Pulastya’s place was so pleasant, being enjoyable in all seasons and nicely forested, the daughters of sages, nāgas, rājarṣis and apsarās would come there to enjoy themselves with singing, musical instruments and frolicsome amusements. This disturbed the sage’s practice of austerities in a faultless manner. He thereupon became angry and said: ‘Whatever women I happen to lay eyes on will become pregnant. When the maidens heard what the great sage said, they became afraid of the curse of the brāhmaṇa and fled from there.

“The daughter of the rājarṣi Tṛṇabindu did not hear about this curse. She went to Pulastya’s hermitage and wandered about fearlessly, but did not find her friends there. At that time the mighty sage who was a son of Lord Brahmā was reciting the Vedas there. He was glowing because of his austerities. The maiden heard him reciting the Vedas and saw the wealth of his austerities. Suddenly her body became pale and the symptoms of pregnancy became clearly manifested. Seeing her transformation, she became bewildered. Saying to herself, ‘I do not understand what this is,’ she

went to her father's hermitage and stood before him. Seeing her in that condition, Tṛṇabindu said: 'Why is your body in this unlikely condition?'

"With joined palms, that miserable maiden spoke to her austere father: 'I do not know why my body is like this, O father. Earlier I went by myself to the great self-realized sage Pulastya's divine hermitage to find my friends. I did not see any of my friends there, but I saw that my appearance had changed, and in fear I came here.'

"The royal sage Tṛṇabindu, who was glowing with luster from his penances, entered into meditation and saw that it was caused by the sage Pulastya. Understanding the nature of the curse, the self-realized sage took his daughter, went to the sage Pulastya and said: 'O holy one, please accept the gift of my daughter, who is decorated with her own good qualities and who has come of her own volition. She will doubtlessly always engage herself in serving you, whose limbs are exhausted from the practice of austerities.' Desiring to accept the maiden, the twice-born sage said yes to the rajarṣi who was speaking in such a righteous manner. After giving away his daughter, King Tṛṇabindu returned to his own hermitage, and the maiden stayed there, pleasing her husband with her qualities.

"That best of sages was pleased with her character and conduct. Out of affection the powerful sage spoke the following words: 'O shapely lady, I am extremely pleased with the wealth of your good qualities. Therefore, O lady, today I shall give you a son equal to me. He will continue both of our lines and will be known as Paulastya. Because you have heard me reciting the Vedas, he will also undoubtedly be known as Viśravā.'

"Hearing this, that lady was extremely pleased at heart. Very soon she gave birth to a son named Viśravā. He was well-known throughout the three worlds because of his glory and righteousness. He was well-versed in the scriptures and saw everyone as equal. The sage Viśravā engaged himself in the observance of vows and practiced austerities like his father."

THE BIRTH OF VAIŚRAVAṆA

Agastya continued: “Pulastya’s son Viśravā was soon engaged in austerities just like his father. He was truthful, well-behaved, self-controlled, dedicated to studying the Vedas, pure, unattached to all kinds of sense enjoyment and always intent on the practice of righteousness. When the great sage Bharadvāja came to know of Viśravā’s way of life, he gave his daughter, Devavarṇinī, to him as a wife. Accepting Bharadvāja’s daughter dutifully, Viśravā began to think of begetting a son and procuring his own well-being. Exceedingly pleased, Viśravā, the best of sages, begot in her a most wonderful son endowed with vigor and all the good qualities of a brāhmaṇa. Pulastya, the grandfather, was overjoyed when the child was born. Seeing that the child would do good for the world and become the lord of wealth, Viśravā gave him a name in consultation with celestial sages. The sages said: ‘Since he is the son of Viśravā and is just like his father, he will therefore be known as Vaiśravaṇa.’

“The splendorous Vaiśravaṇa then went to a forest suitable for the practice of austerities and grew up there like a fire fed oblations of clarified butter. While living in that hermitage, it occurred to the great soul to practice the highest activity of righteousness, for righteousness is the highest goal. While practicing austerities for thousands of years in that great forest, he subdued his senses by severe means and performed the mightiest penances. After the completion of one thousand years, he followed all the appropriate rules, living first on just water, then air, then without anything at all. In that way one thousand years passed as if they were one year.

“Then, accompanied by Lord Indra and hosts of other gods, the highly glorious Lord Brahmā came to Vaiśravaṇa’s hermitage and spoke the following words: ‘O sage of noble vows, I am very pleased with your actions. O intelligent one, bless you! You deserve a boon. Choose one.’ Vaiśravaṇa said to Lord Brahmā: ‘O venerable one, I would like to be a loka-pāla, a guardian of the world and its protector.’

“With an overjoyed mind, Lord Brahmā, in the company of the hosts of gods, said: ‘Yes, I was just about to create the fourth of the lokapālas. Therefore, O knower of right action, go and take the position of lord of wealth in conjunction with Indra, Varuṇa and Yama. After Indra, Varuṇa and Yama, you will be the fourth lokapāla. Moreover, here is an aerial ship called Puṣpaka that is as brilliant as the sun. Accept this vehicle and become equal to the celestials. May you have good fortune. O lad, we are all going as we came, having accomplished our purpose by giving you these two boons.’ After saying this, Lord Brahmā returned to his own abode accompanied by all the gods. When Lord Brahmā and the gods had departed for the heavenly realm, the lord of wealth joined his palms and humbly said to his father: ‘O honorable one, I have achieved the boons I wanted from Lord Brahmā, but he did not designate where my residence should be. Therefore, find a good residence for me, O lord, where there will be no harm to any other living creature.’

“When spoken to in this way by his son, Viśravā, the best of sages, replied as follows: ‘Listen, O knower of right action and best of beings. On the southern shore of the ocean is a mountain named Trikūṭa. On its summit is a spacious city like Lord Indra’s capital. That charming city named Laṅkā was built by Viśvakarmā as a residence for the rākṣasas, as was the city of Amarāvati for Lord Indra. You can live there in Laṅkā without any misgiving. Bless you! That charming city has golden ramparts and a moat. It is equipped with war machines and weapons. Its archways are made of gold and vaidurya gems. The rākṣasas abandoned it long ago out of fear of Lord Viṣṇu. It is now free of rākṣasas. They have all fled to the nether region known as Rasātala. Laṅkā is now vacant and has no ruler. Go there, my son, and live as you please. Your stay there will be faultless and will not bother anyone.’

“When Vaiśravaṇa heard his father’s righteous advice, he settled in Laṅkā on the summit of the mountain. Before long, because of his good administration, the city became full of thousands of ever-contented nairṛtas. The righteous son of Viśravā and lord of the nairṛtas lived happily there in Laṅkā, which had the ocean as a moat. From time to time the righteous and humble lord of wealth went in the Puṣpaka airship to visit his mother and

father. Praised by hosts of gods and gandharvas as celestial damsels danced in his palace, the lord of wealth, glowing like the sun with its rays, would enjoy himself and sometimes go visit his father.”

HISTORY OF THE RĀKṢASAS

Rāma was surprised by what Agastya said, and so asked: “How is it that rākṣasas were living in Laṅkā even before Vaiśravaṇa?” Rāma shook His head as He stared at Agastya, who resembled the three sacrificial fires. Then Rāma smiled and said: “O honorable one, I am very surprised to hear you say that Laṅkā belonged to the rākṣasas in the distant past. We heard that the rākṣasas are descended from Pulastya, but now you imply that they have some other origin. Were they more powerful than Rāvaṇa, Kumbhakarna, Prahasta, Vikaṭa and Rāvaṇa’s sons? Who was their powerful progenitor and what was his name? What offense did they commit that they were driven away by Lord Viṣṇu? O sinless one, tell Me all about this in detail. Remove my curiosity, as the sun dispels darkness.”

Hearing Rāma’s beautiful and sophisticated inquiry, Agastya, being surprised, spoke to Rāma as follows: “In the past Lord Brahmā, who was born from the lotus flower sprouted from Lord Viṣṇu, created the living entities. Tormented with fear due to hunger and thirst, these creatures approached their creator and humbly asked him: ‘What shall we do?’ With a laugh Lord Brahmā said: ‘Protect these waters.’ Of those who were hungry some said, ‘We shall protect’ and others said, ‘We shall eat.’ Then the creator said to them: ‘Those who said they would protect shall be rākṣasas and those who said they wanted to eat shall be yakṣas.’

“There were two brothers—Hetī and Prahetī—leaders of the rākṣasas. They were just like the demons Madhu and Kaitabha, and were the scourge of their enemies. Eventually Prahetī, who was very dutiful, went to a forest suitable for the practice of penance. Hetī tried very hard to find a wife. Being highly intelligent and immeasurably strong, he married Yama’s sister named Bhayā, who was very frightening due to being the sister of the lord of death. That outstanding rākṣasa Hetī begot in her a son known as Vidyutkeśa, and thus became the best of those with sons.

“Hetī’s son Vidyutkeśa, whose great splendor was like the blazing sun, grew up like a lotus flower in water. When that rākṣasa reached adolescence, his father strove to get him married. That foremost of rākṣasas Heti chose the daughter of Sandhyā, who was just like Sandhyā, for engendering a son. Thinking that her daughter Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā needed to be given to someone in marriage, Sandhyā gave her to Vidyutkeśa. After getting the hand of Sandhyā’s daughter Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā, Vidyutkeśa enjoyed with her as Indra does with Paulomī.”

“O Rāma, in the course of time Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā conceived a child with Vidyutkeśa, as clouds draw water from the ocean. The rākṣasī then went to Mount Mandara and gave birth to the child, as the Ganges delivered the son of Śiva. Desiring her husband, Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā forgot about her new-born son and enjoyed with her husband. When the baby had been abandoned by her, it bawled like a rumbling cloud. Putting its fist in its mouth, the child, who was as brilliant as the autumn sun, cried softly.

“Then Lord Śiva, riding his bull and accompanied by Pārvatī, heard the sound of crying. Śiva, the destroyer of the tree cities, saw the crying child of the rākṣasī. Out of compassion, Pārvatī made the child Sukeśa instantly reach the same age as its mother and also made it immortal. Similarly, Śiva, due to affection for Pārvatī, gave the child a flying city. Pārvatī also gave the rākṣasī the boon of instantaneous conception and childbirth and that her children would instantly reach the age of their mother. After receiving from Lord Śiva the boon of a flying city, the highly intelligent and powerful Sukeśa became haughty and wandered about everywhere like Lord Indra.”

THE SONS OF SUKEŚA

Agastya continued: “When the righteous gandharva named Grāmaṇī, who was equal in splendor to Viśvavāsu, saw that the pious rākṣasa Sukeśa had received boons, he gave his daughter Devavatī to him. Devavatī was like a second goddess of fortune and was famous throughout the three worlds for her beauty and youthfulness, as if she were the glory of the rākṣasa dynasty. After achieving a loving husband who had obtained lordship through boons, Devavatī was satisfied, as when a pauper achieves wealth. Being united with her, the night-stalker shone like an elephant born from the guardian elephant Añjana roaming with his mate.

“O descendent of Raghu, in the course of time, Sukeśa begot three sons—Mālyavān, Sumālī and Mālī. This last was the strongest of all, but all three were just like three fires and were equal to Lord Indra. They were as steady as the three worlds and as strong as lordship, enthusiasm and counsel, or the three Vedas. They were as formidable as disease occasioned by a disruption of vital air, bile and phlegm. The three sons of Sukeśa were as bright as three sacrificial fires and grew up very quickly, like neglected disease.

“Learning that their father had achieved the boons of lordship by means of his austerities, the three brothers went to Mount Meru, determined to practice austerities. After accepting stringent rules, O best of kings, the rākṣasas performed severe austerities which frightened all living beings. By rare austerities combined with truthfulness, straightforwardness and self-control, the rākṣasas disturbed the three worlds along with the gods, asuras and human beings. Then Lord Brahmā came in an aerial ship. He greeted the sons of Sukeśa and said: ‘I have come to grant you boons.’ When they understood that Brahmā, surrounded by Indra and hosts of gods, was going to give them boons, they shook like trees, joined their palms and said: ‘O lord, if you are pleased with our austerities and wish to give us boons, let us be invincible, the scourge of our enemies and long-lived. Let us also be

powerful and dedicated to each other.’ Lord Brahmā, who is very fond of the brāhmaṇas, said to them: ‘You will become exactly so.’ Then he returned to his own abode.

“O Rāma, after receiving those boons and being therefore free from fear, the three night-stalkers went about harassing the gods and demons. Harassed by them, the gods, sages and caraṇas could find no one to protect them, like men trapped in hell. Then the three jubilant rākṣasas together approached immortal Viśvakarmā, the best of architects, and said: ‘For the gods, who are valorous, effulgent, strong and mighty due to their personal vigor, you build residences according to their hearts’ desires. O highly intelligent one, now build us a residence too. Build us a residence like that of Lord Śiva either in the Himālayas, on Mount Meru or on Mount Mandara.’

“Then the strong-armed Viśvakarmā told the rākṣasas about a residence equal to Lord Indra’s capital Amarāvātī: ‘On the southern side of the ocean there is a mountain named Trikūṭa. O lords of the rākṣasas, there is another mountain called Suvēla. On that island there is a peak of Mount Trikūṭa, which resembles a cloud and is difficult to reach even for birds because of its four sides being cut with a chisel. In the middle of the slope of that peak I built the city of Laṅkā by the order of Lord Indra. It is thirty yojanas wide and one hundred yojanas long. It is surrounded by walls made of gold, as are the archways. You greatest of rākṣasas, who are difficult to assault, can live there, as the gods live with Indra in Amarāvātī. When you, surrounded by multitudes of rākṣasas, have reached the fortress of Laṅkā, you will be unassailable by enemies.’

“Hearing what Viśvakarmā said, those outstanding rākṣasas went to that city with thousands of followers and lived there. The jubilant night-stalkers reached the city of Laṅkā, which was surrounded by strong ramparts and moats, and full of hundreds of golden buildings, and settled down there. At that time, O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, there was a gandharvī named Narmadā. She had three daughters who were just like the goddesses Hṛī, Śrī and Kīrtī. Although Narmadā was not a rākṣasī, she gave her daughters, whose faces were as bright as full moons, to the three rākṣasas according to their age. Narmadā gave the fortunate maidens in marriage

while the asterism Uttarā-phalgunī was prominent. O Rāma, after the sons of Sukeśa were married, they enjoyed with their wives as the immortals enjoy with heavenly damsels.

“Learn about the children which Mālyavān begot in his beautiful wife Sundarī. They were Vajramuṣṭi, Virūpākṣa, Yajñakopa, Matta and Unmatta. Sundarī also gave birth to a beautiful daughter named Analā. Sumālī’s wife was named Ketumatī. O Rāma, she had a face as bright as a full moon and was dearer to him than his own life. Learn about the children which Sumālī begot from Ketumatī according to their age. Sumālī’s children were Prahasta, Akampana, Vikāṣa, Kālikāmukha, Dhūmrākṣa, Daṇḍa, Supārśva, Saṁhrādi, Praghosa and Bhāsakaṇṇa, as well as the girls Rākā, Puṣpotkāṭā, Kaikasī and the bright-smiling Kumbhīnasī. Mālī’s wife was the gandharvī Vasudā. She was beautiful. Her eyes were charming and resembled the petals of a lotus flower. She was just like a consort of Kuvera. Listen, O Rāma, as I mention the children that Mālī begot in her. They were Anala, Anila, Hara and Sampāti. These four sons of Mālī were the ministers of Vibhīṣaṇa.

“Surrounded by night-stalkers and their hundreds of sons, those three stalwart rākṣasas, who were haughty because of their boons, harassed Indra and the other gods, the sages, the nāgas and the yakṣas. Wandering about the world like the wind, they were difficult to assail. In battle they were as formidable as Yamarāja. They were extremely puffed up because of the boons they had received. They always interrupted Vedic sacrifices.”

THE GODS SEEK THE HELP OF VIṢṆU

Agastya continued: “The gods and sages rich in asceticism who were being killed by the rākṣasas took shelter of the god of gods, Lord Śiva. He is the creator and destroyer of the world, unborn, unmanifested, the support of all the worlds and the supreme guru. In one body they approached Lord Śiva, who defeated Cupid and destroyed the three cities of the demons, and petitioned him with joined palms and voices trembling due to fear: ‘O lord of creatures, all living entities are being harassed by the sons of Sukeśa, who have grown arrogant due to the boons which they received from Lord Brahmā and who are therefore the scourge of their enemies. Our residences and hermitages have been made unfit. They have driven the gods out of the heavenly planets and are enjoying there as if they were gods. The rākṣasas Mālyavān, Sumālī and Mālī boast: ‘I am Viṣṇu. I am Śiva. I am Brahmā. I am Indra. I am Yama. I am Varuṇa. I am the sun and moon.’ O lord, please free us who are frightened from this fear! Kill these enemies of the gods by assuming a fearsome form!’

“After being spoken to in this way by all the gods, Lord Śiva, who had some affection for Sukeśa, replied to them as follows: ‘I shall not kill those demons, for they cannot be killed by me, but I shall inform you about the person who can kill them. O great sages, in order to accomplish this you should take shelter of Lord Viṣṇu. The Lord will kill them.’ After hailing Lord Śiva with shouts of ‘victory!’ they, fearing the night-stalkers, approached Lord Viṣṇu. After offering obeisances to Lord Viṣṇu, who holds in His hands a conchshell and discus, they spoke with trembling voices regarding the sons of Sukeśa: ‘O God, because of the boons given them, the three sons of Sukeśa, who resemble three fires, have invaded our places and usurped our posts. There is a fortified city named Laṅkā situated on the summit of Mount Trikūṭa. All the rākṣasas settled there after harassing us. O Viṣṇu, slayer of the Madhu demon, we have taken shelter of You. Therefore, be our protector. Kill them for our benefit, O Lord of the gods. Except for

You there is no one else who can protect us in times of difficulty. Cut off with Your discus the lotus heads of those proud rākṣasas who are enlivened in battle, along with their relatives, and offer them to Yama, the lord of death. O God, remove our fear, as the sun melts ice.’

“When petitioned in this way by the gods, Supreme Lord Viṣṇu promised to protect the gods and said: ‘I know the rākṣasa Sukeśa, who has become proud due to the boons he received from Lord Śiva. I also know his sons, of whom Mālyavān is the eldest. Angered as I am, I shall kill those lowest of rākṣasas who have transgressed all bounds. O gods, be free from worry!’

“After the gods had been addressed in this way by Lord Viṣṇu, they praised Him and returned to their abodes overjoyed. When the night-stalker Mālyavān found out about what the gods had done, he spoke the following words to his heroic brothers: ‘Desiring our extermination, the immortals and sages have approached Lord Śiva and said:

O Lord, proud because of the boons they received, the hideous sons of Sukeśa harass us at every step. O lord of creatures, we have been overpowered by those rākṣasas. Out of fear of those wicked fellows, we are unable to stay in our own abodes. O Śiva, for our good please kill those rākṣasas and burn them with your shrill howl, O best of destroyers!

“After hearing what the gods said, Lord Śiva, who killed the demon Andhaka, shook his head and hand and replied as follows:

O gods, I am unable to kill the sons of Sukeśa in battle. However, I shall advise you about who can kill them. Take shelter of Lord Viṣṇu, who is also known as Hari or Nārāyaṇa, who wears yellow silk garments and holds in His hands a discus and club.

“Receiving this advice from Lord Śiva, the gods offered him respect, went to Lord Viṣṇu’s abode and informed Him about everything. Lord Viṣṇu then reassured the gods that He would kill their enemies and that they need not fear. O best of the rākṣasas, Lord Viṣṇu has promised the frightened gods that He would annihilate us. Therefore think about what we

should do. Lord Viṣṇu has killed Hiranyaśipu and other enemies. Namuci, Kālanemi, Saṁhrāda, who was most courageous, Rādheya, who was a powerful magician, Lokapāla, Yamala, Arjuna, Hārdikya, Śumbha, Niśumbha and other asuras and dānavas, who were powerful and mighty, were all defeated and never heard from again once they entered the battlefield against Lord Viṣṇu. All of them had performed hundreds of sacrifices. They were all adept in the black arts. They were all skilled in using weapons. And they were all the scourge of their enemies. Lord Viṣṇu killed them by the hundreds and thousands. Knowing this, you should do what is beneficial for all of us. It is very difficult to kill Lord Viṣṇu, who now wishes to kill us.’

“When Sumālī and Mālī heard Mālyavān’s warning, they spoke to him, their elder brother, in the same way that the Aśvins speak to Indra: ‘We have studied the Vedas, given charity, performed sacrifices and protected our wealth. We have achieved long lives free from disease and have observed the greatest principles of dutifulness in our lives. The ocean of gods, which was unperturbable, has been riven by our weapons. Our enemies have been defeated. We have no fear of death. Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Śiva, Indra and Yama are all afraid of standing before us. O lord of the rākṣasas, Lord Viṣṇu has no reason to be inimical to us. The gods have swayed His mind against us. Therefore, let us band together right now to protect each other and to slaughter the gods from whom this problem has arisen.’

“After seeking advice in this regards, all those strong stalwart rākṣasas, such as Jambha and Vṛtra, roared angrily as they sallied forth for battle, accompanied by soldiers. After they had made their decision, O Rāma, the huge and powerful rākṣasas sallied forth for war with full preparation. All those rākṣasas, who were proud of their strength and inimical to the gods, left Laṅkā for the abode of the gods to do battle against them. They were followed by chariots, elephants, horses as big as elephants, mules, cows, camels, porpoises, snakes, alligators, tortoises, fish, birds as big as Garuḍa, lions, tigers, boars and different kinds of deer. Other beings who resided in Laṅkā foresaw the danger and setbacks for Laṅkā and therefore became disturbed. Then hundreds and thousands of rākṣasas quickly departed in chariots for the abode of the gods. The gods came out by the same path by which the rākṣasas were approaching.

“Dangerous omens appeared on the land and in the sky by the order of Yama, indicating the imminent destruction of the rākṣasas. Clouds rained down bones and hot blood. The ocean overflowed and mountains trembled. Beasts emitted howls like the laugh of a horse or like thundering clouds, and hideous she-jackals howled frightfully. The material elements seemed to be dissolving one after the other, and a big circle of vultures spewing flames from their mouths was flying over the rākṣasa hordes like death itself. Pigeons with red feet and mynah birds were flying about frantically, crows were cawing, cats were howling and elephants were trumpeting.

“Unperturbed by these omens, the rākṣasas, proud because of their strength, did not turn back but pushed forward as if pulled by the noose of the lord of death, Yama. Mālyavān, Sumālī and Mālī marched ahead of the rākṣasas like blazing fires. The night-stalkers relied on Mālyavān, who was as unshakable as Mount Mālyavān, just as the gods depended on Lord Brahmā. That army of rākṣasa leaders roared loudly like a thunder cloud and headed for the abode of the gods in order to conquer them.

“When Lord Viṣṇu heard from a messenger of the gods what the rākṣasas were attempting, He decided to fight. Filling a quiver with arrows, He departed on the back of Garuḍa. Riding on the beautiful-feathered Garuḍa, who resembled a mountain, Lord Viṣṇu was equipped with two spotless quivers full of arrows. He put on His divine armor which shone like a thousand suns. The lotus-eyed Lord fastened his belt and armed Himself with a spotless sword. He was holding a conchshell, discus, lotus flower and club, and was equipped with excellent weapons. He quickly set forth to annihilate the rākṣasas. Riding on the back of Garuḍa, Lord Viṣṇu, whose complexion was swarthy and who wore bright yellow garments, resembled a cloud with a streak of golden lightning on the peak of Mount Meru. Bearing a discus, sword, bow and conchshell in His hands, Lord Viṣṇu, the enemy of the demon hordes, arrived while being praised by siddhas, celestial sages, nāgas, gandharvas and yakṣas. The wind raised by the flapping of Garuḍa’s wings blew away a portion of the rākṣasa army—their flags fluttered and their weapons fell from their hands. The rākṣasa army trembled like the craigs of a blue mountain. Thousands of night-stalkers surrounded Lord

Viṣṇu and attacked Him with their best sharp weapons dripping with blood and fat and shining like the fire of universal devastation.”

LORD VIṢṆU DEFEATS THE RĀKṢASAS

Agastya continued: “As clouds pummel a mountain with rains, the cloud of roaring rākṣasas showered weapons on Lord Viṣṇu, who stood firm like a mountain. Lord Viṣṇu, whose complexion was swarthy, was surrounded by those outstanding night-stalkers, like a black mountain surrounded by raining clouds. The rākṣasas, shot arrows from their bows with the speed of a thunderbolt, the wind or the mind. These in turn entered Lord Viṣṇu’s body, like locusts entering a paddy field, moths entering a fire, bees entering a pot of honey, crocodiles entering the ocean, or the worlds entering Lord Viṣṇu at the time of universal dissolution. There were soldiers riding chariots, elephants and horses, as well as foot soldiers standing in the sky. By means of their arrows, javelins and swords, the rākṣasa leaders, who were like mountains, obstructed Lord Viṣṇu’s breathing, like a brāhmaṇa controlling his breath.

“When Lord Viṣṇu was assailed by the night-stalkers, as the ocean is by fish, He stretched His bow named Sārṅga and shot arrows at the rākṣasas. By firing sharp arrows that were like thunderbolts from His fully stretched bow, Lord Viṣṇu lacerated hundreds and thousands of rākṣasas. After repelling the rākṣasas with His arrows as the wind dispells a rain shower, the Supreme Person then sounded His conchshell Pāñcajanya. When the Lord blew that king of conchshells with all His breath, it produced a noise that seemingly terrified all three worlds. The sound of that best of conchshells frightened the rākṣasas, as a roaring lion in the forest would frighten elephants. Because of the sound of the conchshell, horses were unable to stand steady, elephants lost their stamina and warriors fell from their chariots. The fine feathered arrows shot from the Sārṅga bow, having heads as sharp as thunderbolts, entered the ground after traversing the bodies of the rākṣasas. When pierced by arrows in combat shot from the hands of Lord Viṣṇu, the rākṣasas fell on the ground like mountains struck by lightning. Like streams of red ochre flowing from mountains, blood gushed

from the wounds on the bodies of the rākṣasas inflicted by Lord Viṣṇu's discus. The roar of the conchshell, the twang of the bow Sārṅga and the shouts of Lord Viṣṇu Himself drowned the noise raised by the rākṣasas. With His arrows, the Lord cut off the heads of the rākṣasas, as well as their arrows, flags, bows, chariots, pennants and quivers. The hundreds and thousands of arrows shot by Lord Viṣṇu from His bow flew speedily like the fierce rays of the sun, waves of the sea, big snakes from a mountain or torrents of rain from a cloud. Like lions chased by the fearsome monster śarabha, elephants chased by a lion, tigers chased by an elephant, leopards chased by a tiger, dogs chased by a leopard, cats chased by a dog, snakes chased by a cat or rats chased by a snake, all the rākṣasas chased by Lord Viṣṇu fled, while others fell down on the ground out of fear. After killing thousands of rākṣasas, Lord Viṣṇu filled His conchshell with air, as Lord Indra fills a cloud with water.

“When the rākṣasa army was repulsed by the impact of Lord Viṣṇu's arrows, Sumālī blocked the Lord on the battlefield with a shower of arrows. Sumālī covered Him, as mist covers the sun. Then the rākṣasa gathered up greater courage. The angry rākṣasa, proud of his personal strength, jumped forward while roaring very loudly, as if reviving the other rākṣasas. Raising his ornamented hand and waving it as if it were an elephant's trunk, the exultant rākṣasa roared like a cloud riveted by lightning. The Lord then cut off the head wearing sparkling earrings of the roaring Sumālī's charioteer, afterwhich the horses dashed frantically. Like an unstable person dragged about by his senses, that lord of the rākṣasas was dragged all over the place by his horses.

“While Sumālī's chariot was being drag about on the battlefield by his horses, the rākṣasa Mālī grabbed his bow and arrows and rushed toward the chariot of Lord Viṣṇu, who was also rushing toward him. Mālī's gilded arrows reached Lord Viṣṇu and entered His body, as birds enter Krauñca Mountain. Although Lord Viṣṇu was hit by thousands of arrows shot by Mālī, He did not feel at all disturbed while fighting, just as a self-controlled person is not disturbed by anxieties. Then, the Lord, who is the creator of all beings, shot volleys of arrows at Mālī. Those arrows glaring like streaks of lightning reached Mālī's body and drank his blood, as nāgas drink nectar.

“After driving away Mālī, Lord Viṣṇu threw down Mālī’s crown, flag and bow. Having lost his chariot, the night-stalker Mālī grabbed a club and rushed toward Lord Viṣṇu, like a lion charging from a mountain peak. Mālī hit Garuḍa on the forehead with the club, as Yama struck Lord Śiva or as Indra strikes mountains with his thunderbolt. Unable to bear the pain inflicted by the impact of Mālī’s club, Garuḍa forced Lord Viṣṇu to leave the battlefield. The rākṣasas raised a loud clamor when Mālī forced Lord Viṣṇu and Garuḍa to leave the battlefield.

“Angered by the roaring of the rākṣasas, Lord Viṣṇu, while sitting sideways on Garuḍa’s back, with His face turned away from the battle, threw His discus at Mālī in order to kill him. Shining like the orb of the sun, resembling the wheel of time, illuminating the sky with its brightness, the discus cut off Mālī’s head. When cut off by the discus, that fearsome head of the rākṣasa fell on the ground spewing blood, as did the head of Rāhu in the past. Then the jubilant gods raised a clamor with all their might, like the roar of a lion, shouting: ‘Well done, O Lord!’ When Mālyavān and Sumālī saw that Mālī was dead, they became stricken with grief and fled to Laṅkā with their respective armies.

“When Garuḍa had recovered, he was furious and drove away the rākṣasas with wind created by his wings. The rākṣasas suddenly fell out of the sky and into the ocean. Some had their lotus faces lacerated by Lord Viṣṇu’s discus; some had their chest crushed by His club; some had their necks broken by His ploughshare; some had their heads smashed by His bludgeon; some were slashed by His sword; and some were injured by His arrows. With the lightning-like arrows shot from His bow, Lord Viṣṇu wounded the night-stalkers whose hair was disheveled, like a huge thunder cloud discharging lightning bolts. With their parasols broken, their weapons falling down, their garments rent by arrows, their entrails ripped open and their eyes restless due to fear, the army was completely distracted. Like elephants pursued by a lion, the night-stalkers cried out and hurriedly fled with their elephants, having been driven away by Lord Viṣṇu.

“Being covered by volleys of arrows shot by the Lord and dropping their own arrows, those clouds of night-stalkers fled, like a black cloud

driven away by the wind. When their heads were cut off by the strike of the discus, their limbs smashed by the blows of the club and cut in two by the stroke of the sword, the rākṣasa leaders fell down like mountains. Because of the night-stalkers' being thrown on the ground with their pearl necklaces and earrings, it looked as if blue mountains had fallen on the ground.”

MĀLYAVĀN AND SUMĀLĪ FLEE TO LAŊKĀ

Agastya continued: “When the rākṣasa forces were being destroyed from behind by Lord Viṣṇu, Mālyavān returned to battle, as the ocean returns after touching the shore. With blood-shot eyes and his head shaking from anger, the night-stalker spoke the following words to the Supreme Lord: ‘O Viṣṇu, You do not know the ancient laws of kṣatriyas. Like an ordinary person, You are killing us who are terrified and who have no mind for fighting. O Lord of the gods, one who commits the sin of killing those who have stopped fighting does not go to heaven, which is achieved only by those who perform acts of piety. O bearer of the conchshell, discus and club, if You are interested in fighting, here I stand. Show me Your strength so that I can see it.’ Seeing Mālyavān standing firm like a mountain, Lord Viṣṇu said: ‘I am implementing an assurance of safety to the gods, who are terrified of you, and the promise to annihilate the rākṣasas. I shall do what is good for the gods at the cost of My life. As such, I shall kill you even if you hide in the nether region.’

“The furious rākṣasa leader then struck Lord Viṣṇu, whose eyes are like the petals of a red lotus, with a javelin while He was talking. The javelin with tinkling bells hurled by Mālyavān’s arms shone on Lord Viṣṇu’s chest like a bolt of lightning piercing a cloud. Pulling out that javelin, Lord Viṣṇu hurled it back at Mālyavān. As if hurled by Skandha, the war god, that javelin went straight for Mālyavān, like a huge meteor approaching a mountain of antimony. The javelin struck the rākṣasa’s chest adorned with necklaces, like a thunderbolt falling on a mountain. When his armor was shattered by the javelin, Mālyavān fell unconscious. When he returned to consciousness and got up, he stood firm like a mountain. Then he struck Lord Viṣṇu in the center of the chest with an iron pike covered with many spikes. The rākṣasa continued fighting Lord Viṣṇu, striking Him with his fist. Then he withdrew the distance of a bow. A loud cry of ‘well done! well done!’ arose in the sky. After hitting Viṣṇu, he also hit Garuḍa. Angered by this, Garuḍa drove him

away with the wind stirred up by his wings, as a strong wind blows away dry leaves. When Sumālī saw his brother repelled by the wind created by Garuḍa's wings, he left for Laṅkā, accompanied by his army. Driven away by the wind raised by Garuḍa's wings and covered with shame, Mālyavān also fled to Laṅkā, accompanied by his soldiers.

“O Rāma, in this way the rākṣasas were repeatedly defeated by the Lord and their foremost leaders killed. Tormented by Lord Viṣṇu's power and unable to fight back, the rākṣasas abandoned Laṅkā and went to the nether region with their wives to live there. Those famous warriors joined Sumālī, who was a descendent of the family of Sālakaṭaṅkaṭā, and stayed with him. Mālyavān, Sumālī and Mālī were all very fortunate and more powerful than Rāvaṇa. The rākṣasas which You killed were descendents of the line of Pulastya, O best of the Raghu Dynasty. Only Lord Viṣṇu, the bearer of the conchshell, discus and club, could have killed the rākṣasas who were the enemies and tormentors of the gods. You are the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa, the eternal Lord with four arms, the invincible and imperishable Lord. You have appeared just to annihilate the rākṣasas. You, the creator of all beings, are very fond of those who have taken shelter of You. You appear from time to time in order to destroy the scoundrels who violate the principles of righteousness.

“O king, I have just now narrated all this about the origin of the rākṣasas to You. Now learn from me further about the origin of Rāvaṇa and his sons, as well as their unparalleled powers.

“Afflicted with fear of Lord Viṣṇu, the mighty rākṣasa Sumālī wandered about in the nether region for a long time with his sons and grandsons. Meanwhile Vaiśravaṇa, the lord of wealth took up residence in Laṅkā.”

THE ORIGIN OF RĀVAṆA AND OTHERS

Agastya continued: “After some time the rākṣasa named Sumālī was wandering about the earth and happened to see Vaiśravaṇa, the lord of wealth, flying in his aerial vehicle Puṣpaka. Resembling a dark blue cloud and wearing earrings made of smelted gold, Vaiśravaṇa was holding his young daughter, who looked like the goddess of fortune without a lotus flower.

“While wandering over the earth, the rākṣasa leader Sumālī saw Vaiśravaṇa travelling in his airship Puṣpaka on his way to visit his powerful father Viśravā, the son of Pulastya. When Sumālī saw how Vaiśravaṇa was like a god and equal to fire in splendor, he returned to the nether world and thought as follows: ‘What must we do to achieve lasting well-being? What must we do to increase our prosperity?’

“The the rākṣasa told his daughter named Kaikasī: ‘My dear child, you are passing beyond the period of adolescence. It is time to give you away in marriage and suitors are hesitant for fear of not winning your hand. Righteous as we are, we have all tried to arrange something for your own sake. O daughter, you possess all good qualities and are just like the goddess of fortune. To be the father of an unmarried daughter is a cause of anxiety for all those who care about honor, for they do not know who will accept their daughter. An unmarried girl poses a danger to three families—that of her mother, that of her father and that to which she has not yet been wed. Therefore, you should choose as your husband the best of sages Viśravā, the son of Pulastya and a member of Lord Brahmā’s family. O daughter, you will undoubtedly bear sons equal to the lord of wealth and as splendidous as the sun.’ When that girl heard these words, out of respect for her father she went to where Viśravā was practicing austerities and stood there.

“Meanwhile, O Rāma, that brāhmaṇa, the son of Pulastya, was performing a sacrifice in the three sacred fires, himself being like a fourth fire. Unaware that the time was inauspicious and pressed by the urgency of

her father's request, the maiden approached the sage, stood before him and looked down at her feet. She repeatedly scratched the ground with the tip of her big toe. Seeing that shapely girl whose face was like the full moon and who was illuminated by her own effulgence, the supremely magnanimous sage said: 'O blessed girl, whose daughter are you and why have you come here? Tell me truthfully the reason for which you have come here, O beautiful one.'

"When spoken to in this way, the girl replied with joined palms: 'O sage, you should read my mind by your spiritual power. O brāhmaṇa sage, I am in fact named Kaikasī. Know that I have come under the order of my father. You can understand the rest yourself.' The sage went into meditation for some time and then spoke the following: 'O gentle one, I have discerned the intention in your mind. O lady whose gait is like that of an elephant in season, you wish to have sons with me. However, since you have approached me at an inauspicious time, listen to what kind of sons you will give birth to. They will be wicked, hideous and fond of wicked people. O beautiful woman, you will give birth to rākṣasas who execute cruel deeds.'

"Upon hearing what the sage Viśravā said, the girl offered him respects and replied as follows: 'O honorable sage, I do not want sons inclined to wicked deeds from you who are a knower of the Absolute Truth! Please be merciful to me!' When entreated in this way by the maiden, the best of sage Viśravā replied to her as follows: 'O woman with a beautiful face, your last son will be a righteous soul in conformity with my lineage. Of this there is no doubt.'

"O Rāma, after this discussion, the girl eventually gave birth to a fearsome child with the form of a very wicked rākṣasa. He had ten heads, huge fangs and resembled a heap of dark blue antimony. His lips were coppery red. He had twenty arms, huge mouths and reddish hair. While he was taking birth, she-jacks vomitted flames from their mouths and carnivorous beasts circumambulated him from counterclockwise. Indra showered down blood and clouds thundered fiercely. The sun did not shine very brightly and big meteors fell to earth. The earth quaked and gale winds blew. The ocean, which is the lord of rivers, though unperturbable, was

agitated. His father, who was just like Lord Brahmā, named the child because he was born with ten heads.

“After him was born the extremely mighty Kumbhakarṇa, who was bigger in size than anyone else. Then was born the rākṣasī Śūrpaṇakhā, whose face was quite hideous. The pious soul Vibhīṣaṇa was the last son of Kaikasī. When this great personality took birth, a shower of flowers fell and the drums of the gods sounded in heaven. In the sky were heard shouts of ‘Very good! Very good!’ Thereafter both Kumbhakarṇa and Rāvaṇa grew up in the forest, becoming exceedingly powerful and capable of tormenting the world. Foolish Kumbhakarṇa wandered the three worlds, devouring the great sages fond of righteousness. The pious Vibhīṣaṇa was always fixed in righteousness. He studied the Vedas and lived on a restricted diet, controlling his senses strictly.

“After some time, Kuvera (Vaiśravaṇa), the lord of wealth, came in his airship Puṣpaka to see his father. When the rākṣasī Kaikasī saw him blazing with brilliance, she said to the ten-headed Rāvaṇa: ‘O son, look at your brother Vaiśravaṇa enveloped in splendor. Look at yourself, devoid of opulence, though equal to him as a brother. O Daśagrīva, make an effort so that you become just like him. O son, your prowess is immeasurable.’ When the valorous Daśagrīva heard what his mother said, he became immeasurably envious and made the following promise: ‘I swear to you truly that I shall become equal to Vaiśravaṇa and even greater than him in power! Give up the anxiety in your heart!’ In a fit of anger, Daśagrīva decided to practice austerities in order to accomplish a difficult task and went to the hermitage of Gokaṇa to achieve his goals in the company of his brothers. Then Daśagrīva practised unparalleled austerities there. By this he pleased the mighty Lord Brahmā, who thereafter granted him boons that would bring victory.”

DAŚAGRĪVA AND HIS BROTHERS PERFORM AUSTERITIES

Rāma then said to the sage Agastya: “O brāhmaṇa, how and what kind of austerities did those brothers perform in the forest?” Then Agastya told Rāma that the brothers practiced austerities that suited them respectively. Agastya said: “Ever-steady on the path of virtue and practicing self-control, Kumbhakarṇa practiced austerity by sitting surrounded by four fires with the burning sun overhead during the hot season. He passed the rainy season kneeling on one knee while being drenched with rain. He passed the winter standing deep in water. Firmly situated on the path of virtue and endeavoring to achieve piety, he passed ten thousand years.

“The pious Vibhīṣaṇa, pure and always dedicated to righteousness, stood for five thousand years on one foot. When he completed his austerities, beavies of celestial damsels danced, showers of flowers fell and the gods sang hymns of praise. Determined to study the Vedas, he stood for another five thousand years with his arms and head raised in worship of the sun. In this way, the self-controlled soul Vibhīṣaṇa passed ten thousand years as if he were staying in the Nandana Garden of Lord Indra.

“Daśagrīva fasted for ten thousand years, and at the end of each thousand years he offered one of his heads into a sacrificial fire. In this way he passed nine thousand years and offered nine of his heads into the sacrificial fire. At the end of ten thousand years when he was about to cut off his tenth head, Lord Brahmā appeared before him. Very satisfied by Daśagrīva’s austerities, Lord Brahmā stood there accompanied by other demigods. Then he said: ‘O Daśagrīva, I am so pleased with you. Quickly choose the boon you desire, O knower of what is right. What desire should I now fulfill? Your effort should not go in vain.’ Then, with an overjoyed heart Daśagrīva bowed his head and replied in a faltering voice: ‘O lord, the greatest fear for living beings is death. I choose immortality.’ When

requested in that way, Lord Brahmā replied: ‘You cannot have complete immortality, therefore ask me for some other boon.’

“O Rāma, after Lord Brahmā, the creator of the world, finished talking, Daśagrīva stood there in front of him with joined palms and said: ‘O eternal lord of creatures, I want to be unkillable by fine-feathered birds, nāgas, yakṣas, daityas, dānavas, rākṣasas and also demigods. O lord honored by the immortals, I have no fear of other creatures, for I consider creatures such as humans and others to be less than straw.’ When petitioned in this way by the ten-headed rākṣasa, the pious Lord Brahmā replied as follows: ‘O best of the rākṣasas, your request will be fulfilled. After saying this to Daśagrīva, Lord Brahmā further added: ‘Hear about another auspicious boon for the one with whom I am pleased. O sinless one, the heads which you previously offered in the sacrificial fire will be restored as they were before. My dear rākṣasa, I shall at this time grant you another rare boon. You will be able to assume any form you choose.’ Thus the heads which Daśagrīva had offered in a sacrificial fire were restored.

“After saying this to Daśagrīva, Lord Brahmā then spoke to Vibhīṣaṇa: ‘My dear child, Vibhīṣaṇa, I am very pleased with you whose mind is absorbed in righteousness. O pious one dedicated to good vows, choose a boon.’ Then the pious Vibhīṣaṇa, who was always endowed with all good qualities, as the moon is accompanied by moonbeams, joined his palms and said: ‘My life’s purpose is already accomplished in that the guru of the world is personally pleased with me. If you must grant me a boon according to your pleasure, then listen to me. Let my mind always be fixed in righteousness even in times of difficulty. Let me know how to deploy the brahmāstra weapon without being taught. Let all my thoughts that arise during the different stages of life be virtuous and also let me be able to perform the appropriate actions at such times. This I consider to be the best boon. For those who are devoted to righteousness, there is nothing in the world that is difficult to achieve.’ Being very pleased, Lord Brahmā further said: ‘My child, because you are so virtuous, everything will be so. Although you have taken birth in the race of rākṣasas, you never have unrighteous thoughts; I grant you immortality.’

“When Lord Brahmā was about to offer a boon to Kumbhakarṇa, all the gods joined their palms and said: ‘You should not give any boon to Kumbhakarṇa, for you know the wicked fellow is terrorizing the worlds. He has devoured seven celestial damsels from the Nandana Garden of Lord Indra, ten attendants of Lord Indra, as well as sages and human beings. When he was able to do this prior to receiving any boons, if he receives boons, he will be able to devour all the three worlds. In the name of a boon, put a spell on him, O lord of limitless luster. Thus the world will be safe and he will achieve honor.’

“When the gods finished speaking to Lord Brahmā in this way, the lotus-born Lord Brahmā thought of the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī. At once the goddess Sarasvatī appeared and stood beside Lord Brahmā. While standing there, she joined her palms and said: ‘I have come, O lord. What should I do?’ Lord Brahmā said to Sarasvatī: ‘O goddess of speech, in accordance with the wishes of the gods, become the faculty of speech of this rākṣasa.’ Saying, ‘So be it,’ she entered Kumbhakarṇa’s mouth. Then Lord Brahmā said: ‘O strong-armed Kumbhakarṇa, choose the boon you wish.’ Hearing these words, Kumbhakarṇa replied as follows: ‘O god of gods, I wish to sleep for many years.’ After saying, ‘So be it,’ Lord Brahmā left along with the gods. The goddess Sarasvatī also left the rākṣasa. When Lord Brahmā and the gods had ascended to the heavenly region and the goddess Sarasvatī had left him, Kumbhakarṇa regained his normal consciousness and sadly thought: ‘How did such words come out of my mouth just now? I think I must have been tricked by the gods who were here at that time.’

“After receiving their boons, the splendorous brothers went to a forest of Śleśmātaka trees and lived there happily.”

DAŚAGRĪVA USURPS LAṆKĀ FROM Kuvera

Agastya continued: “When Sumālī learned that those rākṣasas had acquired boons, he abandoned his fear and came up from the nether world with his followers. Daśagrīva’s ministers—Mārīca, Prahasta, Virūpākṣa and Mahodara—also came up infuriated. Accompanied by his ministers and surrounded by other rākṣasa leaders, Sumālī came to Daśagrīva, embraced him and said: ‘Son, since you have achieved the greatest boon from the best person in all the three worlds, you have luckily achieved exactly what you desired. The great fear occasioned by Viṣṇu, for which we had to abandon Laṅkā and go to the nether world, is now gone, O mighty-armed one. Often we all had to abandon our home and enter the nether world with our followers out of fear of Viṣṇu. The city of Laṅkā in which your intelligent brother, the lord of wealth, is presently residing is actually ours and was previously inhabited by rākṣasas. If it can be regained by diplomacy, gifts or force, our goal will have been accomplished. O son, you will doubtlessly be the ruler of Laṅkā. You have lifted up the rākṣasa dynasty, which was sunken in misfortune. O mighty one, you will be the lord of us all.’ Then Daśagrīva said to his maternal grandfather, who was standing there: ‘You should not talk like that, for the lord of wealth Kuvera is our older brother.’

“After being remonstrated by Daśagrīva, the senior rākṣasa did not say anything, knowing Daśagrīva’s intention. After some time the night-stalker Prahasta offered to Daśagrīva the following humble and reasonable advice: ‘O strong-armed Daśagrīva, you should not talk like that. There is no such thing as brotherly affection among heroes. Listen to these words of mine. The two sisters, Diti and Aditi, are both the extremely beautiful wives of Kaśyapa, a progenitor of creatures. Aditi gave birth to the gods, the lords of the worlds. Diti gave birth to the daityas or demons. Both groups are the descendents of Kaśyapa. In the past this earth with its forests, oceans and mountains belonged to the daityas, for they were very powerful. After

slaying them, the mighty Lord Viṣṇu put these three worlds under the lasting control of the gods. You are not the only one who will have acted in opposition to a brother. This took place previously between the gods and asuras. Therefore, do as I say.’

“After being spoken to in this way, Daśagrīva, being very pleased, thought for a while and then said: ‘All right!’ On that very day valorous Daśagrīva gladly went to the forest near Laṅkā followed by the rākṣasas. After stationing themselves on Trikūṭa Mountain, Daśagrīva sent the skillful speaker Prahasta as a messenger, saying: ‘O Prahasta, quickly go and relay this message of mine to the lord of wealth in a polite manner:

O king, you have occupied this city of Laṅkā, which used to belong to the rākṣasas. O sinless one, this is not proper for you. O you whose prowess is unmatched, if you could give it back to us now, you will have pleased me and done the right thing.’

“Prahasta went to Laṅkā, which was well-protected by the lord of wealth Kuvera, and presented the following message to him: ‘O best of those who wield weapons, I have been sent to you by your brother Daśagrīva. O lord of wealth, learned in all scriptures and highly intelligent, listen to what Daśagrīva says:

O broad-eyed one, this charming city was previously enjoyed by rākṣasas of immeasurable prowess, of whom Sumālī was chief. O son of Viśravā, he is now requesting that it be returned. Give it back peacefully to the one who is requesting it.’

“After hearing Prahasta’s statement, Vaiśravaṇa, being an expert speaker, replied to Prahasta in the following manner: ‘When the night-stalkers abandoned this city, my father gave it to me. I then populated it by bestowing gifts and honors. Go and tell Daśagrīva that my capital, kingdom and wealth are his undivided possession. Let him enjoy this kingdom without any obstruction.’ After saying this, the lord of wealth went to his father. When he finished offering respects to his father, he informed him of Daśagrīva’s desires: ‘Father, Daśagrīva has sent an envoy to me with the following message:

Laṅkā, which was previously occupied by rākṣasas, should be given back to me.

O you who are dedicated to pious vows, please tell me what I should do in this regards.’

“When questioned in this way, the brāhmaṇa sage Viśravā gave the lord of wealth the following advice: ‘My dear son, listen to what I say. The mighty Daśagrīva also said the same thing to me. I chided that most evil-minded fellow and pleaded with him in many ways. Out of anger I told him repeatedly that he would be destroyed. My dear son, listen to what I say, which is profitable and in conformity with righteousness. This very wicked fellow is deluded by the boons given him and does not distinguish between those who should be respected and those who should not. Moreover, by my curse he will have a cruel nature. Therefore, O strong-armed one, leave Laṅkā and go to Mount Kailāśa. Settle there with your followers. There flows the charming and best of rivers called Mandākinī. Its waters are covered with lotus flowers that are golden and as bright as the sun, as well as white water lilies, blue lotus flowers and other sweet-smelling flowers. There the gods accompanied by gandharvas, apsarās and kinnaras always go to enjoy themselves. O lord of wealth, since you know that he has received several boons, it is better not to strike up enmity with him.’ Accepting this advice out of respect for his father, Kuvera left that place with his wife, sons, ministers, vehicles and wealth.

“Overjoyed by this, Prahasta went to Daśagrīva, who was being served by his ministers and brothers, and said: ‘Kuvera, the lord of wealth has abandoned the city of Laṅkā and gone elsewhere! It is now empty. Enter it with your entourage and carry out your duties there.’ When informed in that way by Prahasta, the mighty Daśagrīva entered Laṅkā along with his brothers, soldiers and followers. Then that enemy of the gods entered the city of Laṅkā, which had well-laid out thoroughfares and which had been abandoned by Kuvera in the same way that Indra had ascended to heaven. After being coronated by the rākṣasas, Daśagrīva settled down in that city. It was soon filled to capacity with night-stalkers as swarthy as dark blue clouds. Out of respect for his father’s advice, Kuvera built on Mount Kailāśa, which

was as white as the moon, a city beautified with well-decorated mansions,
just as Indra built his own city of Amarāvātī in the heavenly planets.”

THE MARRIAGES OF DAŚAGRĪVA AND HIS SIBLINGS

Agastya continued: “After Daśagrīva’s coronation, he consulted with his brothers about the marriage of their sister Śūrpaṇakhā. The rākṣasa Daśagrīva gave his sister in marriage to Vidyujjihva, lord of the dānavas and son of Kālakeya. After giving her away, Daśagrīva went hunting and saw the dānava Maya, son of Diti. Seeing him accompanied by his daughter, the night-stalker Daśagrīva asked: ‘Who are you? Why are you in this forrest devoid of humans and animals? Why are you staying with this girl whose eyes are like a doe’s?’

O Rāma, Maya then replied to the inquiring night-stalker: ‘Please listen. I shall narrate everything as it took place. There was an apsarā named Hemā, of whom you might have heard. She was given to me in marriage by the gods, just as Paulomī was given to Lord Indra. I was very attached to her and therefore lived with her for thousands of years. It has now been fourteen years since she left to serve the purpose of the gods. By my magical powers I created for Hemā’s sake a city constructed entirely with gold and adorned with diamonds and vaidurya gems. Dispirited because of her absence, I lived there miserably. O king, taking my daughter with me, I left that city and came to the forest. This is my daughter who was born from the womb of Hemā. With her at my side, I have come looking for a husband, for an unmarried daughter is a cause of distress for all those parents who are worried about their reputations. An unmarried girl puts two families into difficulty. I also had two sons by my wife. The first is named Māyāvī and the other is Dundubhi. Thus have I answered your questions truthfully. Now, how may I know you? Who are you?’

“When spoken to in that way, the rākṣasa humbly replied: ‘I am a grandson of Pulastya and a son of the sage Viśravā, who is the third generation from Brahmā. I am called Daśagrīva.’

“After hearing Daśagrīva’s reply and understanding that he was the son of a great sage, Maya Dānava was happy. At that very moment he decided to give his daughter to Daśagrīva. Causing her hand to be grasped by Daśagrīva’s, Maya Dānava, lord of the daityas, spoke to the lord of the rākṣasas while laughing: ‘O king, this daughter of mine was raised by the apsarā Hemā. The maiden’s name is Mandodarī. Accpet her as your wife.’ Daśagrīva replied: ‘I agree.’ Then he kindled a sacrificial fire and married her.

“Although Maya Dānava knew that Daśagrīva had been cursed by Viśravā, he gave his daughter to him anyways because of his being a descendent of Lord Brahmā. Maya Dānava also gave Daśagrīva a wonderful and infallible javelin which he had obtained through extreme austerities. It was the same one with which Lakṣmaṇa was struck. After getting married, the mighty lord of Laṅkā went to his city and arranged wives for his brothers. As a wife for Kumbhakarṇa, Daśagrīva decided on Bali’s granddaughter named Vajrajvālā. Vibhīṣaṇa received as his wife the righteous Saramā, the daughter of the great Śailūṣa, king of the gandharvas. She was born on the bank of the Mānasa Lake. At that time, the Mānasa Lake was rising due to the monsoon. The mother of the child affectionately called out: ‘Saro mā vardhayet; O lake, do not swell!’ Therefore her child came to be known as Saramā. After marrying, the three rākṣasas enjoyed with their respective wives, as do the gandharvas in the Nandana Garden. Later Mandodarī gave birth to a son named Meghanāda. He is the one whom you know as Indrajit. This son of Daśagrīva cried as soon as he was born, making a loud noise like a thundering cloud. O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, the city of Laṅkā was stunned by his roar. Therefore his father named him Meghanāda (Cloud-Thunder). Taken care of by excellent women, the child grew up in the royal palace of Daśagrīva, like fire growing under a pile of wood. The child brought great delight to his mother and father.”

KUVERA SENDS A MESSENGER TO DAŚAGRĪVA

Agastya continued: “After some time, Kumbhakarṇa was overcome by deep sleep as ordained by Lord Brahmā. Therefore Kumbhakarṇa spoke as follows to his brother Daśagrīva, who was sitting nearby: ‘O king, I am being overwhelmed by sleep. Please have a residence constructed for me.’ When ordered by King Daśagrīva, architects who were as skillful as Viśvakarmā constructed a lovely mansion for Kumbhakarṇa that was one yojana wide and twice that long. It was very beautiful and free from disturbances. It was beautified on all sides with lovely columns of crystal and gold. The stairways were made of vaidurya and the lattices over the windows were decorated with tiny gold bells. Its entranceways were constructed from ivory. It had platforms adorned with diamonds and crystals. Daśagrīva made sure that it was fascinating and completely enjoyable. It was designed to be comfortable during all times of the year and was like a holy cavern on Mount Meru.

“Overcome by sleep, Kumbhakarṇa lay there and did not wake up for thousands of years. While Kumbhakarṇa was sleeping, Daśagrīva decimated the gods, sages, yakṣas and gandharvas without any restraint. Enfuried as he was, he destroyed many beautiful celestial gardens, such as the Nandana Garden, and destroyed them. He disrupted the flow of rivers like an elephant amusing itself, broke down trees like a gale wind and shattered mountains as if he were a thunderbolt thrown by Lord Indra. When Vaiśravaṇa, the lord of wealth, learned of Daśagrīva’s activities and bearing in mind what was proper behavior for a member of his family, he sent a messenger to Laṅkā out of brotherly affection and for the benefit of Daśagrīva. When the messenger reached the city of Laṅkā, he went to Vibhīṣaṇa, who welcomed him appropriately and inquired about the reason for his coming. Vibhīṣaṇa also inquired about the health of King Vaiśravaṇa and his kinsfolk. Then he showed him Daśagrīva seated in an assembly. When the messenger saw Daśagrīva shining with his own glory, he greeted

him with shouts of victory and then stood silent. Then the messenger spoke the following words to Daśagrīva, who was sitting on a finely upholstered couch:

“O king, I shall relate everything that your brother has said. It is befitting of good conduct and the family lineage:

Whatever you have perpetrated so far has been quite enough. Now please try to act in a pious manner, if it is possible. I have seen the Nandana Garden which you destroyed and have heard about the sages whom you have killed. O king, I have also heard about the preparations the gods are making against you. O lord of the *rākṣasas*, you have repeatedly ignored me. Still, relatives have to protect one who is junior, even when he is offensive. I went to the slopes of the Himālaya Mountains in pursuance of righteousness and performed severe austerities by continually controlling my senses. There I saw Lord Śiva accompanied by his consort Umā. O great king, by chance my left eye glanced at her just to surmise who she was, and for no other reason. She was standing there manifesting her incomparable beauty. The goddess’ divine power scorched my left eye, while my other eye became dimmed as if damaged by dust. After that I went to another broad plateau of the Himālayas and practiced the great vow of silence for eight hundred years. When I completed the vow, the great Lord Śiva appeared there and, being pleased at heart, spoke the following words:

“I am very pleased with the austerities you have performed, O you who know what is right to do. I was the first person to observe this vow and you are the second person to do so, O lord of wealth. There is no third person who can carry out such a vow. Long ago I invented this very difficult vow. Therefore, O lord of wealth, kindly accept my friendship. I have been conquered by you through your austerities, O sinless one. Since the supernatural power of my consort scorched your left eye and left your right eye greyed, you will always be known as *Ekākṣi-piṅgalī*.”

After achieving friendship with Lord Śiva in that way and returning, I heard about your sinful determination. Please refrain from such unrighteousness which is a stain on our family. The gods and sages are in fact plotting the means to kill you.’

“When Daśagrīva heard this message, his eyes became red from anger. Rubbing his hands together and grinding his teeth, he spoke the following words: ‘O envoy, I understand the message that you have related. Neither you nor that brother of mine who sent you will survive! What the lord of wealth says is not beneficial to me. That fool is obviously informing me of his friendship with Lord Śiva. I cannot pardon what you have told me. O messenger, up to the present time I have put up with all his insults because of the principle that one should not kill one’s elder brother. But after hearing the present affront, I have made up my mind to conquer all the three worlds depending on the strength of my own arms. Because of him, I shall at this very moment send the four lokapālas to the abode of the lord of death.’

“After saying this, Daśagrīva killed the messenger with his sword and gave the corpse to wicked rākṣasas to eat. Then Daśagrīva, desiring to conquer the three worlds, had brāhmaṇas recite hymns of benediction, mounted his chariot and departed for the abode of Vaiśravaṇa, the lord of wealth.”

DAŚAGRĪVA DEFEATS THE YAKṢAS

Agastya continued: “Accompanied by his ministers—Mahodara, Prahasta, Mārīca, Śuka, Sāraṇa and Dhūmrākṣa—who were always eager for battle, the glorious Daśagrīva, who was ever-proud of his strength, sallied forth as if to burn the worlds with his anger. Crossing cities, rivers, mountains, forests and groves, he reached Mount Kailāsa within an hour.

“When the yakṣas heard that the wicked King Daśagrīva was encamped on the mountain with his ministers and was eager and ready for battle, they were unable to stand up to him. Understanding that he was the brother of Kuvera, the lord of wealth, they went to his abode. Approaching him, they informed him fully about his brother’s intentions. With Kuvera’s permission, they sallied forth to engage in battle. At that time there was great excitement among the rākṣasa forces, like the swelling ocean, and it seemed to shake Mount Kailāsa. Then a pitched battle ensued between the yakṣas and the rākṣasas, which caused Daśagrīva’s ministers to feel disturbed.

“When the night-stalker Daśagrīva saw his army in that condition, he rushed out angrily, shouting words of encouragement. Daśagrīva’s ministers were fiercely heroic. Each one of them fought with one thousand yakṣas. While being struck with clubs, bludgeons, swords, javelins and iron truncheons, Daśagrīva entered among the enemy army. Daśagrīva was blocked and could hardly breathe because of the impact of arrows falling like showers from a storm cloud.

“As a mountain is not shaken even when a cloud batters it with hundreds of showers, so Daśagrīva did not feel bothered though wounded by the yakṣas’ weapons. Picking up a club that was like death’s rod of chastisement, Daśagrīva entered the enemy ranks and dispatched the yakṣas to the abode of Yama. Like a fire blazing up because of wind, Daśagrīva burnt the yakṣa army, which was spread out like dry grass and concentrated

like dry firewood. The yakṣas were decimated by the great ministers Mahodara, Śuka and others, as winds disperse clouds. Badly wounded when struck in battle, some of them fell on the ground. Others angrily bit their lips with their sharp teeth during combat. Some of the yakṣas dropped their weapons, embraced each other and sank down to the ground, like the bank of a river collapsing when eroded by the current. There was no space in the sky because of the slain ascending to heaven, those who were fighting or fleeing, and the hosts of sages watching the battle. When the lord of wealth saw that those mighty yakṣa leaders had been crushed, he sent other yakṣas to replace them.

“Thereafter, O Rāma, a yakṣa named Saṁyodhakaṇṭaka sallied forth with a big army of horses and chariots. When struck with Saṁyodhakaṇṭaka’s discus as if by Lord Viṣṇu’s, Mārīca fell down from the mountain to the ground, like a star whose pious merit had expired. Regaining his consciousness after an hour and having rested, that night-stalker fought with Saṁyodhakaṇṭaka, defeated him and caused him to flee. Then Daśagrīva entered the gateway of Kuvera’s abode. This was plated with gold and inlaid with vaidurya gems and silver. It was the last line of defense for the palace guards.

“A gate-keeper named Sūryabhānu ordered Daśagrīva to stop while he was entering the gateway. Although challenged by the yakṣa, Daśagrīva entered anyway. O Rāma, when Daśagrīva did not stop when confronted by the yakṣa but entered, the yakṣa struck him with a post which he pulled out of the side of the gateway. Because he was bleeding profusely, Daśagrīva looked like a hill with streams of molten metal flowing from it. Although hit with the gate post which was like the pinnacle of a mountain, the heroic Daśagrīva was not killed because of the boons he had received from Lord Brahmā. Daśagrīva then struck the yakṣa back with the same post, causing the yakṣa to vanish from sight due to being reduced to dust. When everyone saw how powerful the rākṣasa was, they all began to flee. Exhausted and pale, they abandoned their weapons and hid in rivers and caves.”

DAŚAGRĪVA CONFISCATES THE PUṢPAKA AIRSHIP

Agastya continued: “Seeing that the yakṣa leaders were fleeing in fear by the thousands, Kuvera therefore said to the great yakṣa Māṇibhadra: ‘O leader of yakṣas, kill the wicked and evil Daśagrīva and become the shelter of the yakṣa warriors skilled in battle.’ When spoken to in this way, Māṇibhadra, who was difficult to defeat, began fighting, surrounded by four thousand yakṣas. The yakṣas assaulted the rākṣasas, striking them with clubs, cudgels, spears, javelins, bludgeons and mallets. Fighting a fierce battle and moving swiftly like hawks, they shouted out: ‘Let me fight! Give me my weapon! I do not want to retreat!’

“Thereafter the gods, gandharvas and sages who were theologians were very surprised to see that extremely tumultuous battle. Prahasta killed one thousand yakṣas in combat and Mahodara killed another thousand yakṣas who were faultless warriors. O king, the furious Mārīca, who was eager for battle, killed two thousand more yakṣas in the twinkling of an eye. What can be said of the straightforward battle techniques of the yakṣas and the deceitful tactics of the rākṣasas? O tiger among men, the rākṣasas began gaining on the yakṣas in that battle.

“Māṇibhadra squared off with Dhūmrākṣa in that great battle and was struck in the chest with a club, but he did not budge. Then Māṇibhadra swung his club and hit Dhūmrākṣa on the head. The rākṣasa became bewildered and fell on the ground. When Daśagrīva saw that Dhūmrākṣa was fallen and bathed in blood, he rushed towards Māṇibhadra on the battlefield. Seeing that the furious Daśagrīva was rushing towards him, Māṇibhadra hit him with three javelins. After being struck in combat, Daśagrīva hit Māṇibhadra’s crown. As a result of that blow, Māṇibhadra’s crown was knocked to one side. From then on Māṇibhadra was known as

Pārśvamauli, he whose crown is tilted to one side. When the great Māṇibhadra turned away from the battle, the rākṣasas raised a great clamor on the mountain. Then from far away came into view Kuvera, the lord of wealth, bearing a club and accompanied by his ministers Śukra and Prauṣṭhapada, as well as the personifications of his two treasures—Padma and Śaṅkha.

“When the intelligent Kuvera saw on the battlefield his brother Daśagrīva, who had lost all common sense due to the curse, he gave him the following advice worthy of one descended from the family of Lord Brahmā: ‘O fool, although I warned you, you did not listen. You will understand later when you have achieved the fruit of your actions and have gone to hell. The fool who drinks poison without recognizing it to be such will recognize it later when he reaps the result of that action. Even if you perform pious deeds, the gods will not be pleased with you. Bewildered by their displeasure, you have taken up this violence, yet you do not understand that. One who insults his mother, father, teacher or a brāhmaṇa will reap the consequences when he has come under the sway of the lord of death. The fool who does not use his temporary body to practice austerities will suffer after dying when he reaches his fate. From righteousness come sovereignty, wealth and happiness. Only misery results from unrighteousness. As such, one should practice righteousness and avoid sin in order to achieve happiness. The result of sin is suffering and the person who performed it must experience it. Therefore, a fool commits sin for his own punishment. Intelligence never manifests in the mind of a wicked person. One achieves a result according to how one acts. In this world people achieve prosperity, beauty, strength, sons, wealth and valor according to their pious deeds. Because your mind is so wicked, you will go to hell. I shall not tell you anything more. This is the law for those whose activities are uncivil.’

“After being verbally chastised and assaulted by Kuvera, Daśagrīva’s ministers headed by Mārīca turned and fled. Then Kuvera, the great leader of the yakṣas, struck Daśagrīva on the head with his club, but he did not budge from his position. In the course of that great conflict, Kuvera and Daśagrīva exchanged blows, but neither of them felt stressed or tired. Then Kuvera shot an Agni weapon at Daśagrīva, which that king of rākṣasas counteracted with a weapon of Varuṇa.

“Then the lord of the rākṣasas began using his demoniac magical powers and assumed hundreds and thousands of forms in order to annihilate the yakṣas. Daśagrīva appeared as a tiger, boar, cloud, mountain, ocean, tree, yakṣa and daitya. Because he appeared in so many guises, he could not be seen. Then, seizing a mighty weapon, Daśagrīva struck Kuvera on the head. When struck in that way, the lord of wealth was knocked senseless and drenched with blood. Then he fell down on the ground like an aśoka tree cut down at the root.

“Surrounded by the personalities presiding over his treasures, such as Padma and Śaṅkha, the lord of wealth was brought to the Nandana Garden and brought back to consciousness. After defeating Kuvera, Daśagrīva was pleased at heart and confiscated Kuvera’s aerial vehicle Puṣpaka as a token of his victory. The aerial vehicle had columns of gold. Its archways were inlaid with vaidurya gems. It had latticework encrusted with pearls and potted trees that bore fruits in all seasons. It was as swift as the mind. It could go wherever one wanted. It could assume any form one desired. Its staircases were adorned with gold and jewels and it had platforms of gold. It was a celestial vehicle and was not subject to deterioration. It was always pleasing to the eye and mind. It had many amazing things to behold. Its compartments were picturesque. It had been made by Lord Viśvakarmā. It was provided with all desirable things. It was fascinating and unparalleled. It was neither too cold nor too hot. It was enjoyable during all seasons and was splendid.

“When the wicked Daśagrīva ascended the vehicle, which he had won by means of his prowess, he thought in the height of his pride that he had conquered all the three worlds. After conquering Kuvera, the son of Viśravā, Daśagrīva came down from Mount Kailāśa. Having achieved that great victory by his strength, the glorious Daśagrīva, who sat in that unsurpassed vehicle wearing a spotless crown and necklace of pearls, shone like a sacrificial fire in a shrine.

NANDĪŚVARA CURSES DAŚAGRĪVA

Agastya continued: “After defeating his brother Kuvera, Daśagrīva went to that thicket of rushes where Kārtikeya, the son of Lord Śiva, was born. There Daśagrīva saw the great thicket of golden rushes as bright as a second sun surrounded by a mass of rays. O Rāma, as he was going up a mountain covered with a charming forest, he saw that the Puṣpaka airship came to a stop. Surrounded by his ministers, Daśagrīva began thinking: ‘How is it that this aerial vehicle, which was made to obey its master’s will, has stopped? Why is it not proceeding? Why does it not move according to my will? It must be the work of someone on this mountain.’

“Then the clever Mārīca said: ‘O king, there must be some reason why this Puṣpaka is not moving. Maybe this Puṣpaka will not carry anyone besides Kuvera, the lord of wealth. Therefore, since it has been separated from him, it has stopped.’

At that time an attendant of Lord Śiva named Nandīśvara, who was dreadful, swarthy, dwarfed, misshapened, shaven-headed, short-armed and strong, approached and interrupted their conversation, fearlessly saying: “Turn back, O ten-headed Daśagrīva! Lord Śiva is enjoying himself on this mountain. Access to this mountain has been closed to birds, celestial serpents, yakṣas, gods, gandharvas, rākṣasas and all living beings.’

“When Daśagrīva heard what Nandīśvara said, he got down from the Puṣpaka, his earrings shaking because of his anger and his eyes red from indignation. He went to the foot of the mountain, saying: ‘Who is this Śiva?’ There he saw Nandī standing near Lord Śiva. He was holding a spear and looked like a second Lord Śiva. Seeing that he had the head of a monkey and despising him, Daśagrīva laughed loudly like the thundering of a rain cloud. Angered by this, Nandī, who was the other half of Lord Śiva’s body, spoke to the rākṣasa Daśagrīva, who was standing nearby:

“O Daśagrīva, since you despised me for my monkey-like appearance, laughing loudly like the thundering blast of a bolt of lightning, monkeys will take birth that will destroy your dynasty! They will have my virility. They will have splendorous forms like mine. For weapons they will have claws and teeth. They will be as swift as the mind. They will be furious in combat. They will be proud of their strength. They will resemble moving mountains. Coming together, they will eliminate your pride over your strength and superiority, along with that of your ministers and sons. O night-stalker, I could kill you right now, but I shall not do so because you are already killed by your own deeds.’

“When that divine being spoke those words, the gods sounded their drums and a shower of flowers fell from the sky. Disregarding what Nandī said, the mighty Daśagrīva approached the mountain and said: ‘O master of a bull, I shall pull up by its roots this mountain which obstructed the course of the Puṣpaka as I was travelling in it. By what power does Lord Śiva always amuse himself like a king? He does not know what he should—that danger has now arrived.’

“After saying this, O Rāma, Daśagrīva put his hands under the mountain and quickly lifted it up, causing it to shake. Because of the mountain’s shaking, Lord Śiva’s followers trembled. Pārvatī also slipped and clung to Lord Śiva. Then Lord Śiva, the the best of the gods, playfully pressed the mountain down with His big toe. Then Daśagrīva’s arms, which were like columns supporting the mountain, were crushed, and Daśagrīva’s ministers who were present were amazed.

“Because of his arms’s being crushed in that way, Daśagrīva suddenly screamed out of anger, which shook all the three worlds. Daśagrīva’s ministers thought it was the boom of thunder at the end of the world. At that moment even the gods headed by Indra stumbled on their path. Even the oceans were agitated and mountains shook. The yakṣas, vidyādhara and siddhas inquired: ‘What is this?’

“Daśagrīva’s ministers then advised Daśagrīva in this way: ‘Propitiate Lord Śiva, whose neck is blue and who is the husband of Pārvatī. O Daśagrīva, in this circumstance we do not see any other shelter than him.

Humbly take shelter of him with hymns of praise. Lord Śiva is merciful. When he is satisfied, he will be merciful to you.’

“When advised in this way by his ministers, Daśagrīva bowed respectfully to Lord Śiva and glorified him with hymns from the Sāma Veda. A thousand years passed as the rākṣasa cried in this manner. When Lord Śiva seated on the mountain peak was pleased with the hymns uttered by Daśagrīva, he released the pressure on Daśagrīva’s arms and said to him: ‘O ten-headed one, I am pleased with your virility and heroism. Since the screams which you let out when the mountain crushed you caused all the three worlds to cry, you will therefore be known as Rāvaṇa, one who causes others to cry. O grandson of Pulastya, go by whatever path you wish without any fear. O lord of the rākṣasas, you have my permission to go.’

“After being spoken to in this way by Lord Śiva, Rāvaṇa, the lord of Laṅkā replied: ‘O Lord Śiva, if you are pleased with me, grant me a boon which I am eager for. I am already unkillable by gods, gandharvas, dānavas, rākṣasas, guhyakas, nāgas and others who are greater than these. O lord, I do not count human beings because I think that they are insignificant. O destroyer of the Tripura demon, I have received a boon of long life from Lord Brahmā. Please grant me the rest of my life which I desire, as well as a weapon.’

“When requested in this way by Rāvaṇa, Lord Śiva presented him with a shining sword known as Candrahāsa. Śiva, the lord of ghosts, also granted him at that time the remainder of his life. Lord Śiva said: ‘You should not disregard this sword. If you do, it will undoubtedly return to me.’

“After receiving a name from Lord Śiva, Rāvaṇa bid him farewell and then mounted the Puṣpaka airship. O Rāma, after that, Rāvaṇa wandered over the surface of the earth, oppressing kṣatriyas who were very courageous. Some heroic kṣatriyas who were powerful and eager for battle disobeyed Rāvaṇa’s command and perished along with their followers. Others who were known to be wise saw that Rāvaṇa was undefeatable and admitted their defeat.”

VEDAVATĪ CURSES RĀVAṆA

Agastya continued: “While travelling over the surface of the earth, the strong-armed Rāvaṇa arrived at a forest in the Himālayas and wandered through it. There he saw a maiden dressed in the skin of a black antelope. Her hair was matted in dreadlocks. She was practicing austerities befitting a sage and was glowing like a goddess. When Rāvaṇa saw how She was endowed with physical beauty and engaged in a great vow, he became overwhelmed with lust and laughingly asked Her: ‘O gentle one, what are You doing here? This is incompatible with Your beauty. O lady, Your uncomparable beauty causes in men an enfeeblement born from lust. It is not proper for You to practice austerities. This is the conclusion which has just occurred to me. O gentle one, to whom do You belong? Why are You here? O woman with a lovely face, who is Your husband? The man who enjoys You is very fortunate in this world. Please answer my questions completely. What is the reason for this undertaking?’

“When questioned in this way by Rāvaṇa, the glorious maiden whose wealth was Her austerity welcomed him appropriately and replied: ‘My father’s name is Kuśadhvaṇa and he is a brahmaṛṣi of immeasurable splendor. He was a son of Bṛhaspati and was equal to him in intelligence. I was born from that great sage who was always engaged in the study of the Vedas as a manifestation of the Vedas, and am therefore known as Vedavatī. O lord of the rākṣasas, the gods, gandharvas, yakṣas, rākṣasas and nāgas approached my father and asked for My hand in marriage, but My father did not give Me to any of them. O night-stalker, I shall tell you the reason why. Listen. My father wanted to have Lord Viṣṇu, Lord of the three worlds, as his son-in-law, and would not give Me to anyone else but Him. Hearing this, Lord Śiva, being proud of his strength, became angry. That sinful one came and killed My father while he was sleeping at night. Then My glorious mother was devastated. Embracing My father’s body, she entered the funeral pyre. Since then I have established Lord Viṣṇu in My heart so that I can

carry out My father's wish in regards to Him. Having taken this vow, I am performing severe austerities. O best of the rākṣasas, I have now told you everything. No one other than that best of persons Lord Viṣṇu is My husband. I am performing these stringent restrictions because of My desire to achieve the shelter of Lord Viṣṇu. O king, by dint of My austerities I know everything there is in all the three worlds. I have also understood who you are, O son of Viśravā. You may now go.'

"Smitten with the arrows of Cupid, Rāvaṇa climbed down from his aerial vehicle and responded to that austere maiden: 'O shapely woman, it is very presumptuous of You to have made such a decision. O lady with eyes like a doe, the endeavor to accumulate merit is for old women. You who possess all good qualities should not speak like that. You are the most beautiful woman in all the three worlds and Your youth is passing away. O gentle one, I am the lord of Laṅkā known as Rāvaṇa. Become my wife and enjoy pleasures as You wish. And who is that Viṣṇu of whom You just spoke? O lady, the one whom You desire is not equal to me in manliness, austerities, enjoyment or strength!'

"After Rāvaṇa finished speaking, Vedavatī replied as follows: 'Do not, I repeat, do not talk like that!' Then the maiden said to the night-stalker: 'O lord of the rākṣasas, except for you, no intelligent person would disparage Lord Viṣṇu, who is the Lord of the three worlds and respected by everyone.'

When spoken to in that way by Vedavatī, the night-stalker grabbed the maiden's hair with his hand. Becoming infuriated, Vedavatī used Her hand like a sword and cut off Her hair. Feeling the urge to quickly give up her life, She used Her mystic powers to kindle a fire. Then, while blazing with anger, She addressed the rākṣasa as if She would burn him up: 'O ignoble one, insulted by you, I no longer wish to live. Therefore, O rākṣasa, I shall enter fire as you watch. Because you have insulted Me in this forest, I shall take birth again for your destruction. A woman cannot kill a man, even when his resolve is sinful. And if I curse you, the result of my austerities will be exhausted. If I have done any pious deed, given any charity or executed

any sacrifice, I shall surely appear without parturition as the daughter of a righteous man.'

"Having said this, She entered the blazing fire. All around a shower of celestial flowers fell from the sky. Then She again reappeared out of a lotus flower, and was Herself lustrous like a lotus. As previously, the rākṣasa again seized Her who was as radiant as the inside of a lotus flower, and took Her to his residence. Rāvaṇa showed Her to one of his ministers. The minister, who was expert in physiognomy, examined Her features and said the following to Rāvaṇa: 'If this shapely woman stays in your house, She will be the cause of your destruction.'

O Rāma, when Rāvaṇa heard this, he threw Her in the ocean. Reaching the shore, She positioned Herself beneath the ground of a sacrificial arena. She was dug up by the ploughshare of King Janaka. Thus the chaste lady reappeared. O Lord, that daughter of King Janaka is Your wife and You are in fact the primeval Lord Viṣṇu. It was the curse occasioned by Her anger in Her previous life which enabled You to kill Your enemy. In the same way, this fortunate lady will again appear among mortals uncovered by a ploughshare in a field, like a fire flaring up on a sacrificial altar. In Her previous birth in Satyayuga, the Golden Age, She was known as Vedavatī. In Tretāyuga She appeared anew in the dynasty of Mithilā as the daughter of the great King Janaka. Because She came up out of a plowed furrow, the people called Her Sītā."

RĀVAṆA DEFEATS KING MARUTTA

Agastya continued: “After Vedavatī had entered fire, Rāvaṇa got on board the Puṣpaka airship and again began wandering the earth. When Rāvaṇa reached a placed called Uśīrabīja, he saw King Marutta performing a sacrifice along with the gods. Surrounded by hosts of gods, a brāhmaṇa sage named Saṁvarta, a brother of Bṛhaspati, was performing the sacrifice. As soon as the gods saw that rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, who was difficult to defeat, they became frightened and hid themselves in the guise of animals. Indra became a peacock; Yama, a crow; Kuvera, a chameleon; and Varuṇa, a swan. After all the other gods had similarly disguised themselves, Rāvaṇa entered the sacrificial arena like an unclean dog.

“Rāvaṇa approached the king and said: ‘Fight with me or admit that you are defeated.’ After that, King Marutta said: ‘Who are you?’ Uttering a derisive laugh, Rāvaṇa spoke the following words: ‘I am very pleased with your poise, O king, who do not know me to be Rāvaṇa, the younger brother of Kuvera, the lord of wealth. Who else in the three worlds does not know my strength or that I confiscated this aerial vehicle after defeating my brother?’

“Thereafter King Marutta replied to Rāvaṇa: ‘You are certainly fortunate that you could defeat your elder brother in combat. There is no one as praiseworthy as you in all the three worlds. What pious deed did you perform in the past for which you received a boon? I have never heard anything like what you say before. O fool, stay here for a while. You will not leave here alive. I shall send you to the abode of death with my sharp arrows.’

“Grabbing his bow and arrows, the king angrily sallied forth to fight, but Saṁvarta blocked his way. He spoke the following affectionate words to Marutta: ‘Please follow my advice. It is not advantageous for you to fight. If

this sacrifice which is being performed to propitiate Lord Śiva is left unfinished, it will scorch your dynasty. How can one who is consecrated for sacrifice engage in combat or become angry? The outcome of a fight is always uncertain, and this rākṣasa is very difficult to defeat.’

“Accepting his preceptor’s advice, King Marutta withdrew. Casting aside his bow and arrows, he became calm and returned his attention to the sacrifice. Considering them defeated, Rāvaṇa’s jubilant minister Śuka loudly shouted: ‘Rāvaṇa has triumphed!’ After devouring the great sages who had come there for the sacrifice and satisfying himself with their blood, Rāvaṇa once more began wandering the earth.

“After Rāvaṇa had gone, the gods and celestial denizens headed by Indra resumed their original forms and addressed the animals. Out of joy, Indra said to the blue-tailed peacock: ‘O knower of righteousness, I am pleased with you. Snakes will never be a danger for you. These thousand eyes of mine will appear as spots on your tail. When I send down showers of rain, you will rejoice as a sign of affection.’ Thus Indra, the lord of the gods, granted boons to the peacock. O Rāma, formerly peacocks’ tails were only plain blue. After receiving those boons from Lord Indra, all the peacocks left.

“Yama said to the crow perched on the roof of the sacrificial cottage: ‘O bird, I am very pleased with you. Hear my words of gratitude. Because I am pleased with you, the diseases that afflict other living entities will not afflict you. Of this there is no doubt. Because of the boon which I grant you, death will not be a cause of fear for you. In fact, you will live as long as people do not kill you. When you have been fed, those who are in my abode suffering from hunger will be completely satisfied, along with their relatives.’

“Then Varuṇa said to the swan that was swimming in the water of the Ganges: ‘O lord of birds, listen to my words of love. Your color will be pleasing to the mind and charming like the orb of the moon. Your upper body will be as effulgent as white foam. Coming into contact with my body, which is water, you will always appear lovely and will enjoy unequalled delight. This will be the sign of my affection.’

“O Rāma, in the past swans were not completely white. The ends of their wings were a dark blue and their breasts were dark like the tips of durvā grass.

“Then Kuvera said to the chameleon that was sitting on a slab of rock: ‘Because I am also pleased with you, I shall bestow upon you a golden hue. Your head will always have an unfading golden color. Because of my affection for you, your complexion will become golden.’

“After granting such boons to the animals upon completing the sacrifice, the gods returned to their abode with their ruler, Indra.”

ANARAṆYA CURSES RĀVAṆA

Agastya continued: “After conquering King Marutta and being eager for combat, Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, set out for the capitals of different kings. Approaching the great kings who were like Indra and Varuṇa, Rāvaṇa said to them: ‘Give me battle or admit that you are defeated. This is my ultimatum. Those who act otherwise will not escape.’

“After consulting among themselves, the wise kings who were fearless and determined to be righteous, recognizing the enemy’s strength derived from boons, admitted defeat. Duṣyanta, Suratha, Gādhī, Gaya and Purūravā—all these kings admitted defeat.

“Then, after reaching Ayodhyā, which was well-protected by King Anaraṇya as Amarāvātī is by Lord Indra, Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, approached the exalted king who was equal to Lord Indra in might and said: ‘Give me battle or admit defeat. Such is my command.’ Enraged to hear the sinful wretch’s arrogance, Anaraṇya, the king of Ayodhyā, replied to the lord of rākṣasas: ‘O lord of the rākṣasas, I shall fight a duel with you. Just wait and quickly get ready. I am also getting ready.’

“Since Anaraṇya had prior warning, he had gathered a huge army. Eager to kill the rākṣasa, the king’s army sallied forth. Ten thousand elephants and one hundred thousand horses, many thousands of chariots and footsoldiers came out onto the battlefield, completely covering the ground. Then, O Rāma, a fierce and amazing battle ensued between King Anaraṇya and the lord of the rākṣasas. After encountering Rāvaṇa’s forces, the king’s army was completely annihilated, like oblations offered in a sacrificial fire. Upon coming into contact with the blazing Rāvaṇa, the army was quickly decimated, like a moth entering a fire.

“The king saw his great army perish, like thousands of streams entering the great ocean. Then, infuriated as he was, he twanged his bow,

which was like that of Indra, and approached Rāvaṇa. The ministers Mārīca, Śuka, Sāraṇa and Prahasta were defeated by Anaraṇya and fled like deer. Then Anaraṇya shot eight hundred arrows into Rāvaṇa's head. Although those arrows struck Rāvaṇa in the head, they did not injure him, anymore than would showers of water from a cloud falling on top of a mountain. Then, when King Anaraṇya was struck on the head by the palm of Rāvaṇa's hand, he fell off of his chariot. Bewildered and shaken, the king fell on the ground like a sāla tree struck by lightning in the forest.

“Ridiculing that king of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, Rāvaṇa said: ‘What have you achieved now by fighting with me? O king, there is no one in the three worlds who can contend with me. I suppose you did not hear about my might because you were engaged in sense enjoyment.’

“The king whose life was waning replied as follows: ‘What can I do now? Indeed, no one can escape death. I have certainly not been defeated by you, O rākṣasa, who praise yourself. I have been defeated by fate itself, and you have been but an instrument. What can I do now that my life is finished? At least, O rākṣasa, I was not opposed to fighting and have been killed while fighting. Because you have insulted the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, I shall curse you. If I have ever given charity, executed a sacrifice, performed a pious deed, practiced austerities or completely protected the people, then let my words prove true. Indeed, in this dynasty of the great descendents of King Ikṣvāku will be born Rāma, a son of King Daśaratha, who will take away your life.’

“When that curse was uttered, the drums of the gods resounded like the loud thunder of a cloud and showers of flowers fell from the sky. Then that king ascended to heaven, afterwhich the rākṣasa departed.”

RĀVAṆA MEETS NĀRADA MUNI

Agastya continued: “While terrorizing the mortals on earth, Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, happened to meet Nārada Muni, the best of sages, in a cloud in the sky. After greeting Nārada and inquiring about his welfare, the night-stalker Rāvaṇa asked Nārada why he had come. Standing on top of a cloud, the glorious Nārada, a sage among the gods with an immeasurable effulgence, spoke the following words to Rāvaṇa, who was seated in the Puṣpaka airship: ‘My dear lord of the rākṣasas and son of Viśravā, please stay for some time. O you of noble descent, I am pleased with your bold exploits. I am very pleased by Lord Viṣṇu’s slaying of daityas and by your defeat of gandharvas and nāgas. But I will just tell you something worth hearing, if you will listen. My dear son, please concentrate on listening as I speak. Why are you, who cannot be killed by the gods, destroying this world? Indeed, this world is already destroyed, in that it has succumbed to death. The world of humans does not deserve to be tormented by you, who cannot be killed by gods, dānavas, daityas, yakṣas, gandharvas or rākṣasas. Who would bother killing people who are ignorant of their own welfare, are surrounded by great adversities and are suffering from old age and hundreds of diseases?

“What wise person would feel like waging war in the world of humans, which is always afflicted with adversities everywhere? Please do not destroy this world, which is already destroyed by destiny and ravaged by hunger, thirst, old age and is bewildered by despair and sorrow. O mighty lord of the rākṣasas, just look at this world of humans, who though deluded, are endeavoring for many goals without knowing what is their destiny. In some places people are enjoying music, dance, etc., and in other places people are crying with tears streaming down their faces. Deluded by affection for mother, father and children, and desires in relation to wife and relatives, one is lost and is not aware of one’s own hardship. So, what will you gain by tormenting this world, which is already devastated by delusion. My dear friend, you have undoubtedly already conquered the mortal world. All

these beings have to go to the abode of Yama, the lord of death. Therefore, go subdue Yama, the conqueror of enemy cities. When he is conquered, everything is conquered. Of this there is no doubt.’

“After being spoken to in this way, the lord of Laṅkā laughed as he replied to Nārada, who was shining with his own glory: ‘O great sage who enjoys the company of gods and gandharvas, you are fond of watching conflicts. I am ready to go to the nether region known as Rasātala for conquest. Then, after conquering the three worlds and subduing the nāgas and gods, I shall churn the ocean in order to extract the nectar of immortality.’

“Then the holy sage Nārada said to Rāvaṇa: ‘Why are you going that way? This is in fact the difficult path leading to the city of Yama, the king of the dead.’

“Uttering a laugh that sounded like an autumn cloud, Rāvaṇa said: ‘It is done!’ Then he added: ‘O brāhmaṇa, I am determined to annihilate Yama, the son of the sun-god. I am heading toward the south, where its ruler Yama is. O venerable lord, desirous of combat, I took a vow in anger that I would conquer the four protectors of the world. Now that I have set off for the city of Yama, I shall put to death him who is afflicting the living entities.’

“After speaking in this way, Rāvaṇa bid farewell to the sage and departed, entering the southern region with his ministers. Nārada, who was like a smokeless fire, wondered: ‘How Rāvaṇa will defeat Yama, who justly afflicts the three worlds of moving and nonmoving beings, including Indra, when their lifespan is expired? Yama is aware of the gifts and deeds of everyone and is like a second fire. By his mercy all living beings have achieved consciousness and are active. The three worlds are always running about in fear of him. Yama has conquered the three worlds. How will the lord of rākṣasas subdue him who is the support of the world and the dispenser of the results of good and evil deeds? How will he conquer him who has conquered the three worlds? After defeating Rāvaṇa, what other order will he establish? Since I am curious, I shall personally go to Yama’s abode to see the encounter between Yama and the rākṣasa.’”

RĀVAṆA INVADES THE REALM OF YAMA

Agastya continued: “Having thought in that way, Nārada, who was a swift traveller, departed for the abode of Yama in order to inform him of what had happened. There he saw Yama with a sacrificial fire before him. He was judging the living entities according to the nature of their actions. When Yama saw that Nārada had arrived, he accordingly offered him a comfortable seat and water for washing the hands and said: ‘O sage among the gods, I hope everything is all right. I hope righteousness has not been vanquished. O you who are worshiped by gods and gandharvas, what is the purpose of your coming?’

“The holy sage Nārada thereupon replied in the following way: ‘Please listen. I shall inform you. Make appropriate preparations. O king of the forefathers, the night-stalker named Rāvaṇa is coming to subdue you by his prowess, even though you are hard to defeat. For this reason I have hurriedly come, O lord. I now wonder what will happen to you who hold the rod of chastisement.’

“Meanwhile, they saw from afar the rākṣasa’s aerial vehicle arriving and shining like the sun. Dispelling the darkness of that entire region with the effulgence of the Puṣpaka, the mighty Rāvaṇa drew near.

“Here and there Rāvaṇa saw living beings undergoing the results of their pious or sinful actions. He also saw Yama’s soldiers, along with his attendants. He also saw embodied beings crying and screaming loudly as they were being tortured and executed by Yama’s dreadful agents, who were hideous and frightening. In this way, Rāvaṇa saw hundreds and thousands of people being eaten by maggots and fierce dogs and uttering words unbearable to hear. Others were being forced to repeatedly cross the Vaitaraṇī River, which has blood for water. Others were suffering from continually walking on burning sands. Others were being cut in forests with leaves as sharp as the blades of swords. Others were being forced to tread

over razor blades and then in streams of salty water. Others who were thirsty and hungry were pleading for water to drink. Others who were practically corpses were running about, emaciated, miserable, pale, dissheveled and soiled with dirt and mud.

“Rāvaṇa also saw some people in mansions who were enjoying themselves with the sounds of singing and music by dint of their pious deeds. He saw those who had given the gift of a cow drinking milk, those who had given food eating food, and those who had donated houses living in houses. They were enjoying the fruits of their deeds. Other pious persons were adorned with gold, jewels, pearls and the company of beautiful women, and were shining with their own glory. By his prowess, the mighty Rāvaṇa forcefully liberated all those who were being tortured for their sinful activities. Those living beings who were liberated by Rāvaṇa enjoyed for some time a happiness that was unexpected and unimaginable.

“While the mighty Rāvaṇa was freeing the deceased, their guards angrily rushed upon him. A great clamor arose from all directions as Yama’s heroic warriors rushed to the scene. Hundreds and thousands of warriors assaulted the Puṣpaka with spears, iron bars, pikes, bludgeons, javelins and iron clubs. Like a swarm of bees, they quickly demolished the seats, compartments, platforms and archways of the Puṣpaka. Although the Puṣpaka vehicle, which was a transport for the gods, was being assaulted, it remained intact by the power of Lord Brahmā. The great Yama’s army was huge and incalculable. There were hundreds and thousands of soldiers who formed the advance troops. Thereafter Rāvaṇa and his ministers fought according to their will and strength with hundreds of trees, mountains and buildings.

“Although their limbs were wounded with all kinds of weapons and were smeared with blood, Rāvaṇa’s ministers put up a great fight. The ministers of Yama and Rāvaṇa struck each other fiercely with weapons. Then Yama’s mighty fighters abandoned Rāvaṇa’s ministers and rushed upon Rāvaṇa himself with a shower of pikes. With his limbs lacerated by the blows of weapons and smeared with blood, the lord of the rākṣasas seated in the Puṣpaka looked like a blossoming aśoka tree. The mighty Rāvaṇa

counterattacked by hurling pikes, clubs, spears, javelins, iron clubs, arrows, bludgeons, mountain peaks and trees by dint of his ability to discharge mystic weapons. That fearsome shower of trees, boulders and weapons fell upon Yama's troops stationed on the ground.

“After destroying all those projectiles and counteracting a mystic weapon, the soldiers assaulted the formidable Rāvaṇa by the hundreds and thousands. Surrounding him like a cloud around a mountain, they assaulted him with short javelins and pikes to suffocate him. With his armor smashed, soaked with streams of blood and infuriated, Rāvaṇa left the Puṣpaka and stood on the ground. When he had regained consciousness after some time, he took his bow and arrows and angrily stood on the battlefield like death personified. Placing the mystic pāśupata missile on his bow and shouting “wait! wait!” he drew back the bowstring. Pulling the bowstring back to his ear, that enemy of Indra then released it, as Lord Śiva shot at Tripura. With its circle of smoke and fire, that arrow looked like a summer wild fire growing to burn a forest.

“With its garland of flames, that missile reduced trees and bushes to ashes as it coursed across the battlefield, as carnivorous beasts followed in its wake. When burned by its fire, Yama's soldiers fell on the battlefield like Indra's flags. Then the rākṣasa with frightful prowess roared loudly, causing the earth to shake.”

RĀVAṆA DEFEATS YAMA

Agastya continued: “When Yama heard Rāvaṇa’s loud roaring, he concluded that the enemy was victorious and that his own army had been destroyed. Believing that his forces had been wiped out, his eyes became blood red and he hurriedly said to his charioteer: ‘Bring my chariot!’

“After bringing the huge chariot, the charioteer stood there and the glorious Yama climbed into the chariot. With a spear and mallet in his hands, the lord of death, who destroys all these three worlds, stood in front of the charioteer. Yama’s divine rod of chastisement stood at his side in a personified form blazing like fire. At his sides stood perfect nooses and a mallet in its personified form whose impact was like fire. Seeing the lord of death, who was a cause of fear for all people, enraged, the three worlds thereupon became disturbed and the residents of the heavenly planets began trembling.

“Then the charioteer urged on the lustrous horses, and the chariot proceeded forward making a frightful noise as it reached the place where the rākṣasa was. In one moment those horses, being equal to those of Indra, brought Yama to the place where the battle was raging. When Rāvaṇa’s ministers saw that chariot, which was bearing the lord of death, and was therefore frightening to behold, they immediately fled. Because of their meager strength, they became overwhelmed with fear and lost consciousness. Unable to fight at that time, they fled in all directions. But when Rāvaṇa saw that chariot which was a cause of fear for the world, he did not feel disturbed or afraid. Yama then approached Rāvaṇa and hurled spears and javelins at him, piercing his vulnerable parts.

“Rāvaṇa, however, who was self-situated, released a shower of arrows on Yama’s chariot, as a cloud would pummel a mountain with rain. As hundreds of spears stuck against the rākṣasa’s chest, he was unable to fight back because of the pain he felt from his wounds. In this way, as the battle

raged on for seven nights, Yama, who employed many different kinds of weapons, rendered Rāvaṇa unconscious and averse to fighting.

“Then, O hero, a tumultuous duel ensued between Yama and Rāvaṇa, both desiring victory and neither retreating from combat. The the gods, accompanied by gandharvas, siddhas and great sages, gathered at that battlefield, placing Lord Brahmā before them. While the chief of rākṣasas and the lord of the dead were fighting, it seemed as if the world was about to end. Rāvaṇa stretched back his bow, which was as effulgent as Indra’s thunderbolt, and released arrows, seemingly filling all intervening space.

“Rāvaṇa struck the lord of death with four arrows and the charioteer with seven arrows. He quickly pierced Yama in his vital parts with one thousand arrows. Then out of Yama’s mouth came a fire of anger with a garland of flames along with breath and smoke. Witnessing that marvel in the presence of the gods and dānavas, both Yama and death personified felt inspired to fight.

“Extremely angered, the personification of death said to Yama: ‘Leave me on the battlefield until I kill this sinful rākṣasa! The rākṣasa will not live past today, for this is a natural law. The glorious Hiranyakaśipu, Namuci, Śambara, Nisandi, Dhūmaketu, Bali, the son of Virocana, the daitya Śambhu, the great king Vṛtra, Vāṇa, royal sages learned in the scriptures, gandharvas, mighty nāgas, wise men, serpents, daityas, yakṣas, hosts of celestial damsels, this earth with its oceans, mountains, rivers and trees were brought to an end by me at the end of the age. These and many other great and powerful persons who were difficult to approach were killed by me as soon as I saw them, what to speak of this night-stalker. Leave me completely alone until I have slain him. No one whom I see can survive, no matter how strong they are! O Yama, when I see this fellow, he will not survive for even a short while. This is not because of my strength, but is a natural thing.’

“After hearing death personified’s declaration, the glorious Yama said to him: ‘You stay here. I shall kill this fellow.’

“Thereafter Yama, his eyes bloodshot from anger, lifted in his hand his unfailing rod of chastisement. On its four sides were deadly nooses. Also

the personified form of a mallet stood there shining like fire or a thunderbolt and could take away the life of living beings by its mere sight, what to speak of being touched or knocked down by it.

“When that great weapon with its circle of flames was touched by the mighty Yama, it shone as if it was going to incinerate the rākṣasa. All the rākṣasas fled from the battlefield in fear of Yama. All the gods also felt perturbed when they saw Yama with his rod of chastisement raised. As Yama was preparing to strike Rāvaṇa with his rod, Lord Brahmā personally appeared there and said to him: ‘O strong-armed son of the sun-god, your prowess is immeasurable. Actually you cannot kill this night-stalker with your rod. In fact, I have given a boon to this rākṣasa. Any boon or promise which I have given should not be invalidated. Anyone, whether a god or a man, who renders my word invalid will have reduced all the three worlds into liars. Of this there is no doubt. If you release this weapon in a fit of anger, it will destroy all living entities, both those that are not dear to you and those that are.’

“Indeed, this rod of chastisement is unfailing in its effect on all living beings and its effulgence is immeasurable. It was previously created by me and is accompanied by death. As such, my dear one, you should not strike Rāvaṇa in the head with this weapon, for if it should fall, no one would survive for more than a moment. Whether this rākṣasa dies from being struck by this weapon, or whether he survives, in any event my boons will have been rendered false. Therefore, withdraw this raised rod from Rāvaṇa and in that way uphold my veracity, if you care about the worlds.’

“When petitioned in this way, the righteous Yama replied: ‘Because you are my master, this rod is now withdrawn. If I am unable to kill him because of the boons you have given him, what can I do now by staying on the battlefield? I shall therefore vanish from the sight of this rākṣasa.’ After saying this, he disappeared right there with his chariot and horses.

“After Rāvaṇa defeated Yama, he proclaimed his own name. Mounting the Puṣpaka airship, he emerged from Yama’s abode. Yama and Nārada Muni ascended to the heavenly planets with the gods headed by Lord Brahmā.”

RĀVAṆA DEFEATS VARUṆA'S SONS

Agastya continued: “After defeating Yama, the best of the gods, Rāvaṇa, who was boastful of his fighting, then saw his associates. The rākṣasas were amazed to see Rāvaṇa lacerated by projectiles and bathed in blood. After congratulating him for his victory and being assured by him, the ministers headed by Mārīca boarded the Puspaka airship. In order to go to the nether region called Rasātala, the rākṣasa entered the ocean, which is inhabited by daiyas and nāgas and well-protected by Varuṇa. After reaching the city of Bhogavatī ruled by Vāsuki, he subdued the nāgas and jubilantly departed for the city of Maṇimayī. There dwelt a class of daityas called Nivātakavacas, who had received boons from Lord Brahmā. Approaching them, the rākṣasa challenged them to fight. All those sons of Diti were extremely courageous and powerful. They were armed with all kinds of weapons and obsessed with combat, and were therefore overjoyed for this opportunity to fight. The rākṣasas and dānavas were infuriated and injured each other with pikes, tridents, thunderbolts, spears, swords and axes. While they were fighting, a whole year passed without either side being victorious or defeated.

“Then Lord Brahmā, the immortal refuge of the three worlds, suddenly arrived there seated in his excellent aerial vehicle. The ancient grandsire Lord Brahmā stopped the Nivātakavacas from fighting and spoke the following informative instructions: ‘This fellow Rāvaṇa cannot be defeated in battle by the gods or demons, nor can you be exterminated by the gods or dānavas. Therefore it is good for you to establish friendship with this rākṣasa. Friends enjoy their good fortune in an undivided manner. There is no doubt about this.’

“Thereafter Rāvaṇa made an alliance with the Nivātakavacas in the presence of a fire and at the time became very pleased. Honored by them according to the rules of courtesy, Rāvaṇa stayed there for a year and enjoyed pleasures indistinguishable from those in his own city. There he learned one

hundred different conjuring tricks. Then he wandered about Rasātala in search of the capital city of Varuṇa, the lord of the ocean. Reaching a city named Aśmanagara, which was inhabited by the proud Kālakeyas, Rāvaṇa massacred them. At that time he also cut down with a sword Śūrpaṇakhā's husband, his own brother-in-law Vidyujjihva, when he was about to lick Rāvaṇa to death on the battlefield. After defeating him, Rāvaṇa obliterated four hundred daityas in an hour's time.

“Afterwards the lord of the rākṣasas saw the heavenly abode of Varuṇa, which resembled a white cloud and shone like Mount Kailāśa. There Rāvaṇa saw the Surabhi cow, the mother of the best of bulls. She was pouring forth milk which forms the ocean called Kṣīrodaka. From that ocean of milk arises the moon with its cool rays signalling the night. The topmost sages live off of the foam of that ocean of milk, and from it was produced the nectar of immortality and food for the deceased.

“Circumambulating clockwise around that wonderful cow whom people in this world call Surabhi, Rāvaṇa entered the formidable and remote abode of Varuṇa, which was protected by many different troops. Then he saw Varuṇa's palace adorned with one hundred waterfalls, shining like an autumn cloud and always appearing very joyful. After killing the generals and also being struck by them, Rāvaṇa said to those warriors: ‘Immediately inform your king that Rāvaṇa has arrived looking for a fight. He should fight with me or he may admit defeat with joined palms and there will be no cause of fear for him.’

“Meanwhile, the sons and grandsons of the great Varuṇa angrily came out, led by the two generals, Gau and Puṣkara. When they had hitched their chariots, which could go wherever they wished and were as brilliant as the risen sun, they appeared on the battlefield adorned with their good qualities and surrounded by their forces. Then a frightening and hair-raising battle took place between the sons of Varuṇa and the crafty Rāvaṇa. The whole army was annihilated in a moment by Rāvaṇa's ministers, who were exceptionally valorous.

“When Varuṇa’s sons saw that their army had been devastated and themselves tormented by the shower of arrows, they retreated from battle. While they were still on the ground, they saw Rāvaṇa seated in his Puṣpaka airship. Then they quickly entered into the sky in their swift chariots. When they were at the same level as Rāvaṇa, a great and tumultuous battle ensued, like the struggle between the gods and the dānavas. When they forced Rāvaṇa to turn away from the battle with their blazing arrows, Varuṇa’s sons were overjoyed and shouted in various ways.

“The valiant Mahodara was infuriated when he saw his king overpowered. Shedding fear of death, he glanced around, looking for an opportunity to fight. When Mahodara struck the horses with his mace on the battlefield, they fell down to the ground. After killing soldiers and horses of Varuṇa’s sons and seeing them deprived of their chariots, Mahodara uttered a loud roar. When destroyed by Mahodara, the chariots of Varuṇa’s sons fell on the ground, along with their horses and excellent charioteers. Abandoning their chariots, Varuṇa’s sons stood in the sky by their own power and did not feel disturbed.

“Varuṇa’s sons strung their bows and pierced Mahodara. Then, angry as they were, they all surrounded Rāvaṇa on the battlefield. They began piercing Rāvaṇa with dreadful arrows as hard as thunderbolts shot from their bows, as clouds would assail a mountain. Rāvaṇa, who resembled the raging fire of universal dissolution, was enraged and released a frightful shower of arrows on their vital parts. As Rāvaṇa stood firmly, he hurled on them different kinds of bludgeons, hundreds of lances, sharp-edged spears, javelins and spiked balls of iron. Although badly wounded, the soldiers moved forward. The foot soldiers were quickly put into difficulty, like a sixty-year old elephant caught in a big swamp.

“When the mighty Rāvaṇa saw that Varuṇa’s sons were weakened and distracted, he roared out of joy like a big cloud. Uttering loud roars, the rākṣasa then began striking Varuṇa’s sons with different kinds of weapons, like a cloud pummeling trees with showers. Then they all fell to the ground with their faces turned, and they were immediately taken from the battlefield by their attendants and brought to their homes. Then the rākṣasa

said to them: 'Announce my presence to Varuṇa.' But one of Varuṇa's ministers named Prahāsa said to Rāvaṇa: 'The great king Varuṇa, lord of the waters, whom you are challenging, has actually gone to the abode of Lord Brahmā to hear the music of the gandharvas. Since the king has left, O hero, what is the use of your exerting yourself? As for his sons who were present here, they are defeated.'

"When Rāvaṇa heard this, he loudly declared his name as lord of the rākṣasas and left Varuṇa's abode while shouting for joy. Proceeding by the same route by which he had come, he entered the sky and went back to Laṅkā."

RĀVAṆA ABDUCTS CELESTIAL DAMSELS

Agastya continued: “While jubilantly returning home, the wicked Rāvaṇa abducted on the way the daughters of kings, sages, gods and dānavas. Killing the kinfolk of the maidens or married women whom he found attractive, he locked them up in his aerial vehicle. In this way, he carried off in his airship the daughters of nāgas, rākṣasas, asuras, human beings, yakṣas and dānavas. Out of anguish, they all simultaneously shed tears, which were like sparks of fire since they had sprung from fear and the fire of sorrow. As the ocean is filled on all sides by rivers, the airship was filled with those irreproachable women shedding inauspicious tears out of fear and anguish. The virgin daughters of nāgas, great sages, daityas and dānavas wailed by the hundreds. They had long hair and charming limbs. Their faces shone like full moons. They had large breasts and slim waists that were as effulgent as altars made of diamonds. They caught one’s mind, like the crossbar of a chariot pole. The women were just like ladies from the heavenly planets and their effulgence was like molten gold. They were afflicted with grief, sorrow and fear. They were completely disturbed. They were very shapely. Shining on all sides because of their sighs, the Puṣpaka looked like a pit with a sacrificial fire burning within it. The women were overwhelmed with grief because they had fallen into the power of Rāvaṇa. The faces and eyes looked miserable, like deer captured by a lion. Some of them were wondering whether Rāvaṇa would devour them, others wondered whether he would kill them.

“Remembering their mothers, fathers, husbands and brothers and being overwhelmed by sorrow and grief, they lamented all together: ‘I wonder how my son will get along without me. How will my mother and brother sunken in an ocean of sorrow manage? Oh, how will I fare without my husband? O death, I beseech you! Please take me, who am suffering misfortune! I wonder what misdeed I committed in my previous life for which we have all fallen into this ocean of grief and am miserable. Indeed, I do not see any end to our sorrow. Oh cursed is this world of humans! Surely

there is no world lower than this, in which our weak husbands were overpowered by the mighty Rāvaṇa, as stars are obliterated by the gradual rising of the sun. Oh, how this mighty rākṣasa enjoys inventing means of destruction! Although he adheres to wicked conduct, he is not disgusted with himself. In that case this wicked fellow's prowess befits him. But this act of laying hands on others' wives is unbecoming. Since this foolish and lowest of rākṣasas delights in the wives of others, he will therefore meet his death simply because of the effort of a women.'

"When these fine ladies uttered such words, kettledrums resounded in the sky and a shower of flowers fell. Upon being cursed by chaste women devoted to their husbands, Rāvaṇa lost his luster, like one whose vigor had been destroyed, and he felt disturbed. While listening to their laments, that foremost of the rākṣasas entered the city of Lankā while being honored by the night-stalkers.

"Meanwhile, Rāvaṇa's sister, a horrible rākṣasī capable of changing her form at will, suddenly threw herself on the ground. Consoling his sister and lifting her up, he said: 'My dear sister, what is it you wish to tell me so urgently?' With red eyes obscured by tears, she replied as follows: 'O mighty king, you have made me a widow! You massacred by your prowess fourteen thousand daityas called Kālakeyas in battle. At that time, you, my enemy in the guise of my brother, killed my mighty husband, who was dearer to me than my own life. O king, I have been killed by you, my own relative! I shall now suffer the title of widow bestowed on me by you. Did not your brother-in-law deserve to be protected by you, even in conflicts? Although you killed him in combat, you are not ashamed.'

"When spoken to in this way by his crying sister, Rāvaṇa consoled her and replied as follows: 'My dear sister, please stop crying. You have no need to be afraid of anyone. I shall satisfy you with gifts, honors and favors. Because I was intoxicated by battle, distracted and eager for victory, I was discharging arrows without being able to recognize my own people from others on the battlefield. Wild as I was while shooting, I did not recognize my brother-in-law. That is why I killed your husband on the battlefield. I shall at this time do whatever is best for you. Live with your cousin Khara, who has been granted lordship. Your mighty cousin will have the power to

command and maintain fourteen thousand rākṣasas. Your cousin Khara is in fact very capable. He will always do whatever you command. Let him immediately go to guard the Daṇḍakā Forest. The mighty Duṣaṇa will be the commander of his forces. While living there, Khara will do whatever you say. He will be the lord of those rākṣasas capable of assuming any form they choose.’

“After speaking in that way, Rāvaṇa ordered fourteen thousand valiant rākṣasas to become Khara’s army. Surrounded by those fierce-looking rākṣasas, Khara, who had no reason to fear punishment by anyone, soon reached the Daṇḍakā Forest. There he established his rule and Śūrpaṇakhā also lived in the same Daṇḍakā forest.”

MEGHANĀDA BECOMES POWERFUL THROUGH SACRIFICES

Agastya continued: “After putting Khara in command of a formidable army and consoling his sister, Rāvaṇa felt relieved and joyful. Then, accompanied by his followers, the powerful lord of the rākṣasas entered a forest grove in Laṅkā that was called Nikumbhilā. There he saw a sacrificial hall that seemed to be glowing with splendor. It was surrounded by hundreds of sacrificial posts and adorned with a charming shrine. Then he saw his son, Meghanāda, looking very fearsome. He was wearing the pelt of a black antelope. His head was shaved, with a tuft of hair sticking out of the crown of his head. He was holding a water pot in one hand and a staff in the other. Approaching and hugging him with his arms, the lord of Laṅkā said: ‘My dear son, what is this that you are doing? Tell me the truth.’ Śukrācārya, the best of the twice-born and a great ascetic, being the one in charge of the sacrifice, responded to Rāvaṇa’s inquiry as follows:

“O king, I shall tell you everything. Please listen. Your son has performed seven extensive sacrifices. First he performed the Agniṣṭoma, Aśvamedha, Bahusavarṇaka, Rājasūya, Gomedha and a sacrifice to please Lord Viṣṇu. Then, while performing a very difficult sacrifice to please Lord Śiva, your son received boons from Lord Śiva himself. He also received a chariot that can travel in the air, going wherever the driver wishes, as well as the deceptive power called tāmasī māyā, which creates darkness. O lord of the rākṣasas, by employing this power of deception in combat, neither the gods nor the asuras can see one’s movements. He also received a pair of inexhaustible quivers with arrows and a bow difficult to defeat, as well as a weapon capable of destroying the enemy in combat. O Rāvaṇa, after receiving all these boons, your son is standing here eager to see you when he completes the sacrifice, and so am I.’

“Then Rāvaṇa said: ‘This was not done well, for my enemies who are led by Indra were worshipped with offerings! Come now. Whatever was done was all right. There is no doubt. Come, my dear son. Let us go to our home.’ Leaving that place with his son and Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa had all the captured women disembark. Their voices were choked up with tears. Their bodies had auspicious marks and they were like jewels among the gods, dānavas and rākṣasas. Understanding his intention, the righteous Vibhīṣaṇa spoke the following words to Rāvaṇa: ‘By acting in this way according to your own sweet will, you are knowingly offending living beings, which will destroy your fame, fortune and family. After overpowering their relatives, you have brought these ladies. Meanwhile, slighting you, the demon Madhu has abducted your own cousin Kumbhīnaśī. Rāvaṇa then exclaimed: ‘I do not understand how this happened. Who is the fellow whom you said is called Madhu?’

“The irritated Vibhīṣaṇa replied as follows to his brother: ‘Listen. This is the result of your own sinful activities. The aged and wise night-stalker known as Mālyavān is the eldest brother of our maternal grandfather, Sumālī. He is the senior uncle of our mother Kaikaśī. As such he deserves our respect. His daughter Analā had a daughter named Kumbhīnaśī. Since Analā is the daughter of our mother’s sister, she is by nature our sister. While your son was engaged in a sacrifice, I was practicing austerities submerged in water and Kumbhakarna was sound asleep, she was abducted by the stronger rākṣasa Madhu, after killing some of our outstanding and highly regarded ministers. Although she was under protection in your palace, she was overpowered and carried away. When we heard about what happened, we hushed it up. The culprit was not killed, for brothers have to find a husband for an unmarried girl. Let it be known to you that this is the result of your sinful actions and wicked mentality that have now arrived.’

“After hearing what Vibhīṣaṇa said, Rāvaṇa looked like an ocean with its turbulent waters stirred up by his own viciousness. He became furious, his eyes became bloodshot and he said: ‘Immediately get my chariot ready and have my warriors come here! Have my brother Kumbhakarna and other outstanding night-stalkers get into their chariots, armed with all kinds of weapons. Today, after killing this Madhu who is not afraid of me, I shall

go to the world of the gods eager for battle and surrounded by my supporters!’

“Four thousand superb akṣauhiṇīs of rākṣasas set forth. They were bearing all kinds of weapons and were eager for combat. Taking troops with him, Indrajit marched at the head of the army, Rāvaṇa rode in the center and Kumbhakarṇa rode in the rear. The righteous Vibhīṣaṇa stayed in Laṅkā following the principles of piety. All the rest set out for Madhu’s capital. All the rākṣasas rode on various mounts, such as donkeys, camels, excited horses, porpoises and huge snakes, leaving no space in the sky. Seeing Rāvaṇa on the move, daityas, who are inimical to the gods, followed behind him by the hundreds.

“Upon reaching Madhu’s capital, Rāvaṇa entered it and saw his cousin Kumbhīnasī, but not Madhu. Out of fear, Kumbhīnasī joined her palms and touched her head to Rāvaṇa’s feet. Rāvaṇa lifted her up and told her not to be afraid. Then he said: ‘What can I do for you?’ She replied: ‘O mighty king, if you are pleased with me, do not kill my husband! Nothing is more dreadful for women from a good family. Of all adversities, widowhood is the worst. Be true to your word, O king! Look after me who supplicate you! You yourself assured me that I had no reason to be afraid.’

“Rāvaṇa joyfully replied to his cousin, who was standing there: ‘Tell me where your husband really is. I shall go with him to the realm of the gods for conquest. Out of compassion and good will to you, I will refrain from killing Madhu.’

“After being reassured in this way, the rākṣasī Kumbhīnasī gladly woke her husband, who was sleeping, and said to him: ‘My powerful cousin Rāvaṇa has arrived. Desirous of conquering the realm of the gods, he requests your help. Therefore, accompanied by your relations, go as his assistant, O rākṣasa. You ought to do what you can to assist one who is affectionate to you and loves you.’ When Madhu heard this supplication, he replied: ‘So be it!’ Madhu saw Rāvaṇa, the best of rākṣasas and approached him according to custom, offering appropriate respect.

“Rāvaṇa was honored in the home of Madhu and spent the night there, then he got ready to sally forth. After reaching Mount Kailāśa, which is the residence of Kuvera, Rāvaṇa, who resembled Indra in greatness, encamped his army there.”

RĀVAṆA RAPES RAMBHĀ AND IS CURSED

Agastya continued: “When the sun had set, the powerful Rāvaṇa decided to camp there with his army. When the spotless moon, which was as bright as the mountain itself, had risen, the vast army equipped with many different kinds of weapons was sound asleep. While resting on top of the mountain, Rāvaṇa saw the features of the mountain beautified by the moon and trees. The mountain was adorned with groves of trees, such as karṇikāra, kadamba, bakula, campaka, aśoka, punnāga, mandāra, mango, pāṭala, lodhra, priyaṅgu, arjuna, ketaka, tagara, coconut, priyāla, and panasa, as well as ponds full of water from the Maṇḍākinī River and blossoming lotus flowers. In those groves, love-sick kinnaras with sweet voices sang together in a manner that increased the satisfaction of the mind. Intoxicated vidhyādharas with the edges of their eyes red were convorting with their wives and enjoying themselves.

“In Kuvera’s residence could be heard the sweet signing of bebies of celestial damsels, which sounded like the chiming of bells. Dropping showers of flowers when buffeted by wind, the trees seemed to be perfuming that mountain with the sweet fragrances of spring. A pleasant breeze blew, carrying the scent of honey, flowers and pollen, which increased Rāvaṇa’s lustiness. Because of the singing, abundance of flowers, coolness of the breeze, charm of the mountain and rising of the moon, the mighty Rāvaṇa became overwhelmed by lust. Gazing at the moon, he sighed repeatedly.

“Meanwhile, Rambhā, the best of celestial damsels, arrived there adorned with shimmering ornaments. Her face shining like the full moon, her limbs were smeared with divine sandalwood paste and her hair was

decorated with mandāra flowers. She had just began a journey to a heavenly festival and was nicely adorned with heavenly flowers. Her eyes were fascinating and her broad hips were decorated with a girdle, which she wore as an excellent offering of love. With her moist flower decorations from all six seasons and her splendor, beauty, effulgence and glory, she resembled another goddess of fortune. She was veiled in cloth that was the color of a dark blue rain cloud. Her face was like the moon and her beautiful eyebrows resembled two bows. Her thighs were like the trunk of an elephant and her hands were as tender as newly sprouted leaves. Rāvaṇa happened to see her passing through his army's encampment.

“Jumping up and catching her by the hand as she was passing by embarrassed, Rāvaṇa, who was struck by an arrow of lust, smiled and said: ‘Where are you going, O lovely woman? What goal are you trying to accomplish? Whose lucky time has come that he will enjoy with you? Who will tonight be satisfied with the sweet nectar of your lips which have the fragrance of lotuses and lilies? To whose chest will these two large, beautiful and tightly pressed breasts that resemble a pair of golden urns give their touch? Who will mount your broad hips, which resemble a disc of gold and are covered with a golden girdle, looking like heaven itself? What man is greater than I at this time, whether he be Indra, Viṣṇu or the Aśvinī-kumāras? It is not good that you are trying to go somewhere beyond me, O timid lady. Rest on this lovely slab of rock, O woman with shapely hips. I am none other than the lord of the three worlds. In this way, with joined palms Rāvaṇa, the lord of lords and master of the three worlds is beseeching you. Please accept me.’

“When spoken to in this way, Rambhā shook and replied with joined palms: ‘Be kind to me! You should not talk like that, for you are my elder. You should protect me from others if I am attacked, for I am technically your daughter-in-law. I am telling you the truth.’

“As Rambhā was standing there staring at her feet, her hair standing on end from merely seeing him, Rāvaṇa said to her: ‘If you are my son's wife, then you must be my daughter-in-law.’ Rambhā replied to him: ‘Yes! I am the lawful wife of your son, O best of rākṣasas. He is the son of your brother Kuvera, the son of Viśravā, and is dearer to him than his own life. He is

known in all the worlds as Nalakūvara. By nature he is a brāhmaṇa, but by valor he is a kṣatriya. When angered he is like fire, and he is compassionate like the earth. I have an arrangement to meet that son of Kuvera, a protector of the world. All this decoration was done for his sake. As his heart is devoted to me alone, so is mine to him. On the basis of this truth, O king, you should release me, for that righteous soul is waiting for me anxiously. Surely you should not obstruct his plan. Please let me go. Follow the path trodden by the pious, O best of rākṣasas. Just as you deserve my respect, I deserve your protection.’

“When spoken to in these words, Rāvaṇa humbly replied: ‘Your claim that you are my daughter-in-law is true only in the case of those who have one husband. Celestial damsels have no husbands, nor do the gods devote themselves to one woman. Such is the perpetual custom among the gods in the heavenly planets.’

“After saying this he laid her on the rock. Obsessed as he was with the enjoyment of love, he began having sex with her. Her flower decorations broke and fell off. She felt disturbed, like a river churned by the play of a lordly elephant. When she was let go, the ends of her braids were dissheveled and her tender hands were trembling. She looked like a flower-laden creeper shaken by the wind. Trembling, embarrassed and frightened, she approached Nalakūvara with joined palms and fell at his feet. Seeing her in that condition, the great Nalakūvara asked her: ‘O gentle one, why have you fallen at my feet?’ Trembling and sighing, she began telling him exactly what had happened:

“O lord, Rāvaṇa arrived on his way to the heavenly planets. He spent the night in the company of his army. While I was coming to you, that rākṣasa happened to see me and asked me to whom I belonged. I answered him truthfully about everything. Because his mind was overwhelmed by lust, he did not listen to my plea. O lord, ignoring my plea that I was his daughter-in-law, he forcefully raped me. You should forgive me for the offense which was committed in that manner, O observer of good vows. The strength of a woman and a man are not the same.’

“When Nalakūvara heard this, he became infuriated. He then went into a trance. After verifying that transgression in meditation, he shortly returned to consciousness, his eyes red due to anger. Taking some water in his right hand, he sprinkled all the parts of his body according to the ritual of purification. Then he uttered a harsh curse on the lord of the rākṣasas: ‘Since, O gentle lady, you were forcefully violated by him, for you were unwilling, he shall not approach any other young woman who is unwilling. If he lustily violates any other woman who is unwilling, his head will at that moment break into seven pieces.’

“When this curse, which was like a blazing fire, was uttered, the drums of the gods resounded, a shower of flowers fell from the sky and all the gods headed by Lord Brahmā were overjoyed. When the sages and forefathers understood the destiny of the world and the ultimate death of the rākṣasa, they experienced the highest delight. When Rāvaṇa heard about this hair-raising curse, he no longer felt inclined to enjoy sex with women who were unwilling. The devoted wives who had been kidnapped by him were overwhelmed with happiness when they heard about the curse which Nalakūvara and uttered.”

INDRA ASKS LORD VIṢṆU FOR HELP

Agastya continued: “Going past Mount Kailāśa with his mighty army and vehicles, Rāvaṇa reached the realm of Lord Indra. The sound of the rākṣasa army approaching from all sides resounded in the heavenly planets like the ocean being stirred up. When Lord Indra heard that Rāvaṇa had arrived, he fell off his throne. Then he said to all the gods who were gathered there—the twelve sons of Aditi, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras the forty-nine Maruts and the sādhyas: ‘Get ready to fight against the wicked Rāvaṇa.’ When commanded in this way by Indra, the gods, who were equal to Indra in battle and extremely courageous, put on armor and felt enthusiastic for combat. Lord Indra was terrified of Rāvaṇa and was feeling miserable. He addressed the following words to Lord Viṣṇu, who had just arrived:

“O Lord Viṣṇu, how should I deal with the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa? Alas, the mighty rākṣasa has come to fight. He is so powerful because of the boons he has received, and not for any other reason. But whatever word Lord Brahmā has given must remain true. Therefore, as I killed Namuci, Vṛtra, Bali, Naraka and Śambara with your help, please do so now. O Lord of the gods, there is no other shelter than You in all the three worlds of living and nonliving entities. You are the eternal and glorious Lord Nārāyaṇa, whose navel resembles a lotus flower. You established the worlds and myself as their ruler. You created all the three worlds of living and nonliving entities. You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead in whom everything enters at the end of the age. O God of gods, please tell me truthfully how I might defeat Rāvaṇa or whether You might personally fight him with Your sword and discus.’

“After being petitioned in this manner by Lord Indra, the Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa replied: ‘You need not be afraid. Furthermore, hear My advice. This wicked demon cannot be defeated by the gods or asuras, nor can he be killed in an encounter. Because of the boons he has received, he is

very difficult to defeat. Accompanied by his son, this rākṣasa intoxicated with power will perform great deeds in every way. I have seen this by My intuition. As far as your request that I fight, O ruler of the gods, I shall not fight against the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa in combat. I do not retreat without killing My enemy in combat. At the present Rāvaṇa is difficult to defeat because of his boons. O Lord Indra, I do declare in your presence that I shall be the cause of the death of this rākṣasa at the appropriate time. When I see that the time has arrived, I shall kill Rāvaṇa, along with those who march before him, thus giving pleasure to the gods. O lord of the gods, I have spoken the truth to you. Fight with the assistance of the gods without any fear!

“Meanwhile, Rāvaṇa’s ministers of grim appearance arrived for combat. These were Mārīca, Prahasta, Mahāpārśva, Mahodara, Akampana, Nikumbha, Śuka, Sāraṇa, Samhrāda, Dhūmaketu, Mahādamastra, Ghaṭodara, Jambumālī, Mahāhrāda, Virūpākṣa, Suptaghna, Yajñakopa, Durmukha, Dūṣaṇa, Khara, Triśirā, Karavīrākṣa, Sūryaśatru, Mahākāya, Atikāya, Devāntaka and Narāntaka. Surrounded by all these greatly valorous rākṣasas, Sumālī, Rāvaṇa’s maternal grandfather, entered the battlefield. The angry Sumālī decimated all the hosts of gods with different kinds of sharp weapons, as the wind drives away rain clouds. O Rāma, when the forces of the gods were being assaulted in this way by the night-stalkers, they fled in all directions, like deer chased by a lion.

“At that time, the eight Vasu known by the name Sāvitra entered the battle arena. Surrounded by jubilant troops and equipped with all kinds of weapons, he entered the battlefield, instilling fear in the hearts of the enemy. Two valiant and fearless sons of Aditi—Tvaṣṭā and Puṣā—also entered the battlefield with their forces. Then a battle ensued between the rākṣasas and the gods, who were angry because of the glory of the rākṣasas in never retreating from battle. Then all the rākṣasas began striking the gods present on the battleground by the hundreds and thousands with their various kinds of dreadful weapons. With their spotless weapons, the gods also dispatched the strong and courageous rākṣasas to the abode of death.

“Then the furious rākṣasa Sumālī, armed with all kinds of weapons, rushed toward the army of the gods. He angrily obliterated the army of the

gods with his many sharp weapons, as a wind would disperse a rain cloud. Being struck with a dreadful shower of big arrows, pikes and spears, none of the gods were able to stand united. However, Sāvitra, the eighth Vasu, was angered by the dispersal of the gods by Sumālī and stood firm. Surrounded by his own soldiers, the mighty Sāvitra courageously assaulted the night-stalker and blocked him on the battlefield. Then a great and hair-raising battle took place between Sumālī and the Vasu, who never retreated from a fight.

“When Sumālī’s chariot, which was drawn by snakes, was hit with sturdy arrows shot by the glorious Vasu, it was suddenly knocked over. After wrecking Sumālī’s chariot, which was covered with hundreds of arrows, the Vasu grabbed his club in order to kill him. Holding that shining club, which resembled death’s rod of chastisement, Sāvitra brought it down on Sumālī’s head. The club came down over him like a falling meteor and roared like a thunderbolt hurled by Lord Indra against a mountain. The blow of the club reduced him to ashes so that neither his head nor flesh nor bones could be seen on the battlefield. Seeing him killed on the battlefield, the rākṣasas fled in all directions crying out to one another. Being driven away by the Vasu, the rākṣasas were unable to make a stand.”

MEGHANĀDA FIGHTS WITH INDRA'S SON

Agastya continued: “Rāvaṇa’s mighty son, Meghanāda, was infuriated when he saw Sumālī reduced to ashes by the Vasu and his army driven away when assaulted by the gods. Thereafter he brought all the rākṣasas back and made a stand. Riding his chariot, which moved where he wished, the great chariot warrior Meghanāda rushed toward the army of the gods, like a blazing fire approaching a forest. As soon as the gods saw him enter the battlefield carrying all kinds of weapons, they fled in all directions. No one could stand before him at that time, eager as he was for battle. Upbraiding the terrified gods, Lord Indra said to them: ‘You should not be afraid nor leave! Return to the battlefield! Here goes my invincible son to fight.’ Then Indra’s son known as Jayanta appeared on the battlefield riding a wonderfully crafted chariot. All the gods surrounded Jayanta. They approached Rāvaṇa’s son, Meghanāda, and attacked him. A fight ensued between the gods and rākṣasas, and between Indra’s son and Rāvaṇa’s son.

“Then Rāvaṇa’s son shot arrows adorned with gold at Gomukha, the son of Mātali, Indra’s charioteer. The rabid Meghanāda also wounded Indra’s son, the chariot warrior Jayanta, all over his body. With wide open eyes, Rāvaṇa’s raging son covered Jayanta’s body with a shower of arrows. Then Meghanāda hurled thousands of different kinds of sharp-edged weapons on the troops of the gods. Meghanāda hurled spiked iron balls, bludgeons, spears, clubs, choppers, axes and huge mountain peaks. While Meghanāda was assaulting the enemy troops, he created a darkness that put all the worlds into anxiety. The army of the gods rallying around Jayanta was afflicted by arrows and greatly disturbed in many ways. The combatants could not distinguish between each other, whether they were gods or rākṣasas. Thrown into chaos, they ran about here and there. Bewildered by the darkness which covered them, the gods struck other gods and rākṣasas struck other rākṣasas, while others fled.

“Meanwhile, a valiant warrior named Pulomā, a ruler of daityas, seized Jayanta and carried him away. Pulomā was the father of Jayanta’s mother, Śacī. Grabbing his daughter’s son, Pulomā dived into the ocean. When the gods realized that Jayanta had vanished, they felt depressed and disturbed and all fled.

“Surrounded by his forces, Meghanāda rushed at the gods and uttered a loud roar. When Lord Indra saw that his son had disappeared and that the gods were fleeing, he said to his charioteer Mātali: ‘Bring my chariot here!’ Mātali then brought the large, celestial, well-equipped and swift chariot. Then over and before that chariot mighty clouds driven by the wind spewed lightning and thundered loudly. When Indra, the lord of the gods, set forth, the gandharvas played different kinds of musical instruments in concert and bebies of celestial maidens danced. Lord Indra sallied forth armed with all kinds of weapons and surrounded by the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, the twelve ādityas and the forty-nine Maruts and the two Aśvinī-kumāras. As Indra set out, a harsh wind blew, the sun lost its brilliance and big meteors fell.

“Meanwhile, the heroic and powerful Rāvaṇa mounted his divine chariot built by Viśvakarmā. Draped over it were huge snakes which was hair-raising to see. Because of the breath which they exhaled the chariot seemed to be blazing on the battlefield. The chariot was surrounded by daityas and night-stalkers. Entering the battlefield, the celestial chariot came before Lord Indra. Restraining his son, Rāvaṇa personally took up a position. Leaving the battlefield, Meghanāda remained on the sidelines. Then the gods renewed their conflict with the rākṣasas, showering weapons on the battlefield, like clouds pouring down rain.

“At that time, the wicked Kumbhakarṇa did not know with whom he was fighting. Using many kinds of weapons, including teeth, feet, arms, hands, spears, clubs and mallets, he furiously attacked the gods. Closing quarters with the Rudras, the night-stalker fought fiercely with his weapons, leaving no free space on the battlefield. With his body covered with arrows and dripping blood, he looked like a thundering cloud flashing lightning and pouring down rain. Caught in a pitched battle with the gods armed with all kinds of weapons, the whole rākṣasa army fled. Some of them were killed,

some were lacerated, some were writhing on the ground, some were stuck on their mounts on the battlefield. Some of those night-stalkers were clutching with their arms their chariots, elephants, donkeys, camels, snakes, horses, dolphins, boars and other animals having the heads of goblins. Others who regained consciousness and got up were slashed with weapons by the gods, after which they died. The slaughter of so many rākṣasas, who were lying on the ground, covering the battlefield, seemed like a miracle. At the fore of battle flowed a river with blood for its water. It was crowded with crows and vultures, and the abandoned weapons were its alligators.

“The glorious Rāvaṇa was infuriated when he saw that his whole army had been decimated by the gods. Suddenly diving into the ocean of the army of the gods, he rushed up to Indra on the battlefield, killing the celestials as he did. Then Indra stretched his huge bow, whose thunderous twang resounded in all ten directions. Bending back that great bow, Indra shot arrows as bright as fire or the sun onto Rāvaṇa’s head. The mighty Rāvaṇa also covered Indra with showers of arrows shot from his bow. While the two were fighting in this way, showers of arrows fell on all sides. Everything was covered with darkness and nothing could be distinguished.”

MEGHANĀDA CAPTURES INDRA

Agastya continued: “When the darkness set in, all the gods and rākṣasas, maddened by their strength, continued fighting and killing each other. Eventually the gods left only one tenth of the great rākṣasa army on the battlefield, dispatching the rest to the abode of death. As the battle took place in darkness, the gods and rākṣasas were unable to recognize each other as they fought. In that web of darkness only three people were not affected: Indra, Rāvaṇa and Meghanāda. When Rāvaṇa saw that his whole army had been destroyed, he became furious and uttered a resounding roar. Out of anger, he spoke to his charioteer: ‘Take me through the middle of the enemy troops to the other end! Today by my prowess I shall personally send all the gods to the abode of death with great showers of different kinds of weapons. I shall kill Indra, Kuvera, Varuṇa and Yama. After killing those celestials very soon, I myself shall stay in heaven. There is no need to despair. Drive my chariot! For the second time I command you! Take me to the other end of the battlefield! Where we are is a part of the Nandana Garden. Now take me to where the Udaya Mountain is!’

“Hearing Rāvaṇa’s command, the charioteer drove the horses, which were as swift as the mind, through the middle of the enemy troops. When Indra realized what Rāvaṇa’s plan was, he spoke from his chariot the following words to the gods present on the battlefield: ‘O gods, listen to what I say. At this time it seems to me that we should capture the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, even if alive. Riding his chariot, he will traverse our army, like the wave-tossed ocean on the full moon day. He cannot be killed now because of the boons he has received, and is fearless. Therefore we shall capture him. Be prepared on the battlefield. As I rule the three worlds because of having arrested Bali Mahārāja, I would like to capture this sinful rogue.’

“After saying this, Indra then left Rāvaṇa alone and went to another area, fighting and terrifying the rākṣasas on the battlefield. Rāvaṇa, who

never retreated from battle, penetrated the army of the gods from the north, while Indra penetrated the rākṣasa army from the south. After entering one hundred yojanas into the army of the gods, Rāvaṇa covered that entire army with a shower of arrows. When Indra saw that his army was devastated, he was not disturbed but surrounded Rāvaṇa and forced him to retreat.

“Meanwhile, when the dānavas and rākṣasas saw that Indra had overcome Rāvaṇa, they uttered loud bellows, saying: ‘Alas! We are finished!’ Then Meghanāda, who was fuming with rage, sat in his chariot and penetrated the formidable army of the gods. Utilizing the power of deception which he had received from Lord Śiva in the past, he furiously entered the ranks of the gods and dispersed them. He ignored the other gods and rushed directly toward Lord Indra, however the mighty Indra did not see the son of his enemy approaching. Even though his armor had fallen off from being struck by the vigorous gods, Meghanāda did not feel the least threatened. After hitting Mātali with excellent arrows as he was approaching, he then covered the great Indra with a shower of arrows.

“Indra abandoned his chariot and dismissed his charioteer. Then he mounted his elephant Airāvata and began searching for Meghanāda. Bewildering Indra with his deceptive power while traveling invisible in the sky, Meghanāda attacked him with arrows. When Meghanāda realized that he had exhausted Indra, he bound him with a magical spell and took him to his own army. When the gods saw that the mighty Indra was being forcefully taken away from the battlefield, they wondered what would happen next. They exclaimed: ‘We cannot see Meghanāda, who is skilled in acts of deception and has won victory in this battle by deceiving Indra and abducting him by force.’ Then the outraged hosts of gods covered Rāvaṇa with a shower of arrows and forced him to turn away from battle. When Rāvaṇa reached the twelve ādityas and the eight Vasus, he could not engage in combat with them because he was overwhelmed by his enemies. Seeing that his father was exhausted and lacerated by blows in battle, the invisible Meghanāda spoke to him the following words: ‘Come, father. We are going. Let the fighting stop. You should know that we are victorious. Be at ease and without worry. Because Indra, who is the lord of the three worlds and master of the army of the gods, has been captured, the pride of the gods has been broken. Having captured your enemy by your superior strength, enjoy the

three worlds as you like. What will you gain by struggling purposelessly? It is useless to fight now.'

"When the gods heard what Meghanāda's said to Rāvaṇa, they stopped fighting. Deprived of Indra, they departed. When the lord of the rākṣasas heard the pleasing advice of his son, he left the battlefield and said to his son: 'You have increased the prestige of my dyansty because you have defeated Indra, whose power was unmatched, and the immortals themselves by your acts of heroism befitting your great strength. Put Indra in your chariot and take him to the city of Laṅkā. Go from here surrounded by your army. I shall jubilantly follow behind you with my ministers.'

"Reaching his own home surrounded by his army and vehicles, the mighty Meghanāda took Lord Indra and dismissed the rākṣasas who had fought in battle."

MEGHANĀDA RELEASES INDRA

Agastya continued: “After the very mighty Lord Indra had been defeated by Rāvaṇa’s son, the gods headed by Lord Brahmā went to Laṅkā. Hovering in the air, Lord Brahmā said to the seated Rāvaṇa, who was surrounded by his sons and brothers: ‘My dear Rāvaṇa, I am pleased with your son’s performance in battle. Oh, his prowess is equal to yours, or even greater! By your might you have conquered all the three worlds. You have fulfilled your vow. I am pleased with you and your son. O Rāvaṇa, this son of yours is very powerful and heroic. As such he shall be known as “Indrajit,” the conqueror of Indra. O king, this rākṣasa will be powerful and difficult to defeat. With his help you have subdued all the celestials. O strong-armed one, please release Indra, the chastiser of the Pāka demon. Moreover, what should the gods give for his release?’

“Then the victorious Indrajit said: ‘O lord, if Indra is to be set free, then I choose immortality.’ Thereafter the glorious Lord Brahmā, the lord of creatures, said to Meghanāda: ‘In this world no one among the birds, four-legged animals or other powerful living beings has total immortality.’

“When the powerful Indrajit heard what the imperishable Lord Brahmā said, he replied: ‘Hear what perfection I seek for the release of Indra. What I wish is that when I worship the sacred fire with oblations and encantations with the desire to defeat my enemies in combat, a chariot harnessed with horses should come out of the fire for me, and while I am on it I shall be immortal. This is the boon I seek. If I should fight in a battle before completing the recitation of hymns and the offering of oblations into the sacred fire, then I could be killed. Everyone else seeks immortality through the practice of austerities. I, however, seek immortality through prowess.’ Lord Brahmā acceded to his request, saying: ‘So be it.’ Indrajit then set Indra free and the gods returned to the heavenly planets.

“Meanwhile, O Rāma, the wretched Indra, whose unfading luster had vanished, began reflecting about what had happened. Seeing him in that state, Lord Brahmā said: ‘O Indra, why did you commit a heinous sin in the past? Originally I created living beings in such a way that they were all of a similar complexion, voice and form in every way. There was no difference in their appearance or characteristics. Then with a concentrated mind I began thinking about those living beings. In order to make a difference among them, I created a woman. Whatever was special in the living beings I put in her. With that form and qualities I created the woman Ahalyā. In this instance hala means ugliness, and from it is derived the word halya or deformity. Because there was no deformity in her, she became known as Ahalyā. In fact, I myself proclaimed that her name was Ahalyā. After creating that noble lady, I began worrying about who her husband would be. You, however, began thinking about that woman, that she should be your wife because of your superior position. However, I put her for many years in the care of the sage Gautama, who later returned her to me. Having thus tested his great self-control and knowing that he had successfully completed his austerities, I thereupon gave her to him as his wife. That great and righteous sage lived happily with her. After she was given to Gautama, the gods became despondent. Angry and lusty, you went to the sage’s hermitage and saw her shining like a flame of fire. Stricken by lust and irritated, you violated her. Then the great sage found you in his hermitage. The highly powerful sage angrily cursed you, because of which you had to suffer a change of fortune. He said:

O Indra, since you fearlessly violated my wife, you will fall into the hands of your enemy in combat. O you whose mind is perverse, the mentality which you have instituted at this time will prevail even among human beings. Of this there is no doubt. One who commits such a sin will reap one half of its result, the other half will fall upon you. Neither will your position be secure. There is no doubt about this. Whoever becomes the ruler of the gods will not last. This is the curse which I pronounce.

“The great ascetic chastised his wife, saying:

O impudent woman, remain unseen in the vicinity of my hermitage! Because you were unstable, though possessing youth and beauty, you will no longer be

the only beautiful woman in this world. Because your beauty was the cause of lusty enftatuation, it will go to all other women.

“From then on women were mostly beautiful. Then Ahalyā tried to propitiate the great sage Gautama: “I was unknowingly violated by Indra disguised as you, not because of my own desire. Please be merciful to me, O learned sage!” When implored in this way by Ahalyā, Gautama replied: “In the Ikṣvāku Dynasty will take birth a glorioius chariot warrior. He will be known in the world by the name Rāma. He will go to the forest to help a brāhmaṇa sage. He will be the all-mighty Lord Viṣṇu in human form. When you see him, my dear, you will become purified, for he is the only one who can purify you of the misdeed you have committed. After offering him hospitality, you will return to my side. Then you will indeed live with me, O fair lady.” After saying this, the learned sage entered his hermitage. His wife began practicing severe austerities.

“All of this has happened because of the sage’s curse. O strong-armed one, remember the misdeed which you committed. O Indra, it is only because of that curse that you fell into the hands of your enemies. As such, immediately perform with great care a sacrifice to please Lord Viṣṇu. Purified by that sacrifice, you will return to heaven. Furthermore, your son was not killed in that great battle. He was carried away by his maternal grandfather and is being kept in the ocean.’

“Hearing this, Indra performed a sacrifice to please Lord Viṣṇu, afterwhich he returned to the heavenly planets and began ruling. Such is Indrajit’s might, which I have just related. He defeated Indra, the ruler of the gods. Hence it is not surprising that he could defeat other living beings.”

When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa heard Agastya’s narration, they and the monkeys and rākṣasas exclaimed: “Amazing!” Then Vibhīṣaṇa, who was sitting beside Rāma, spoke the following words: “Now I have been reminded of these amazing past events.” Then Rāma said to Agastya: “This is true. I heard this previously from Vibhīṣaṇa.” Thus was the birth of Rāvaṇa, who with his son was a thorn in the side of the world and who defeated Indra, lord of the gods, in battle.

RĀVAṆA GOES TO MĀHIṢMATI

Out of surprise, the glorious Rāma again directed the following humble words to the best of sages, Agastya: “O blessed one, during the time when the cruel rākṣasa wandered the earth, were people devoid of courage? Was there no king or someone like a king at that time, since Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas met with no opposition? Or was it that the rulers of the earth had no manliness, or were they lacking good weapons, that so many kings were conquered?”

Upon hearing Rāma’s question, the glorious sage Agastya laughingly replied to Rāma, as Lord Brahmā would to Lord Śiva: “O Rāma, Rāvaṇa wandered over the earth in that way, harassing kings. Then he reached the city named Māhiṣmatī, which was as opulent as a city in the heavenly planets where Agni, the god of fire, resides. The king of that city, where the sacred fire was always burning on an altar strewn with kuśa grass, was named Arjuna, who through Agni’s grace, was just like him.

“The same day, Arjuna, the mighty lord of the Haihayas, had gone to the Narmadā to enjoy with his wives, Rāvaṇa arrived at the capital and asked Arjuna’s ministers: ‘Where is King Arjuna? Quickly answer me accurately. I, Rāvaṇa, have come seeking combat with the best of kings. Inform him of my arrival.’ When commanded in this way by Rāvaṇa, the wise ministers told that lord of the rākṣasas that the king was not present. Upon hearing from the citizens of Arjuna’s departure, Rāvaṇa went to the Vindya Mountains, which were like the Himālayas.

“Rāvaṇa saw the Vindhya mountain range, which seemed to be scraping the sky, having burst out of the earth and entered the clouds. It had thousands of pinnacles and its caves were inhabited by lions. With its cascades of cool water, it seemed to be laughing loudly. With its gods, dānavas, gandharvas, apsarās, kinnaras and women amusing themselves, the

exceptionally high mountain range had become like the heavenly planets. With its rivers flowing with crystal-clear waters, the mountain range stood like the serpent Ananta with his thousands of tongues wavering in the mouths of his heads. While beholding the rising Vindhya Mountains with their many caves and which resembled the Himālaya Mountains, Rāvaṇa went to the holy Narmadā River, whose waters flowed over rocks toward the western ocean. Its pools of water were muddled by thirsty, heat-stricken buffaloes, deer, lions, tigers, bears and fine elephants. It was crowded with ruddy geese, karāṇḍava ducks, swans and other waterfowl, and its cranes were always in heat and crying out.

“The river had blossoming trees as its crest jewel, a pair of ruddy geese as its breasts, wide sandy banks as its hips, and a line of swans as its girdle. The limbs of the river were sprinkled with pollen from flowers. The foam of water was its spotless robe. Submersion in its waters was the pleasant means of contacting it. Fully opened lotus flowers were its beautiful eyes. Quickly disembarking from the Puṣpaka airship, Rāvaṇa bathed in the Narmadā River, which was like a fine and desirable lady. Then he sat down with his ministers on the charming bank, which was frequented by different kinds of sages.

“Rāvaṇa complimented the Narmadā, calling it the Ganges, and experienced delight from seeing it. Rāvaṇa playfully said to Śuka, Sāraṇa and his other ministers: ‘The thousand-rayed sun situated at mid sky has made the world golden and its harsh heat as cool as moonbeams, knowing that I am seated here. This fragrant and soothing breeze cooled by the waters of the Narmadā is blowing softly out of fear of me. Bearing crocodiles, fish and fowl on its waves, this fine Narmadā River looks like a frightened woman. You are all wounded with weapons by kings equal to Indra on the battlefield and are soaked with blood, as if sprinkled with the sap of red sandalwood trees. Therefore, take a dip in the refreshing and lovely Narmadā River, just as the huge elephants that guard the four cardinal directions bathe in the Ganges. By bathing in this great river you will free yourself from sin. I shall also soon make a gradual offering of flowers to Lord Śiva on the sandy bank of this river, which is as bright as the autumn moon.’

“When instructed in this way by Rāvaṇa, Prahasta, Śuka, Sāraṇa, Mahodara and Dhūmrākṣa took a dip in the river. The Narmadā River was disturbed by those elephant-like ministers of Rāvaṇa, as the Ganges is disturbed by the mighty elephants that guard the four cardinal directions—Vāmana, Añjana, Padma and Bhadra. After they finished bathing, those mighty rākṣasas came out of the Narmadā, bringing flowers for Rāvaṇa. In a short time the rākṣasas created a mound of flowers on the sandy bank of the Narmadā, which was as brilliant as a white cloud. After the flowers had been collected, Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, descended into the river to bathe, as a great elephant would in the Ganges.

“After bathing and reciting prayers according to scriptural rules, Rāvaṇa came out of the waters of the Narmadā River. After taking off his wet clothes, he dressed himself in white garments. Like personified mountains pulled by his motion, all the rākṣasas followed him as he walked with joined palms. Wherever Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, went, a Śiva liṅga of gold was carried. Placing the liṅga on a raised altar of sand, Rāvaṇa worshipped it with sandalwood paste and flowers whose fragrance would not fade. After worshipping the great Lord Śiva, whose head is adorned with the glistening moon, who relieves the suffering of the pious and bestows boons, the night-stalker sang and raised his arms, dancing before the Śiva liṅga.”

ARJUNA CAPTURES RĀVAṆA

Agastya continued: “Not far from that place on the sandy bank of the Narmadā River where the fearsome lord of the rākṣasas was worshipping Lord Śiva, King Arjuna was enjoying with his wives in the river’s waters. Standing in their midst, King Arjuna looked like an elephant in the midst of a thousand cow elephants. Desiring to know the strength of his thousand arms, he blocked the flow of the Narmadā River with his many arms. When obstructed by Kārtavīrya’s arms, the clear water flowed backwards to where Rāvaṇa was offering flowers. With its fish, crocodiles and propoises, as well as flowers and strewn kuśa grass, the strong current of the Narmadā looked as it does during the monsoon season. The rapid flow of water, as if sent by Kārtavīrya Arjuna, swept away all the flowers which Rāvaṇa had collected for offering to Lord Śiva. Leaving the offering when it was only half completed, Rāvaṇa looked at the Narmadā River as one would at a dear wife who had become contrary. Rāvaṇa saw that swelling current coming from the west like a flood tide in the ocean and flowing toward the east. With its water fowl undisturbed, the river looked like it was in its natural state, like a woman who was unagitated.

“Without saying a word, Rāvaṇa directed Śuka and Sāraṇa with the index finger of his right hand to find the cause of that powerful surge. Commanded by Rāvaṇa, the two heroic brothers, Śuka and Sāraṇa, headed toward the west. Advancing half a yojana, the night-stalkers saw a man playing with women in the water. He was as big as a śāla tree and his hair was spread out in the water. The edges of his eyes were reddish because of inebriety and his mind was distracted for the same reason. He was able to crush his enemy. He was blocking the flow of the river with his one thousand arms, as a mountain blocks the earth with its thousands of protrusions. He was surrounded by thousands of beautiful ladies, like an bull elephant surrounded by thousands of she-elephants in rut.

“When the rākṣasas Śuka and Sāraṇa saw that amazing person, they returned to Rāvaṇa and said: ‘O lord of the rākṣasas, someone resembling a giant śāla tree is blocking the Narmadā River and is entertaining young women. Obstructed by his one thousand arms, the river is continuously discharging volumes of water like a flood tide in the ocean.’

“As Śuka and Sāraṇa were speaking, Rāvaṇa interjected: ‘So, it is King Arjuna!’ Then he became eager for combat. When Rāvaṇa set off to fight with Arjuna, the wind blew fiercely, howling and raising dust. All at once the clouds began thundering and showering down blood. Surrounded by Mahodara, Mahāpārśva, Dhūmrākṣa, Śuka and Sāraṇa, Rāvaṇa reached the place where Arjuna was. In a short time the mighty rākṣasa, who was shining like antimony, arrived at the dreadful pool in the Narmadā River. There the king of the rākṣasas saw King Arjuna surrounded by women, like a bull elephant surrounded by cow elephants. With his eyes red from anger, Rāvaṇa, who was arrogant because of his strength, spoke in a deep voice to Arjuna’s ministers: ‘O ministers, immediately inform the king of the Haihayas that a warrior named Rāvaṇa has come to fight with him.’ When Arjuna’s ministers heard Rāvaṇa’s challenge, they got up with their weapons and replied to him: ‘O Rāvaṇa, you know well the time for a fight, yet you wish to fight with the king while he is intoxicated and with women! O king, since you wish to fight with someone who is enjoying with women, as a tiger would attack an elephant in rut among female elephants, be patient for now. O Rāvaṇa, spend the night. If you are keen on fighting, then you can fight with King Arjuna tomorrow. But if you are in a hurry, O warrior eager for combat, then you will have the chance to fight with King Arjuna after knocking us down on the battlefield!’

“After that, Rāvaṇa’s hungry ministers killed Arjuna’s ministers in combat and devoured them. Then a loud clamor arose among the followers of Arjuna and Rāvaṇa’s ministers. Arjuna’s ministers ran about everywhere, striking the intruders, including Rāvaṇa, with arrows, iron clubs, spears and tridents, with an impact like a thunderbolt. The onrush of the warriors of the king of the Haihayas was fierce, like the roaring ocean full of crocodiles, fish and alligators. Enfuriated, the ministers Prahasta, Śuka and Sāraṇa began annihilating Kārtavīrya Arjuna’s army by their strength. King Arjuna’s own

greatly disturbed men reported the action of Rāvaṇa's ministers to him while he was amusing himself. When King Arjuna heard this report, he said to the women: 'Do not be afraid.' Then he came out of the water, as the guardian elephant Añjana comes out of the Ganges River.

"With his eyes bloodshot from anger, Arjuna blazed like the ghastly conflagration at the end of the world. Quickly grabbing a mace, Arjuna drove away the rākṣasas, as the sun dispels darkness. Raising his huge mace, which he could toss with his arms, Arjuna rushed upon the rākṣasas as quickly as Garuḍa. Standing there with a club in his hands like the unshakable Vindhya Mountains, Prahasta blocked his path. Enfatuated because of arrogance, the irate Prahasta hurled the copper-rimmed club at Arjuna and roared like death personified. At the end of the club which Prahasta had hurled was fire as bright as aśoka flowers that seemed to scorch its target.

"Undisturbed, Kārtavīrya Arjuna completely outwitted the oncoming club with his own mace. Whirling his heavy mace with five hundred arms, Arjuna rushed toward Prahasta. When struck with great force by that mace, the standing Prahasta fell over like a mountain struck by Lord Indra's thunderbolt.

"When Mārīca, Śuka, Sāraṇa, Mahodara and Dhūmrākṣa saw Prahasta fallen, they left the battlefield. After Prahasta had been knocked down and the ministers had fled, Rāvaṇa rushed toward Arjuna, the best of kings. Then a frightful and hair-raising fight took place between the thousand-armed king and the twenty-armed rākṣasa. Rāvaṇa and King Arjuna looked like two oceans that were disturbed, two mountains with moving bases, two suns with great splendor, two scorching fires, two elephants arrogant because of their strength, two bulls fighting over a cow in heat, two thundering clouds, two lions proud of their strength, or Rudra and personified death when they are angry. Grabbing maces, they struck each other violently. Even as mountains survive the impact of thunderbolts, the human and the rākṣasa endured the impact of each other's maces. As peals of thunder reverberated from bolts of lightning, so all the directions resounded with the striking of their maces. While striking against the enemy's chest, Arjuna's mace made it appear golden, as lightning illumines

the sky. Repeatedly striking against Arjuna's chest, Rāvaṇa's mace likewise shone like a meteor falling on a big mountain.

"Neither Arjuna nor Rāvaṇa became tired. The fight was well-matched, like that which took place between Indra and Bali. Striking each other, the man and the rākṣasa fought like two bulls with their horns or two elephants with their tusks.

"Then Arjuna hurled his mace with full force at Rāvaṇa's big chest. Because Rāvaṇa's chest was protected by the boons he had received, the mace broke in two and fell on the ground, as if it were not very strong. However, because of the blow of Arjuna's mace, Rāvaṇa staggered back the distance of a bow and slumped down crying. When Arjuna saw that Rāvaṇa was bewildered, he suddenly jumped forward and seized him, as Garuḍa would catch a snake. Forcefully grabbing Rāvaṇa with his one thousand arms, the powerful king bound him, as Lord Nārāyaṇa bound Bali. While Rāvaṇa was being bound, siddhas, cāraṇas and demigods scattered flowers over Arjuna's head and exclaimed: 'Well done!'

"After capturing Rāvaṇa, as a tiger catches a deer, or a lion, an elephant, the king of the Haihayas roared repeatedly like a storm cloud. When Prahasta regained consciousness, he became furious to see that Rāvaṇa was bound, and therefore suddenly rushed toward Arjuna. The force of the attacking night-stalkers was like the onrush of rain clouds at the end of the hot season. Prahasta shouted: 'Hurl your weapons!' and 'Stay where you are!' Then he hurled clubs and pikes during the conflict. Arjuna, the crusher of his foes, was not disturbed by this. Instead, he quickly grabbed those weapons of the enemies of the immortals before they reached him. Injuring those rākṣasas with their own formidable and excellent weapons, Arjuna drove them away, as the wind disperses clouds. At that time Kārtavīrya Arjuna terrorized the rākṣasas. Taking Rāvaṇa and surrounded by his friends, he entered his capital. While having flowers and whole grains of rice tossed over him by the citizens and twice-born brāhmaṇas, he entered his own capital, as did Indra after taking Bali captive."

PULASTYA ARRANGES FOR RĀVAṆA'S RELEASE

Agastya continued: “Then Pulastya heard the gods in the heavenly planets talking about the capture of Rāvaṇa, which was like capturing the wind. The great sage, though very sober, felt compassion for his grandson and came to see the ruler of Māhiṣmatī. Travelling through the air, the twice-born brāhmaṇa arrived at the city of Māhiṣmatī at the speed of the mind. He entered the city, which was crowded with happy and prosperous people, as Lord Brahmā enters the city of Amarāvati.

“Recognizing the sage, who was very difficult to look upon and resembled the sun-god descending on foot, the ministers informed King Arjuna. Upon learning that the sage Pulastya had arrived, Arjuna touched his joined palms to his head and went to greet the ascetic. Taking water for washing the hands and honey mixed with yogurt, the family priest proceeded ahead of the king, as Bṛhaspati would walk ahead of Lord Indra. Seeing that sage coming like the rising sun, Arjuna was amazed and offered respects, as if to the Supreme Lord.

“After offering him water for washing the hands and feet, honey mixed with yogurt and a cow, King Arjuna spoke the following words choked up with joy: ‘Māhiṣmatī has today become equal to Amarāvati in that I now see you, the lord of the twice-born, who are very difficult to see. By worshipping your feet, which are worshipable by the hosts of gods, I have now achieved well-being, my vows are blessed, my birth is successful and by austerities are fulfilled. This kingdom, my sons, these women and ourselves are yours. O brāhmaṇa, what should we do? Tell us what you want us to do.’

“After inquiring about the king’s welfare, his duties, sacrificial fires and sons, the sage Pulastya spoke to Arjuna, king of the Haihayas, as follows: ‘O king with eyes like the petals of a lotus flower, your face resembles the full moon. Your strength is unparalleled in that you have defeated Rāvaṇa.

You have captured in battle my grandson, who is difficult to defeat and for fear of whom the ocean and wind stand still. You have swallowed up my grandson's glory and made your own name famous. Being requested by me, set my dear grandson Rāvaṇa free.'

“Accepting Pulastya's request, King Arjuna did not say a word. Instead he joyfully released the lord of the rākṣasas. After releasing Rāvaṇa, the enemy of the gods, and honoring him with glistening ornaments, garlands and garments, the king established a pact of nonaggression before a fire as witness. Then he offered respects to Pulastya, the son of Lord Brahmā and returned to his palace. When he had gained his release by the intercession of Pulastya, receiving honors and being embraced by Pulastya, Rāvaṇa felt embarrassed because of having been defeated. Having secured the release of Rāvaṇa, Pulastya, the son of Lord Brahmā, returned to the abode of Lord Brahmā. In this way, the mighty Rāvaṇa was defeated by Kārtavīrya Arjuna and then released by the intercession of Pulastya.”

VĀLĪ HUMILIATES RĀVAṆA

Agastya continued: “After being released by Arjuna and freed from all kinds of despondency, Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, wandered the earth. Whoever he heard was extremely strong, whether he was a rākṣasa or a human being, Rāvaṇa approached him and arrogantly challenged him to fight. Once he came to the city of Kiṣkindhā ruled by Vālī and challenged him to fight. Then Vālī’s minister Tāra, his father-in-law Suśeṇa, his son Aṅgada and his younger brother Sugrīva said to Rāvaṇa, who was looking for a fight: ‘O lord of rākṣasas, Vālī, who may indeed be a match for you, has gone out. What other monkey is capable of standing up to you? He will return within an hour, when he finishes his evening prayers on the shores of the four oceans. Please wait for some time. Notice these mounds of bones as white as conchshells. O king, they belong to those who wanted to fight with the mighty lord of the monkeys. Even if you have drunken the nectar of immortality, O Rāvaṇa, when you meet Vālī, your life will come to an end. O son of Viśravā, now see the wonder of the world! Just wait for one hour. It will be very difficult for you to survive. Or, if you are in a hurry to die, go to the southern ocean. There you will find Vālī, who is like the fire-god on earth.’

“Reprimanding Tāra, Rāvaṇa, who made the world cry, boarded his Puṣpaka airship and flew to the southern ocean. When Rāvaṇa saw Vālī engaged in prayer, resembling a mountain of gold and shining like the newly risen sun, he disembarked from the Puṣpaka airship. Then he stealthfully hurried toward Vālī in order to capture him. By chance, Vālī happened to see Rāvaṇa. Vālī was not, however, disturbed when he saw what Rāvaṇa’s wicked plan was. He was no more worried than would a lion upon seeing a rabbit, or Garuḍa upon seeing a snake.

“Vālī thought: ‘Squeezing the wicked Rāvaṇa in my armpit when he comes to try to catch me, and leaving him hanging there, I shall visit the

three great oceans. People will see my enemy Rāvaṇa trapped in my armpit, his legs, arms and clothes dangling, like a snake in the claws of Garuḍa.’

“Deciding to do that, Vālī silently chanted the hymns of the Vedas, standing like the king of mountains. Each desiring to catch the other and both being proud of their strength, the king of the monkeys and the king of the rākṣasas prepared to act. From the sound of his footsteps, Vālī could understand that Rāvaṇa was about to grab him. Though Vālī’s back was turned, he grabbed Rāvaṇa, as Garuḍa would catch a snake.

“After catching the ruler of the rākṣasas who had wanted to catch him, Vālī squeezed him in his armpit, and as he was hanging there, Vālī jumped quickly into the sky. Although Rāvaṇa repeatedly pinched and gashed Vālī with his nails, Vālī carried him away, as the wind does a cloud. While Rāvaṇa was being carried away, his ministers howled and rushed upon Vālī to free Rāvaṇa. While being chased by them across the sky, Vālī looked like the sun being followed by masses of clouds. Unable to approach Vālī, those stalwart rākṣasas were exhausted by the speed of Vālī arms and legs. Even great mountains retreated from Vālī’s pathway as he proceeded, what to speak of creatures of flesh and blood who desire to live. The swift lord of the monkeys offered in succession evening prayers at all the four oceans, which were not even visited by flocks of birds. Being worshipped by birds as he flew through the sky, Vālī, the best of fliers, reached the western ocean with Rāvaṇa. After bathing and reciting prayers, he performed his evening worship and left for the northern ocean, carrying Rāvaṇa. Carrying his enemy across many yojanas, the great monkey flew at the speed of the wind and mind. After performing his evening worship at the northern ocean, Vālī headed for the eastern ocean, carrying Rāvaṇa. After performing his evening worship there, Vālī, the lord of the monkeys, returned to the precincts of Kiṣkindhā, bringing Rāvaṇa. Having performed his evening worship at the four oceans, the monkey landed in a garden of Kiṣkindhā, exhausted from carrying Rāvaṇa. Then that best of monkeys released Rāvaṇa from his armpit. Laughing loudly, he asked Rāvaṇa: ‘Where are you from?’ Greatly surprised and his eyes rolling from exhaustion, the lord of the rākṣasas spoke the following words to the lord of the monkeys:

“O lord of monkeys, you are as powerful as Indra. I am Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas. I came here hoping to fight with you, but instead I was captured by you. Your strength, virility and profundity is amazing, for you captured me and carried me to the four oceans like an animal. O monkey, what other warrior could have carried me so effortlessly and quickly? There are only three entities who have such speed: the mind, the wind-god and Garuḍa, and it also exists in you. Of this there is no doubt. O best of monkeys, having seen your strength, I wish to establish a close and lasting friendship with you in the presence of a fire. The two of us will share everything: our consorts, sons, cities, kingdoms, luxuries, clothes and food, O lord of the monkeys.’

“Lighting a fire, the two warriors—the lord of the monkeys and the lord of the rākṣasas—embraced each other and became friends. Clasp- ing each other’s hand, the two warriors entered Kiṣkindhā like two lions entering a mountain cave. Rāvaṇa lived there for one month like Sugrīva. Then his ministers, who wanted to destroy the three worlds, came and took him away. This is how it happened that Rāvaṇa was previously overpowered by Vālī, and then accepted as his brother before a fire. Vālī’s strength was unparalleled and unsurpassed. Yet even he was incinerated by You, as a moth is burnt by fire.”

THE BIRTH OF HANUMĀN

Then, with joined palms, Rāma humbly expressed to Agastya the following important remarks: “Vālī’s and Rāvaṇa’s strength was certainly unequalled. However, their strenght was not equal to that of Hanumān. At least, that is My opinion. Heroism, expertise, strength, firmness, sagacity, logic, prowess and power reside in Hanumān. When the monkey soldiers became despondent upon seeing the ocean, the mighty-armed Hanumān jumped one hundred yojanas across the ocean. After defeating the rākṣasī who was the protectoress of Laṅkā, Hanumān snuck into Rāvaṇa’s palace, found Sītā, talked with Her and reassured Her. Rāvaṇa’s chief general, the son of his minister, his servants and his own son—these were killed singlehanded by Hanumān. Moreover, after speaking with Rāvaṇa, he escaped from his bonds and reduced Laṅkā to ashes, like the fire of universal dissolution. Hanumān’s feats in the war have not been performed by Yama, Indra, Viṣṇu or Kuvera. By the strength of his arms I was able to attain victory, Laṅkā, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, My kingdom, My friends and My relatives. If Hanumān, the friend of Sugrīva, were not with Me, who would have been able to locate Sītā? I wonder why Hanumān did not burn Vālī like a log when he became inimical to Sugrīva. I think Hanumān was not aware of his own strength because he stood by and watched his lord, who was dearer to him than his own life, suffer in exile. O holy one adored by the immortals, please tell Me everything about Hanumān in great detail.”

Upon hearing Rāma’s logical inquiry, the sage Agastya replied as follows in the presence of Hanumān:

“O best of the Raghu Dynasty, what you say about Hanumān is true. There is no one equal to him in strength, speed or intelligence. In the past he was cursed by sages, whose pronouncements were never invalid: although strong, he would not be aware of the extent of his strength. O mighty Rāma, it was not possible to relate his childhood deeds. Therefore he remained

ignorant of them. If, O Rāma, You are interested in hearing, pay attention and listen to what I say. There is a mountain named Sumeru, which is golden because of the sun. On it rules Hanumān's father named Kesarī. His dear wife was widely known as Añjanā. The wind-god in fact engendered an excellent son through her. Therafter Añjanā gave birth to a son with a complexion like the husks of rice paddy. Desiring to get some fruits to eat, his mother went into the forest. Because of separation from his mother and hunger pangs, the baby cried loudly, as did Kārtikeya in the thicket of bull rushes.

“At that time the baby saw the rising sun with a hue like a pile of roses. Thinking that it was a fruit and wanting it, he jumped up toward the sun. Facing the sun, the baby, who also resembled the newly-risen sun, jumped into the sky toward the sun in order to seize it. While Hanumān was jumping in this manner, the gods, dānavas and yakṣas were greatly amazed. They said: ‘Neither the wind-god, nor Garuḍa nor the mind are as fast as this son of the wind-god traversing high in the sky. If this is how his speed and prowess are while he is a baby, what will they be like when he is a youth?’ Cool as a pile of snow, the wind-god flew behind his son to protect him from being burnt by the sun. Flying up into the sky for many thousands of yojanas by dint of his father's strength and his own childish innocence, he approached the sun. Knowing that he was an innocent child and that his real task awaited him, the sun did not burn him.

“The demon Rāhu wanted to seize the sun on the same day that Hanumān jumped to catch the sun. Hanumān grabbed hold of Rāhu as he was on the chariot of the sun. Rāhu, the tormentor of the sun and moon, became frightened and fled. Proceeding to Indra's abode, the angry Rāhu, the son of Simhikā, knitted his eyebrows and spoke to Indra in the midst of the gods: ‘O Indra, slayer of Bala and Vṛtra, after giving me the sun and moon to assuage my hunger, why have you now given them to someone else? Today, on the first day of the waxing moon, I was approaching the sun to seize it when another Rāhu suddenly came and seized it.’

“When Lord Indra heard Rāhu's report, he was amazed. He left his seat, jumping up and grasping his gold necklace. He mounted his elephant Airāvata, who was as tall as a peak of Mount Kailāśa. The four-tusked

elephant was exuding ichor from its temples and was nicely decorated. Because of the ringing of his golden bell, he seemed to be laughing loudly. Placing Rāhu in front of him, Indra proceeded to where the sun-god and Hanumān were.

“Then Rāhu left Indra and travelled very quickly. Hanumān saw him running and resembling a mountain peak. Thinking that Rāhu was a fruit, Hanumān left the sun and once more jumped into the sky to grab Rāhu. O Rāma, when Rāhu saw that Hanumān had left the sun and was running toward him, he turned around and returned the way he came. Taking shelter of Indra as his protector, Rāhu repeated cried out in fear: “Indra! Indra!” When Lord Indra heard Rāhu’s cries and recognized the voice, he responded: ‘Do not fear! I shall defeat him!’ Then Hanumān saw Airāvata, the king of elephants, and, thinking that he was a huge fruit, rushed toward him. While rushing toward Airāvata with the intention of catching him, the splendor of Hanumān’s form for some time looked as formidable as that of Indra and Agni. Although not very angry, Indra hit the onrushing Hanumān with a thunderbolt released from his hand.

“When hit by Indra’s thunderbolt, Hanumān’s left jaw was broken and he fell down on a mountain. When Hanumān was knocked down unconscious by the impact of the thunderbolt, the wind-god became angry with Indra, to the detriment of all living beings. The powerful wind-god who resides in all living beings withdrew his movement and entered a cave, taking his infant son with him. The wind-god caused excruciating pain to all living beings by obstructing their ability to urinate and defecate, just as Indra controls the rains. Because of the wind-god’s anger, all living beings were unable to breathe and were as stiff as wood because of joint problems. Because of Vāyu’s anger, the three worlds were devoid of study of the Vedas and their six corollaries, sacrificial rituals and the observance of virtue, and were therefore practically in hell. Greatly afflicted, all living beings, including the gods, gandharvas, asuras and human beings, hurried to Lord Brahmā for relief. With their stomachs swollen as if they had gout, the gods spoke with joined palms: ‘O lord, you created the four kinds of living beings: mammals, those born from eggs, those born from sweat and those produced spontaneously. You gave us the wind-god as the ruler of our life airs. Therefore, why is he now afflicting us by obstructing our life airs, as a king confines his women in a harem? Tormented by Vāyu, we have come to you

for shelter. O destroyer of distress, remove this suffering of ours caused by Vāyu!’

“When Lord Brahmā heard the living beings’ appeal, he said: ‘There is some reason for this.’ Then he continued: ‘Hear the reason, O living beings, why Vāyu became angry and stopped his movement. Please listen. All of this is justifiable and you ought to hear why. Today, in response to the plea of Rāhu, Indra, lord of the immortals, struck down Vāyu’s son and therefore he is angry. Although he has no body, he moves about in all bodies, maintaining them. Without Vāyu, a body becomes like a piece of wood. Air is life, happiness and all this living world. Deprived of air, the world cannot find happiness. Now the world has been abandoned by Vāyu, who is its life air. Unable to breathe, the living beings are no better than blocks of wood. As such, we shall go to where the wind-god, who is causing this illness, is. My dear children, let us not be destroyed because we have not placated him.’

“Accompanied by all living beings, including the gods, gandharvas, serpents and guhyakas, Lord Brahmā went to where the wind-god was sitting and touched Vāyu’s son who had been struck down by Indra’s thunderbolt. When Lord Brahmā looked at the brilliantly effulgent Hanumān in Vāyu’s lap, the four-head Lord Brahmā, along with the gods, gandharvas, sages, yakṣas and rākṣasas, took pity on the baby.”

HANUMĀN RECEIVES BOONS AND A CURSE

Agastya continued: “Upon seeing Brahmā, Vāyu, who was anguished by the death of his son, stood before Lord Brahmā while holding the baby. Vāyu, with swaying earrings, crown and flower garland, rose and fell three times before the feet of Lord Brahmā. Lifting up Vāyu, Lord Brahmā, petted the child with his outstretched hand adorned with ornaments. When Hanumān was barely touched by Lord Brahmā, he came back to life, like crops when they are watered. Seeing that Hanumān was alive, Vāyu, who is the life breath, was delighted and began circulating in all living beings as previously. Freed from the obstruction of their life airs, all living beings were overjoyed, like ponds with lotus flowers freed from cold wind. Then Lord Brahmā, who possess six exceptional qualities—beauty, fame, strength, knowledge and detachment—and who is worshipped by the celestials, spoke to the gods in order to please Vāyu: ‘O Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, Śiva and Kuvera! Even though you know everything, I shall tell you something good for you. Please listen. This baby will accomplish a task for you. Therefore grant him boons in order to please the wind-god.’

“Lord Indra, whose face was beautiful, took off his garland of lotus flowers and placed it on Hanumān. Then he spoke the following words: ‘Because this baby’s jaw was broken by a thunderbolt hurled by my hand, this tiger among monkeys will be known by the name Hanumān. I grant him the supreme and wonderful boon that from this day onwards he will be invulnerable to my thunderbolt.’

“The venerable sun-god, who dispels darkness, then said: ‘I bestow upon him one percent of my effulgence. When he is able to study the scriptures, I shall give him understanding of the scriptures, by which he will become eloquent. There will be no one like him in understanding of the scriptures.’

“Varuṇa granted him the boon that for millions of years he would not die from his noose or from water. Yama granted him health and invulnerability to his rod of chastisement. Then Kuvera, the lord of wealth, said: ‘I am very pleased. I grant him the boon that my mace will not cause his death in combat and that he will not become tired in combat.’

“Lord Śiva said: ‘I grant this child the supreme boon that he will be invulnerable to death by me or my weapons.’ After glancing at the child, the wise Viśvakarmā, the best of technicians, granted him the following boon: ‘Being invulnerable to the divine weapons made by me, he will be long-lived.’ Lord Brahmā said: ‘This child will be long-lived and great. He will be invulnerable to my rod of chastisement and to curses uttered by brāhmaṇas.’

“Pleased to see the child endowed with boons granted by the gods, Lord Brahmā, the preceptor of the world, said to Vāyu: ‘Your son Hanumān will terrify his enemies, will free his friends from fear and be invincible. This best of monkeys will be able to assume any form he chooses. He will be able to go wherever he wants as fast as he wants. His movement will be unimpeded and he will be glorious. In combat he will accomplish hair-raising deeds for Rāvaṇa’s consternation and for the pleasure of Lord Rāma.’

“After they finished talking, all the immortal gods headed by Lord Brahmā took leave of Vāyu and left the same way they came. Then the wind-god picked up his son and took him home. He informed Añjanā that the child had been given boons and then left. Because of the boons he received and the strength which he gained from them, Hanumān was replete with his own speed, like the ocean.

“Overflowing with energy, Hanumān fearlessly desecrated the hermitages of great sages. He broke the sacrificial laddles and vessels, interrupted the offering of oblations into sacrificial fires and tore up the piles of bark cloth belonging to the peaceful sages. The mighty Hanumān continued doing such deeds. Knowing that Brahmā had made him invulnerable to punishment by brāhmaṇas, the sages tolerated it because of his power. Although prohibited by Kesarī and Vāyu, Hanumān went beyond the bounds of propriety. Great sages born in the families of Bhṛgu and Aṅgirā, who were never overly angry or wrathful, became furious and cursed

him in the following way: ‘O monkey, illusioned by our curse, you will for a long time be unaware of your own strength, by dint of which you harassed us. Your strength will again grow when you are reminded of your glory.’ Thereafter, by the power of the words of the great sages, Hanumān was deprived of his strength.

“At that time, Vālī’s and Sugrīva’s father, named Rkṣarāja, was king of all monkeys and was as splendid as the sun. After ruling over the monkeys for a long time, Rkṣarāja came under the influence of time. When he passed away, Vālī was installed in his father’s position and Sugrīva was installed in Vālī’s position as prince regent by expert ministers. From childhood Hanumān developed an inseparable friendship with Sugrīva, like that between Agni and Vāyu. Because of the curse, Hanumān was unaware of his own strength. O Rāma, when hostility broke out between Vālī and Sugrīva, neither the exiled Sugrīva nor Hanumān knew about his strength. Because his strength had been deprived by the sages, Hanumān stood by Sugrīva in combat like a lion blocked by an elephant.

“Who in this world is greater than Hanumān in prowess, enthusiasm, immeasurable splendor, good character, sweetness, knowledge of what is good and bad, profundity, cleverness, virility, and steadiness? Moreover, to learn grammar from the sun-god, Hanumān faced him to ask him questions and followed him from the eastern mountain where the sun rises to the western mountain where the sun sets. Hanumān mastered the whole subject matter of grammar, including the aphorisms, commentaries and annotations. Indeed there is no one like him in scholarship of scripture and prosody. He rivals Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods, in all fields of knowledge and in the practice of austerities. Well-versed in the nine branches of grammar, he will, by your grace, become a Brahṁa.

“Who can stand up to Hanumān, who is like the ocean swallowing the earth, a conflagration consuming the world or death personified destroying the world? O Rāma, the gods created for Your sake other great monkey leaders like him, such as Sugrīva, Mainda, Dvidida, Nīla, Tāra, Aṅgada, Nala and Rambha. Besides the monkeys, Gaja, Gavākṣa, Gavaya, Sudamṣṭra, Prabha and Jyotirmukha, the bears were also created by the gods

for Your sake. I have told You everything that You asked. I have related the feats which Hanumān performed in his childhood.”

After hearing Agastya’s narration, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, the monkeys and the rākṣasas were extremely amazed. Then Agastya said to Rāma: “You have heard all this. I have seen and spoken with You. O Rāma, now we shall go.” Upon hearing what Agastya said, Rāma joined His palms and humbly replied to the great sage: “Today the gods, forefathers and ancestors are pleased with Me. By merely seeing you My relatives are always satisfied. There is something I wish to say which is worth relating to you. Out of compassion you should do it for Me. After returning and assigning the citizens of the capital and countryside with their specific duties, I would like to perform sacrifices with the help of you pious souls. Desiring to bless Me and endowed as you are with great vigor, please be the constant supervisor of my sacrifices. By depending on you, who have disposed of sin by the practice of austerities, I shall be blessed by My forefathers and shall be very happy. You should all come here together whenever I perform a sacrifice.”

Upon hearing His request, the sages of strict vows headed by Agastya said: “So be it.” After saying this, they left as they had come. Rāma also pondered in amazement over that proposal to perform sacrifices. When the sun had set, He dismissed the kings and monkeys. Then that best of men performed His evening worship according to the rules, afterwhich, when the night had set, He returned to His own residential quarters.

RĀMA GIVES AUDIENCE IN HIS PALACE

After Rāma had been coronated according to custom, He passed His first night, which increased the joy of the citizens. When the night ended and morning ensued, the gentle bards responsible for waking the king assembled in the royal palace. Trained in singing, they all began joyfully praising the heroic king as follows with voices as sweet as kinnaras:

“O hero, O gentle one! Please wake up! You increase the delight of Kausalyā. O king, as long as You are asleep, the whole world remains asleep. Your prowess is like that of Lord Viṣṇu. Your beauty is like that of the Aśvinī-kumāras. You are equal to Br̥haspati in intelligence and are the same as Lord Brahmā. In forbearance You are equal to the earth. In splendor You are equal to the sun. Your velocity is equal to that of the wind. You are as profound as the ocean. You are unshakable like Lord Śiva. Your charm is like that of the moon. A king like You never existed in the past, nor will one exist in the future. You are difficult to overcome and are dedicated to righteousness and the welfare of the people. O best of men, Your glory does not abandon You, nor does Your fortune. Good luck and righteousness are ever-established in You.”

The rhapsodists sang these and other sweet praises and bards woke Rāma with divine eulogies. Rāma woke up while His praises were being sung. Abandoning His bed, which was spread with white sheets, He got up, as Lord Nārāyaṇa gets up from lying on the serpent Ananta-śeṣa. Thousands of servants arrived with shining pitchers of water and bowed with joined palms before the great king who had just risen. Rāma purified Himself by bathing and then at the appropriate time offered oblations in the sacred fire. Then He hurried to the temple of the pious Ikṣvākus. After worshipping there the gods, forefathers and learned brāhmaṇas according to regulations, Rāma went into the outer chamber surrounded by people. Shining like fires, all the great ministers and priests headed by Vasiṣṭha arrived. Great kṣatriyas from many lands sat at Rāma’s side, as the immortals do with Indra. The

highly glorious Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna jubilantly waited upon Rāma, like the three Vedas at a fire sacrifice. With joined palms and joyful face, many servants called muditas walked or sat beside Him. Endowed with tremendous virility and energy, twenty monkeys headed by Sugrīva who could assume any form they wished sat near Rāma. Surrounded by four rākṣasas, Vibhīṣaṇa served the great Lord Rāma, as yakṣas serve Kuvera. Bowing their heads, humans who were learned in the scriptures, from good families and wise also attended upon Lord Rāma. The king was similarly surrounded by glorious sages, outstanding kings and valiant monkeys and rākṣasas. Rāma appeared more beautiful than Lord Indra ever-attended by sages. When they were seated, those great souls who were familiar with the ancient histories narrated different sweet topics.

RĀMA GRANTS LEAVE TO THE KINGS

The mighty-armed Rāma administered all the affairs of the citizens and country folk from day to day in this way. Then, after a number of days, Rāma joined his palms and spoke the following words to King Janaka: “You are indeed our unswerving support. We are being protected by you. It was by means of your exceptional power that I killed Rāvaṇa. O king, an unequalled affection arising from marital relations exists between all the descendents of Ikṣvāku and all the rulers of Mithilā. Therefore, accepting valuable gifts, please return to your own capital, O king. Bharata and Śatrughna will follow behind you as escorts.”

After assenting, King Janaka relied to Rāma as follows: “O king, I am pleased just by Your sight and dealings. All these gifts which you have bestowed upon me I give to my daughter Sītā.” Having spoken in this way to Rāma, the glorious King Janaka took leave of Him and left for Mithilā.

When King Janaka had left, Rāma joined His palms and humbly spoke the following words to His maternal uncle Yūdhañjit, king of the Kekayas: “This kingdom, Myself, Bharata, Śatrughna and Lakṣmaṇa are at your disposal. O king, you are in fact Our support. The aged king of the Kekayas must be in anxiety because of you. Therefore I think it best that you leave this very day, O king. Lakṣmaṇa will follow behind you, bringing with Him a great treasure of different kinds of jewels. Then Yūdhañjit assented to leave and said: “O Rāma, let the jewels and wealth stay permanently with You.” Circumambulating Rāma, who had previously circumambulated him after greeting him, the king of the Kekayas left with Lakṣmaṇa as his escort, as Indra left with Lord Viṣṇu after killing the demon Vṛtra.

After sending him away, Rāma embraced His friend Pratardana, the king of Kāśī, who had no fear of anyone. Then Rāma said to him: “O king, you have shown affection and great friendship to Me and have endeavored

hard with Bharata to please Me. Therefore, now you may return to the city of Kāśī, which is charming, well-protected by you, and built with good ramparts and gateways.” After the righteous Rāma spoke in this way, He rose from His throne and tightly embraced him to His chest. Rāma then bid farewell to the king of Kāśī. When permitted by Rāma, King Pratardana quickly left for Kāśī. After sending away the king of Kāśī, Rāma laughed and sweetly spoke the following words to the three hundred princes who were there:

“Your unflinching devotion to Me is protected by your glory. Righteousness is perpetual and truthfulness always exists in you. By your power and glory you great souls killed Rāvaṇa, the wicked, foolish and lowest of rākṣasas. I was only an instrument. You killed Rāvaṇa and his sons, ministers, relatives and followers by your power. You were brought together by the great soul Bharata when He heard that Sītā had been abducted from the forest. A long time has passed while you great kings were all engaged in My welfare. I therefore think it is time for you to go.”

Overwhelmed with great joy, the princes replied: “O Rāma, it is our good fortune that You were victorious and are secure in Your kingdom. Fortunately You retrieved Sītā and conquered Your enemy. This was our greatest desire and our highest satisfaction, that we see You kill Your enemy and gain victory. It is also all right for You to praise us. Yet we do not know how to utter praise worthy of You. We request permission to leave. You are always situated in our hearts. May we always be filled with great devotion to You and may You always be affectionate to us, O great king.”

When Rāma gave his assent, the kings were overwhelmed with joy. With joined palms they said to Rāma: “We are leaving now.” After being honored by Rāma, they returned to their own countries.

THE PRINCES SEND GIFTS TO RĀMA

Those great princes left joyfully, shaking the earth with their divisions of thousands of elephants and horses. More than one aksauhiṇī consisting of cheerful troops and horses was readied by Bharata's order. Those kings proud of their strength said: "We did not get to see Rāma and Rāvaṇa face to face on the battlefield. Bharata summoned us to late to be of any use. We kings would no doubt have quickly killed the rākṣasas. Protected by the strength of Rāma's and Lakṣmaṇa's arms, we could have easily fought on the other side of the ocean without any difficulty."

Saying thousands of things like this, the jubilant princes returned to their own kingdoms. After reaching the capitals of their own prominent kingdoms, which were prosperous, happy, self-sufficient and wealthy, with abundant valuables and food grains, the princes gave many kinds of valuable gifts to please Lord Rāma, such as horses, vehicles, jewels, passionate elephants, first class sandalwood, glistening ornaments, gems, pearls, coral, pretty servant girls, goats and many different kinds of chariots. Accepting those valuable gifts, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna returned to the city of Ayodhyā. When they reached the charming city of Ayodhyā, they presented the wonderful gifts to Lord Rāma. After accepting all those gifts, the blissful Rāma gave them to Sugrīva for the services he had rendered, as well as to Vibhīṣaṇa and the other rākṣasas and monkeys with whose help He had gained victory. The mighty monkeys and rākṣasas wore the jewels that they received from Rāma on their heads and arms.

Placing Hanumān and Aṅgada on His lap, the great chariot warrior Rāma, king of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, whose eyes are shaped like the petals of a lotus flower, spoke as follows to Sugrīva: "Your fine nephew Aṅgada and your minister Hanumān, son of the wind-god, who were advising you and were dedicated to My interests, deserve all kinds of honor."

After saying this, the glorious Rāma took off ornaments from His own body and fastened them on Aṅgada and Hanumān. Then He addressed the monkey troop leaders—Nīla, Nala, Kesarī, Kumuda, Gandhamādana, Suṣeṇa, Panasa, Vīra, Mainda, Dvividā, Jāmbavān, Gavākṣa, Vinata, Dhūmra, Balīmukha, Prajaṅgha, Sannāda, Darīmukha, Dadhimukha and Indrajānu. Speaking softly and sweetly, as if He would drink them with His eyes, He said: “You are My friends. You are My body and My brothers. O forest-dwellers, you delivered Me from disaster. King Sugrīva is fortunate because of you, the best of friends.”

Having said this, He gave them valuable ornaments and diamonds as they deserved and then embraced them. The tawny monkeys drank fragrant honey and ate foods cooked with spices, as well as roots and fruits. More than a month passed as they stayed there. Because of their devotion to Rāma it seemed to them like a moment. Rāma also enjoyed Himself with those monkeys, who could change their forms as they pleased, as well as with the rākṣasas possessing great prowess and the mighty bears. In this way, the second month of the cold season passed with the monkeys and rākṣasas feeling completely delighted. They enjoyed the highest pleasure because of Rāma’s hospitality. They passed their time happily in the charming city of the Ikṣvākus.

RĀMA DISMISSES THE MONKEYS AND RĀKṢASAS

Then Rāma spoke to Sugrīva regarding the bears, monkeys and rākṣasas that were staying with Him: “My dear friend, please return to Kiṣkindhā, which is difficult to be overcome by gods and asuras. Rule your kingdom free of enemies with your ministers. O mighty-armed one, look upon Aṅgada, Hanumān and the mighty Nala with great affection. Look with affection upon your father-in-law, Suśeṇa, as well as Tāra, the best of the strong, the invincible Kumuda, the mighty Nīla, the valiant Śatabali, Mainda, Dvidida, Gaja, Gavākṣa, Gavaya, Śarabha, Jāmbavān, the formidable king of bears, Gandhamādana, the very valiant Rṣabha, Supāṭaka, Kesarī, Śarabha, Sumbha and the mighty Śaṅkhacūḍa. Look with affection upon all those great monkeys who risked their lives for Me. Do not displease them.”

When Rāma finished saying this to Sugrīva, He embraced him and then sweetly said to Vibhīṣaṇa: “Rule over Laṅkā with righteousness. I, the citizens of Laṅkā, the rākṣasas and your elder brother Kuvera consider you one who knows what is right. O king, never set your mind on unrighteousness. Wise kings rule the earth firmly. You should affectionately remember Sugrīva and Myself. Please leave without any anxiety.”

After hearing Rāma’s statement, the bears, monkeys and rākṣasas repeatedly thanked him, saying: “Well spoken! Your intelligence and prowess are wonderful. O Rāma, Your supreme sweetness always rivals that of Lord Brahmā.”

While the monkeys and rākṣasas were speaking, Hanumān remained bowed and then said to Rāma: “O king, may my supreme love for You last forever! May my devotion be constant. May my affection direct itself to no one else. O hero, may my life always undoubtedly stay in my body as long as stories about You are current in this world. May the celestial damsels

narrate Your pastimes to me, O best of men. O Lord, by hearing the nectar of Your activities I shall rid myself of nostalgia, as the wind disperses a row of clouds.”

Getting up from His fine throne, Rāma affectionately hugged Hanumān as he was speaking in this way. Then Rāma said: “O best of monkeys, this will come to pass. There is no doubt. As long as the narration of My pastimes is current in this world, your glory and life will continue. The narration of My pastimes will surely last as long as the worlds do. I would give My life for every single favor that you did for Me, O monkey. We are indebted to you for the rest of the services you have rendered in this regard. O monkey, may whatever services you have rendered find completion in My body. Only a person who is in difficulties does not have to repay favors.”

Then Lord Rāma took off of His own neck a string of pearls as bright as the moon with a vaidurya gem and fastened it around Hanumān’s neck. With that big necklace hanging on his chest, the monkey looked like a snowy mountain with the moon resting on its peak.

Upon hearing what Lord Rāma said, the monkeys got up one by one, bowed their heads to His feet and left. When Rāma tightly embraced Sugriva and the righteous Vibhīṣaṇa to His chest, all the monkeys began shedding tears. While they were leaving Rāma, their voices became choked up, their eyes flowed with tears and they became disturbed by sadness as if disquieted. After receiving favors from the great descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, they returned to their own homes with heavy hearts, like when the embodied soul gives up the body. After bowing down to Rāma, the expander of the Raghu Dynasty, the rākṣasas, bears and monkeys returned to their homes with eyes full of tears of separation.

ARRIVAL OF THE PUṢPAKA AIRSHIP

After sending away the bears, monkeys and rākṣasas, the mighty-armed Rāma enjoyed great happiness with His brothers. Then Lord Rāma and His brothers heard a sweet voice coming from the sky: “My dear Rāma, look upon me with kindness! O Lord, know me to be the Puṣpaka airship coming from Kuvera’s palace. Obeying Your command, I returned home to serve him, but he said to me: ‘By killing the unassailable Rāvaṇa, lord of the rākṣasas, in battle, the greatest of kings Rāma has won you. I am very pleased that the wicked Rāvaṇa and his sons, relatives and followers have been killed. Rāma, who is the Supersoul, won you in Laṅkā. O gentle one, go carry Him. I order you to do so. It is my greatest desire that you carry Rāma, the support of the world. Go without any anxiety.’ I, who have been ordered by the great Kuvera, lord of wealth, have come to You. Accept me without any hesitation. By my power I am unassailable by any living being. By Kuvera’s order I shall travel about carrying out Your command.”

When addressed in this way by the Puṣpaka vehicle, the mighty Rāma glanced at it and said: “If this is so, you are welcome, O best of airships. Because of Kuvera’s favor, We cannot be accused of wrong doing.”

After worshipping the Puṣpaka with fried grains of rice, flowers, incense and fragrant sandalwood paste, the strong-armed Rāma said: “You may now go, but come whenever I summon you. Stay in the realm of the siddhas and do not feel despondent. May you be unobstructed as you wander in all directions as you please.” Then the Puṣpaka said: “So be it!” Having been honored and dismissed, the Puṣpaka then left in the direction of its choice.

When the well-made Puṣpaka airship had departed, Bharata joined His palms and directed the following words to Rāma: “Since You began ruling, even nonhuman beings are continually talking. O Rāma, only one

month has elapsed since You were crowned king and mortals are free from disease, aged persons do not succumb to death, women have no complications when giving birth and all people have healthy constitutions. O king, every citizen dwelling in the capital has abundant happiness. Clouds shower down nectar-like rains at the proper time. Even the breezes that blow here are gentle and delightful to the touch. O king, the people of the capital and countryside declare: ‘May we have such a king for a long time.’”

When Rāma heard these sweet words uttered by Bharata, He became overjoyed.

WHILE ENJOYING TOGETHER, RĀMA LEARNS OF SĪTĀ'S PREGNANCY

When Rāma finished sending away the gilded Puṣpaka airship, he entered a pleasure garden. It was beautified with the following trees: white sandalwood, red sandalwood, aguru, mango, coconut, pine, campaka, aśoka, punnāga, madhūka, pana, āsana and pārijāta, which were shining like smokeless fires. Scattered about were lodhra, nīpa, arjuna, nāgakeśara, saptaparṇa, atimuktaka, mandāra and banana trees, as well as bushes and canopies of vines. It was also beautified by priyaṅgu, kadamba, bakula, jambu, pomegranate and kovidāra trees. That pleasure garden always had lovely flowers with celestial nectar and fragrance, and charming sprigs of tender budding leaves. The trees were well-pruned by gardeners. They had abundant buds and flowers that were crowded with intoxicated bees.

Cuckoos, bṛigarājas and thousands of other beautiful multi-colored birds were alighting in the tops of mango trees creating an amazingly beautiful scene. Some trees were golden colored, some were like flames of fire, others resembled blue eyeliner. There were all kinds of fragrant flowers and clusters of flowers. Lakes of different shapes were full of clear water. Going down into the lakes were stairways made of rubies. The floors of the lakes were paved with crystals. They had masses of blossoming lotuses and water lilies and they were beautified by ruddy geese. Hawks, parrots, swans and cranes were calling out. The trees were speckled with colorful flowers. The garden was decorated with different shaped walls and rocks. Some parts of the garden were adorned with vaidurya gems. It had fine lawns of green grass and groves of flowering trees.

The trees were sporting flowers, as if to compete with each other. They were covered with flowers of many different colors, like the sky spangled with stars. The pleasure garden of Rāma's palace was like Indra's Nandana Garden or Lord Brahmā's Citraratha Garden. It had many sitting places and kiosks and was shaded with canopies of vines.

Entering that opulent pleasure garden, Rāma sat upon a beautifully-shaped throne spread with a coverlet and decorated with a great many flowers. With His own hand, Rāma gave Sītā a beverage of honey to drink, as Indra does with his wife Śacī. Servants quickly brought different kinds of spiced dishes and fruits for Rāma to eat. Apsarās, nāgapatnis, and kinnarīs that were skilled in dancing and singing began performing before the king. The beautiful and skillful women, who were intoxicated from drinking, danced before Lord Rāma. The righteous Rāma, the best of enjoyers, enjoyed the performance of those women who were always well-adorned. Seated with Sītā, Rāma shone like Vasiṣṭha seated with his wife Arundhatī.

Day after day the blissful Rāma enjoyed like a god with Sītā, who was like the daughter of a god. Thus Sītā and Rāma enjoyed for a long time. The lovely cold season, which is always enjoyable, passed. As the two of Them enjoyed different kinds of pleasures, the cold season elapsed. During the first part of the day, Rāma, the knower of what is right, would religiously perform His different duties. He would spend the remaining part of the day in His palace chambers. Similarly, Sītā would spend the first part of the day in worshiping God, then She specifically worshipped all Her mothers-in-law. Afterwards She would come before Rāma dressed in beautiful garments and jewelry, as Śacī does in heaven in the presence of Lord Indra.

When Rāma saw that His wife was blessed with pregnancy, He experienced unequalled joy and exclaimed: “How nice!” Then He further said to the noble Sītā, who was like a goddess: “O princess of Videha, You have now become pregnant with a child. O fine lady, what do You want? What wish of Yours should be fulfilled?”

Smiling, Sītā thereupon replied to Rāma: “O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, I wish to see the holy forests for the practice of austerities where sages with fierce effulgences reside on the banks of the Ganges at the bases of trees, eating only roots and fruits. This is My greatest desire: to spend one night with those sages who eat only roots and fruits.”

Rāma, who never tires in action, assented by saying: “So be it! O Sītā, do not worry. Tomorrow You will go there without a doubt.” After Rāma said this to Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, He returned to His own quarters, surrounded by friends.

RĀMA HEARS MALICIOUS RUMORS ABOUT SĪTĀ

One day different humorous friends were sitting around King Rāma talking about different matters. Their names were: Vijaya, Madhumatta, Kāśyapa, Maṅgala, Kula, Surāji, Kāliya, Bhadra, Dantavakra and Sumāgadha. With a great deal of laughter they related different stories in the great Rāma's presence. At that time, Rāma asked about a particular matter: "O Bhadra, what are people talking about in the city and countryside? What are the people of the capital and countryside saying about Me, Sītā, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna and Mother Kaikeyī? The faults of a king are always discussed by people both in the city and forest."

Having been questioned in this way by Rāma, Bhadra joined his palms and said: "O king, the citizens only have good things to talk about. My dear friend and best of men, the citizens of Your capital talk a lot about Your victory in relation to the slaughter of the ten-headed Rāvaṇa."

After Bhadra had spoken, Rāma replied: "Tell Me everything in detail without leaving anything out. What good and bad things are the citizens talking about? Some people only want to hear good news and not bad. Tell Me without any fear or anxiety what the debased people of the kingdom are talking about."

When Bhadra had been questioned so nicely by Rāma, Bhadra replied with joined palms and full attention: "O king, hear what good and bad things the citizens are saying at the crossroads, shops, forests and gardens: 'Rāma built a bridge over the formidable ocean. This was never accomplished by anyone else previously, not even by the gods or dānavas. He destroyed Rāvaṇa, who was difficult to overcome, along with his army and vehicles. He has brought under His power monkeys, bears and rākṣasas. After killing Rāvaṇa, Rāma rescued Sītā. Turning His back on jealousy, He took Her back to His own home. What kind of happiness can His heart

have from enjoying Sītā when She was forcefully taken by Rāvaṇa into his lap? Then Rāvaṇa brought Her to Laṅkā and kept Her in his own pleasure garden. Why should not Rāma be disgusted with Her since She was under the power of that rākṣasa? Now we will have to tolerate such things from our wives, for whatever the king does, the people imitate.’ O king, the citizens are talking like this and other manners in the capital and countryside.”

When Rāma heard what Bhadra said, He was extremely pained. He asked all His friends: “How is this? Please tell Me!” Bowing their heads to the ground, they humbly replied: “This is indeed a sad fact. Of this there is no doubt.” Upon hearing all that His friends said, Rāma dismissed them.

RĀMA SUMMONS ALL HIS BROTHERS

Dismissing His friends, Rāma began considering what to do. Rāma spoke the following words to the door guard, who was nearby: “Immediately summon the handsome Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, as well as the fortunate Bharata and the victorious Śatrughna!” Upon hearing Rāma’s command, the door guard raised his joined palms to his head. Reaching Lakṣmaṇa’s palace, he entered unobstructed. After praising the great soul Lakṣmaṇa with joined palms, the door guard said: “The king wishes to see You. Please go there. Do not delay.” Assenting to do so, Lakṣmaṇa obeyed Rāma’s order. He mounted a chariot and rushed to Rāma’s palace.

When the door guard saw that Lakṣmaṇa was going, he went to Bharata. After praising the great soul Bharata with joined palms, the door guard humbly said: “The king wishes to see You.” When Bharata heard Rāma’s request from the door guard, he got up from his throne and quickly walked away on foot. The door guard watched with joined palms as Bharata left in a hurry, then he went to Śatrughna’s palace and spoke the following words: “O best of the Raghu Dynasty, please come. The king wishes to see You. Lakṣmaṇa has already gone, as has the glorious Bharata.”

When Satrughna heard this, he got up from His excellent throne, touched His head to the ground out of respect for His elder brother and went to where Rāma was. The door guard returned and saluted Rāma with joined palms and informed Him that all His brothers had arrived. When Rāma, whose senses were overwhelmed with anxiety, heard that the princes had arrived, He looked down and said to the door guard: “Have the princes enter and come to Me in a hurry! My life depends on Them. They are dearer to Me than My own life.”

When ordered in this way by the king, the princes dressed in white were bewildered. They joined Their palms and entered with gravity. They saw that His face was like an eclipsed moon or like the setting sun deprived

of its spendor. They saw that the wise Rāma's eyes were full of tears and that His lotus face was devoid of luster. They hurriedly greeted Him and touched Their heads to His feet. They all stood there attentively as Rama shed tears. Rising up, Rāma embraced Them with both arms. After telling Them to sit down on seats, He spoke the following words:

“You are everything to Me. You are My life. O princes, I rule this kingdom by Your actions. You have all learned the meaning of the scriptures and are intellectually mature. O princes, in Your presence I present the following matter for You to consider.” While Rāma was speaking in that way, the princes were alert. They all became disturbed, wondering what the king was up to.

RĀMA INFORMS HIS BROTHERS ABOUT THE MALICIOUS RUMORS

When all the disquieted princes were seated, Rāma spoke to them with His mouth dry: “Bless You all! Please listen. Do not decide to do anything else. All the citizens are gossiping about Sītā. The people of the city and countryside are criticizing Her and they are contemptuous toward Me. This is cutting up My vital organs. I was in fact born in a noble family of the great descendents of King Ikṣvāku. Sītā was also born in a pious family of the great King Janaka. You know, My dear brother Lakṣmaṇa, that when Sītā was alone in the forest, She was kidnapped by Rāvaṇa and I therefore annihilated him. Then I began thinking about whether it was proper for Me to bring Her back to My capital after She had spent so much time in Laṅkā.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, at that time, to prove Her fidelity, She entered a blazing fire in Your presence. Agni himself verified Her sinlessness. The wind-god who travels through the sky, as well as the sun, moon, gods and sages all attested to Her sinlessness. Thus, on the island of Laṅkā, in the presence of the gods and gandharvas, Lord Indra himself delivered into My hands Sītā, whose activities are pure. My mind also knew that the glorious Sītā was pure. Therefore I accepted Her and returned to Ayodhyā.

“But now there is this nasty gossip. The citizens of the capital and countryside are raising major criticism, which is causing sadness in My heart. One who suffers from infamy in this world sinks down to the lower planets and stays there as long as people gossip about him. In these worlds, the gods abhor infamy and admire fame. All great persons strive to achieve fame. O best of men, out of fear of criticism I could even give up My life and all of You, what to speak of Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka. As such, just see how I am fallen in an ocean of sorrow. I have never previously experienced a sorrow greater than this.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, tomorrow morning You should mount a chariot with Sumantra. Then You should take Sītā to the border of the kingdom and leave Her there. Crossing to the other side of the Ganges River, You will find the great Vālmīki’s hermitage, which is just like heaven. Leave Sītā there in a desolate place and quickly return. O Lakṣmaṇa, please obey My request. No one should speak to Me about Sītā ever again. Therefore, O Lakṣmaṇa, go! Do not think about this matter. I shall be very displeased if You try to disrupt this. I swear to You by My feet and My life that whoever interrupts Me and tries to somehow influence Me will be My enemy forever for having disrupted My intention. If You have respect for Me and are obedient to My command, then immediately take Sītā away! Obey My command! Previously Sītā told Me that She wanted to see the hermitages on the banks of the Ganges. Therefore, Her desire will now be fulfilled.”

After talking in this way, Rāma’s eyes were brimming with tears. Surrounded by His brothers, the righteous king entered His palace. Because His heart was overwhelmed with sorrow, He was sighing like an elephant.

LAKṢMAṆA TAKES SĪTĀ TO THE GANGES

When night ended and dawn arrived, Lakṣmaṇa, whose mind was miserable, spoke with a dry mouth the following words to Sumantra: “O charioteer, quickly harness swift steeds to a fine chariot. By the order of the king, put a lovely seat spread with a coverlet for Sītā. By the command of the king I shall take Sītā to a hermitage where great sages practice acts of piety. Quickly bring the chariot.” Sumantra said: “So be it.” Harnessing a gorgeous chariot with fine steeds, he placed on it a comfortable seat spread with cloth. Then he said to Lakṣmaṇa: “The chariot is here. O Lord, You may now carry out Your obligation.”

When spoken to in this way by Sumantra, Lakṣmaṇa entered the palace. Coming before Sītā, that best of men said: “You made a request to the king and He has instructed Me to take You to the hermitage of the sages. My lady, by the king’s order I shall quickly take You to the banks of the Ganges to the beautiful hermitages of the sages in the forest.” After the great Lakṣmaṇa said this to Sītā, She felt unaparalleled joy and She prepared to go. She grabbed different garments, ornaments and jewels, and was ready to leave. She said: “I shall give all these different costly garments, ornaments and jewels to the wives of the sages.” Lakṣmaṇa assented and helped Her board the chariot. Remembering Rāma’s orders, Lakṣmaṇa quickly left.

At that time Sītā said to Lakṣmaṇa, the increaser of good fortune: “O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, I see many inauspicious omens. My right eye is twitching and My limbs are trembling. O Lakṣmaṇa, I see that Your heart is not at ease. I am feeling intense anxiety and great uncertainty. The whole world seems empty to Me, O broad-eyed one. I hope Your brother is all right. And may everything be well with My mothers-in-law. May all living beings in the capital and countryside be well.”

Joining Her palms, She prayed to the gods. Hearing Her prayer, Lakṣmaṇa bowed His head to Sītā and with a heavy heart said: “Everything is all right.”

Thereafter, reaching the Gomatī River, They passed the night in a hermitage there. In the morning Lakṣmaṇa got up and told the charioteer: “Quickly harness the chariot. Today I shall touch My head to the waters of the Ganges, just as Lord Śiva did.” After harnessing the swift horses to the chariot, Sumantra joined his palms and said to Sītā: “Please get on board.” At the request of Sumantra, She boarded the fine chariot. With Lakṣmaṇa and the intelligent Sumantra, the broad-eyed Sītā arrived at the Ganges River, which destroys all sin.

When half the day had passed, Lakṣmaṇa saw the current of the Ganges. Forlorn as He was, He began crying loudly. Seeing Lakṣmaṇa overwhelmed with intense grief, Sītā asked: “Why are You crying? Having reached the banks of the Ganges, My long-cherished desire is now fulfilled. O Lakṣmaṇa, why are You crying when it is a time for rejoicing? O best of men, You are always at Rāma’s side. Why have You become so sad after only two days without Him? O Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma is also very dear to Me, more than My own life. Yet I am not lamenting like You. Do not be childish. Please take Me across the Ganges and show Me the ascetics. Then I shall present the sages with garments and ornaments. After greeting those great sages as they deserve, We shall spend one night there, then We shall reutrn to the capital. My mind is eager to see Rāma, the best of enjoyers, whose eyes are shaped like the petals of a lotus flower, whose chest is like a lion’s and whose waist is slim.”

When Lakṣmaṇa heard what Sītā said, He wiped His beautiful eyes and called boatmen. Joining their palms, the boatmen said: “This boat is ready.” Boarding the boat in order to cross the holy Ganges, Lakṣmaṇa crossed it with full attention.

LAKṢMAṆA INFORMS SĪTĀ OF HER BANISHMENT

The boat had been well-prepared by the niṣādas. After helping Sītā get on board, Lakṣmaṇa also boarded. Lakṣmaṇa told Sumantra to wait with the chariot. Burning with sadness, He told the boatment: “Go!” When they reached the bank of the Ganges, Lakṣmaṇa’s eyes filled with tears. Joining His palms, He said to Sītā: “O princess of Videha, a great arrow has pierced My heart because the wise and noble Rāma has intrusted Me with a task by which I shall be vilified by the world. It would be better to die! My death today would be better than engaging Myself in such an action reproved by the world. Please forgive Me and do not find fault with Me, O lovely woman.”

Seeing Lakṣmaṇa crying with joined palms and desiring His own death, Sītā became very disturbed and said to Him: “What is this? I do not understand. O Lakṣmaṇa, please tell Me truthfully. I see that You are not at ease. Is the king all right? I asked the king to grant My wish, which has caused You so much anguish. Tell Me to My face why. I command You!”

When ordered in this way by Sītā, the forlorn Lakṣmaṇa looked down and, with a voice choked up with tears, said: “O daughter of King Janaka, hearing in the midst of His courtiers the horrible criticism being leveled against You in the capital and countryside, Rāma summoned Me to His palace with an anguished heart. My lady I cannot repeat those criticisms in Your presence which the king has allowed to lodge in His heart out of sorrow. I reject that criticism. Although You were proven faultless in My presence, the king has rejected You out of fear of the people’s criticism. My lady, You have no other choice but to accept. By the order of the king and with a heavy heart You are to be left by Me on the edge of the hermitage. Here is the holy and charming forest on the bank of the Ganges where the brāhmaṇa sages practice austerities. Do not despair. Here lives the exalted

and glorious sage and topmost brāhmaṇa Vālmīki, who is a friend of My father, King Daśaratha. O Sītā, approaching the soothing shade of the lotus feet of that great soul, live here with single-mindedness. Keeping Rāma always in Your heart, remain dedicated to Him. By doing that You will be very fortunate.”

SĪTĀ'S SAD MESSAGE FOR RĀMA

Upon hearing Lakṣmaṇa's harsh words, Sītā experienced extreme despair and fell unconscious on the ground. She was unconscious for almost an hour, with Her eyes welling with tears. When She regained consciousness, She spoke the following sorrowful words to Lakṣmaṇa:

“O Lakṣmaṇa, the creator obviously made this body of Mine for suffering, which is why I now appear to be the personification of suffering. What sin did I commit in a previous life or what women did I abandon that I, who am pure in behavior and chaste, am abandoned by My husband? O Lakṣmaṇa, previously I was subjected to miserable circumstances living in a hermitage while serving the feet of Rāma. But how possibly shall I live in a hermitage all by Myself? And when I am suffering, who will I be able to talk with to share My sadness?

“O Lord, what shall I say to the sages when they ask Me what offence I committed that the great soul Rāma rejected Me? I should give up My life this very day in the waters of the Ganges, but then My husband's family would be ridiculed. O Lakṣmaṇa, do as You were instructed. Abandon My unfortunate self. Be firm in carrying out the king's orders and listen to these words of Mine.

“With joined palms I especially bow My head to the feet of My mothers-in-law. Tell the king that I inquire about His well-being. O Lakṣmaṇa, with a bowed head greet all the women of the palace on My behalf and convey this message to the king, who is always alert to His duties:

“O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, You know that Sītā is truly pure. She has the highest devotion to You and is always engaged in Your welfare. O hero, I have been abandoned by You because of Your fear of infamy resulting from the people's gossip. Because of the scandal that has arisen, You, who are my only shelter, have abandoned Me. O king, You are

always dutifully attentive to deal with the citizens as You do with Your brothers. This is in fact Your greatest duty by which You will achieve ultimate glory. O king, that can be achieved by dutifulness in relation to the citizens. Furthermore, I am not in anxiety about Myself, O best of men. O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, do what You must to protect Yourself from malicious criticism by the citizens. For a married woman, her husband is her worshipable deity, her friend and her preceptor. As such, she should especially use her life to achieve her husband's goals.'

“Please tell Rāma everything that I have said. After looking upon Me, who am pregnant, You may go”

While Sītā was speaking in this way, Lakṣmaṇa's mind became overwhelmed with sorrow. Hanging his head down toward the ground, He was unable to speak. Wailing loudly, He circumambulated Her. After reflecting for a while, He said to Her: “What do You say to Me, O lovely woman?” Previously I was never able to see Your complete form. I only saw Your feet, O sinless one. How is it that I now see it in the forest without the presence of Rāma?”

After saying this, He offered Her respects and again boarded the boat. After He was on board the boat, He had it set off. When He reached the opposite shore, he was crushed by the weight of sorrow. He quickly got into the chariot with sadness, as if He were unaware of external things. Looking repeatedly across the river at Sītā, who was crying because of being abandoned, He left. She continuously watched Lakṣmaṇa in the chariot. When She could not see Him any longer, She became overwhelmed with despair. Bent down by the weight of sorrow, the glorious and chaste lady did not see anyone to protect Her. Drowning in sorrow, She wailed loudly like a peacock in the forest.

VĀLMĪKI CONSOLES SĪTĀ

Seeing Sītā crying there, the sons of sages ran to where the revered hermit Vālmīki of awesome intelligence was. Bowing to the feet of the sage, the boys informed him about Sītā's crying:

“O venerable one, there is some great person's wife whom we have never seen before and who resembles the goddess of fortune. Out of despondency, She is crying with a distorted face. O holy one, please go and see Her, who is like a goddess fallen from the sky. That distraught lady is on the bank of the Ganges River. We have seen Her crying intensely and sunken in sorrow. She does not deserve suffering and sorrow. She is alone, forlorn and abandoned. We think She is not a human woman. You should greet Her and offer Her hospitality. Because She is not far from this hermitage, She has obviously come to take shelter of you. The chaste lady is looking for protection. O holy one, please protect Her!”

After hearing what they said, the sage verified with his own intelligence that it was true, for he had acquired farseeing intuition by dint of his austerities. Then he hurried to where Sītā was. When the highly intelligent Vālmīki's disciples saw him going, they followed him. After walking for some time, they reached the charming bank of the Ganges and took some of its water for ceremonial use. There Vālmīki saw Rāma's beloved Sītā abandoned. That foremost of sages, Vālmīki, whose effulgence was pleasing, spoke the following sweet words to Sītā, who was crushed by the weight of sorrow:

“O daughter of King Daśaratha, You are Rāma's dear queen. O Sītā dedicated to Your husband, I welcome You. I learned about Your arrival through my meditative trance. I also saw in my mind the reason for all this. O blessed lady, I know everything in detail regarding You. Everything in the three worlds is known to me. By my intuition I know that You are faultless, O Sītā. Be free from anxiety. Now You are with me. Not far is my hermitage where women are engaged in the practice of austerities. Accept this water

for washing the hands and do not despair. You are as good as in Your own home, so You should not grieve.”

Hearing the wonderful statement uttered by the sage, Sītā joined Her palms, bowed Her head to his feet and said: “So be it!” As the sage walked away, Sītā followed behind him with joined palms. When the wives of the sages saw Vālmīki coming with Sītā, they approached him joyfully and said: “O best of sages, we welcome you. After a long time you have come. We all offer you our respects. Tell us what we should do.”

After hearing what they said, Vālmīki spoke the following words: “This is Sītā who has come. She is the wife of the wise Rāma. This chaste lady is the daughter-in-law of King Daśaratha and the daughter of King Janaka. Although faultless, She was abandoned by Her husband. I must therefore always take care of Her. You should all look after Her with the utmost affection. Because of the seriousness of my request in particular, She should be respected.”

After repeatedly entrusting Sītā into the hands of the wives of the sages, the highly glorious Vālmīki returned to his own hermitage surrounded by his disciples.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN LAKṢMAṆA AND SUMANTRA

When the morose Lakṣmaṇa saw Sītā enter the hermitage, He became overwhelmed with terrible anguish. The glorious Lakṣmaṇa said to the counselor and charioteer Sumantra:

“O charioteer, see Rāma’s sorrow sprung from Sītā’s anguish. What greater sorrow could Rāma have than rejecting His wife Sītā, whose behavior is pure? O charioteer, I think that destiny is the cause of Sītā’s permanent separation from Rāma, for destiny cannot be avoided. The angry Rāma worships destiny in order to annihilate the gods, gandharvas, asuras and rākṣasas. In the past, because of His father’s command, he lived in exile in the desolate Daṇḍakā Forest for fourteen years. Then He suffered even greater anguish by separation from Sītā. But after hearing the gossip of the citizens, He has committed what seems to Me a very merciless action. O charioteer, what self-righteous person would perpetrate an action so defamatory to Sītā on the useless gossip of the citizens?”

After hearing the many things said by Lakṣmaṇa, the wise Sumantra faithfully said the following words: “O son of Sumitrā, You should not be anxious on account of Sītā. O Lakṣmaṇa, this was foreseen in the presence of Your father by learned brāhmaṇas. It was said that Rāma would certainly experience great sorrow, that He would be divested of happiness and be separated from the people whom He loves. It was said that after a very long time had passed, the righteous Rāma would abandon You, Sītā, Śatrughna and Bharata. After the sage Durvāsā said this, King Daśaratha forbade that it be mentioned to You, Śatrughna or Bharata. O best of men, I heard this in the presence of the great personality Durvāsā and also in association of the sage Vasiṣṭha. When King Daśaratha heard what Durvāsā said, he said to me: ‘O charioteer, do not mention this to anyone else.’ My dear Lakṣmaṇa, it is my opinion that I should never break my promise to keep the king’s secret.

Although I am not supposed to say this in Your presence, if you wish to hear, then listen. Although the king forbade me to tell anyone, yet I shall divulge it to You. It is indeed very difficult to escape destiny, by which this present misfortune has arrived. You should never mention this to Bharata or Śatrughna.”

Upon hearing his grave and significant words, Lakṣmaṇa replied:
“What you say is true.”

SUMANTRA DIVULGES SECRETS TO LAKṢMAṆA

Then, on the instigation of the great soul Lakṣmaṇa, Sumantra began relating what the sage Durvāsā had said: “O Lakṣmaṇa, in the past there was a great ascetic named Durvāsā, who was the son of Atri. Once he stayed for the four months of the rainy season in the holy hermitage of Vasiṣṭha. Your mighty and glorious father himself went to that hermitage to see that great soul who was his family priest. Sitting on the left side of Vasiṣṭha, King Daśaratha saw a great sage who was blazing like fire and as bright as the sun. He humbly greeted the two sages who were the best of ascetics. The two of them welcomed the king with a sitting place, water for washing the feet, fruits and roots, then the king sat down with them. As they sat there they engaged in sweet conversations until the afternoon. While they were discussing something, the king joined his palms and addressed the great soul Durvāsā, the ascetic son of Atri:

“O holy one, how long will my dynasty last? How long will my Rāma live and how long will my other sons live? And how long will those who happen to be His sons live? O venerable one, reveal as you please the future of my dynasty.”

When the splendid Durvāsā heard King Daśaratha’s request, he began to reply: “Listen to this incident, O king. During the war between the gods and the asuras, when the demons were being terrorized by the gods, they took shelter of Bhṛgu’s wife. At that time she gave them an assurance of safety, after which they stayed at her hermitage without any fear. Lord Viṣṇu became angry when He saw that they had taken shelter of Bhṛgu’s wife. With His sharp-edged discus, He decapitated Bhṛgu’s wife. When the sage Bhṛgu saw that his wife had been killed, he became furious and immediately cursed Lord Viṣṇu, the crusher of enemy dynasties: ‘O Janardana, because You killed my wife though she did not deserve it when You were overcome by anger,

You will take birth in the mortal world and live in separation from Your wife for many years.’

“But then his mind became disturbed for having uttered a curse and he began thinking about it. Haunted by the curse he had uttered, Bhṛgu worshipped Lord Viṣṇu. After being worshipped by the sage’s austerities, the Lord who is affectionate to His devotees said: ‘I have accepted the curse which you uttered for the benefit of the world.’ In this way, the glorious Lord Viṣṇu was cursed in a previous incarnation by Bhṛgu. O king, that same Lord Viṣṇu has descend to this world as your son and is known in all the three worlds as Rāma.

“The ominous result of Bhṛgu’s curse will take place. Rāma will be the ruler of Ayodhyā for a very long time. His followers will be happy and prosperous. After ruling for eleven thousand years, He will ascend to the spiritual world. The invincible Rāma will solidify the royal dynasty in many ways by performing opulent horse sacrifices. Moreover, Rāma will engender two sons in Sītā.”

After recounting everything about the past and future affecting the king’s dynasty, the glorious ascetic sat silently. When Durvāsā became silent, King Daśaratha offered respect to the two sages and then returned to his own magnificent capital. At that time I also happened to hear what Durvāsā said. I also learned this through my intuition. This will not be otherwise. According to what the sage said, Rāma would not coronate Sītā’s two sons within the city of Ayodhyā but somewhere else. O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, You should not grieve for Sītā or Rāma because of what has happened. O best of men, be firm.”

After hearing the charioteer’s wonderful words, Lakṣmaṇa felt unparalleled happiness and said: “Very well! Very well indeed!” As the charioteer and Lakṣmaṇa were conversing during their journey, the sun set and they passed the night on the bank of the Keśinī River.

LAKṢMAṆA CONSOLES THE FORLORN RĀMA

Lakṣmaṇa passed the night on the bank of the Keśinī River. In the morning He rose again and set forth. At noon time the great chariot warrior entered the city of Ayodhyā, which was wealthy and full of happy and prosperous people. The highly intelligent Lakṣmaṇa arrived very morose. He thought: “What shall I say when I approach the feet of Rāma?” Thinking in this way, He saw Rāma’s spacious moonlike palace. When the prince reached the entrance of the palace, He got down from the chariot. With a sad mind and hanging head, He entered the palace without any obstruction.

Lakṣmaṇa saw Rāma with His eyes filled with tears sadly sitting upon a great throne. The sorrowful Lakṣmaṇa touched Rāma’s feet, joined His palms together and carefully spoke with a sad voice as follows: “O honorable king, I have carried out Your order and left Sītā as You instructed at the beautiful hermitage of Vālmīki on the banks of the Ganges. Leaving that woman of good behavior on the edge of the hermitage, I have returned to serve Your feet. Do not lament, O tiger among men. That is how destiny is. A person as intelligent as You should not lament.

“In the end, everything that is accumulated is destroyed, everything that rises, falls, every union ends in separation and life ends with dead. Therefore no one who should be attached to sons, wives, friends or wealth because one will definitely be separated from them. O Rāma, You are able to control Your self with Your self, Your mind with Your mind, and even all people, what to speak of controlling Your own sadness. Exceptional persons like You do not become bewildered. O Rāma, if you continue like this, You will again be criticized. O king, the criticism for fear of which You abandoned Sītā will surface again among the people of the city. Of this there is no doubt. Therefore, O tiger among men, compose Yourself with firmness! Give up this weakness of heart! Do not grieve!”

After the great Lakṣmaṇa spoke in this way, Rāma replied with great affection: “O best of men, what You say is true. Furthermore, I am very pleased that You have carried out My order. My dear Lakṣmaṇa, now My sadness has subsided. My anguish has vanished. By Your pleasant words I have found peace.”

THE STORY OF KING NṚGA

Upon hearing Lakṣmaṇa's wonderful statements, Rāma became very pleased and replied as follows: "My dear Lakṣmaṇa, especially at times like this it is very hard to find a relative as intelligent as You who follows My mind. O handsome fellow, hear about something in My heart and then carrying out My request. Four days have passed without My attending to the affairs of the citizens. This is tearing up My internal organs. O best of men, summon the common people, priests and ministers, and whatever the men and women require, carry it out. A king who does not attend to the affairs of the citizens every day will undoubtedly fall into a dark and dreadful hell.

"In the past there was a famous king named Nṛga. The king was attentive to the brāhmaṇas, truthful and pure. Once at the holy place of Puṣkāra the king gave ten million gold-adorned cows with calves to the brāhmaṇas. O sinless one, there was a poor brāhmaṇa who lived by the gleanings of the grains left after harvest and the performance of fire sacrifices. Once his cow and calf came back to the king and he gave them to another brāhmaṇa. Due to the loss of his cow, the poor brāhmaṇa was suffering from hunger and looked for the cow here and there. After many years he failed to find her in any region. Finally he came to Kanakhala and saw in the home of a brāhmaṇa his own cow, which was healthy and whose calf had grown up. Then the brāhmaṇa called the cow by the name he had given her: 'Śabala, come here!' The cow heard his voice. Recognizing the voice of the hunger-stricken brāhmaṇa, the cow as brilliant as fire turned around and came to him. The brāhmaṇa who had been taking care of her came hurriedly and approached the poor brāhmaṇa, saying: 'This is my cow! It was given to me by King Nṛga.' A big disagreement broke out between the two learned brāhmaṇas. The two brāhmaṇas continued arguing with each other and then went to see the king who had gifted the cow.

“Upon reaching the entrance of the palace, they waited many days and nights waiting for the king to pass judgement, afterwhich they became angry. The two great brāhmaṇas, who were furious and extremely irritated, uttered the following dreadful words: ‘O king, you have failed to give audience to those who require your decision on a matter. Therefore you will only be seen in the form of a lizard! You will live in a chasm for many hundreds and thousands of years. O king, when Lord Viṣṇu appears in this world as the son of Vasudeva to increase the glory of the Yādu Dynasty, you will be freed from the curse. The glorious Nara and Nārāyaṇa will descend to remove the burden of the earth in Kaliyuga, the age of quarrel.’

“After uttering such a curse, the two brāhmaṇas became calm. They gave the cow to an elderly and weak brāhmaṇa. In this way, the king suffered the terrible curse. Therefore a king who fails to resolve disagreements between persons is faulty. As such, immediately let those who have some business to do come before Me. What king does not reap the fruit of his pious deeds? Therefore go and find out who requires attention.”

KING NṚGA TURNS THE KINGDOM OVER TO HIS SON

When Lakṣmaṇa heard Rāma's meaningful statement, He joined His palms and said to Rāma: "King Nṛga was severely cursed in a manner not unlike Yama's rod of chastisement for a minor offence against the two brāhmaṇas. O best of men, when King Nṛga heard that he was cursed, what did he say to the two angry brāhmaṇas?" When Rāma heard what Lakṣmaṇa said, Rāma replied: "My dear Lakṣmaṇa, listen to what the king did when he was cursed. When the king heard that the brāhmaṇas had departed on the road, he summoned all his ministers, residents of the city and family priest. King Nṛga sadly said to all those people:

"Listen to me with attention. The two faultless sages, Nārada and Parvata, who bless the three worlds, came and informed me that I have been cursed, then departed like the wind. Here is Prince Vasu. Today he will be coronated king. Laborers should excavate a comfortable pit for me. Having been cursed by the brāhmaṇas, I shall pass my time there. Make a comfortable pit that is rain-proof, snow-proof and heat-proof. Surround the pit with fruit-bearing trees, flowering vines and numerous shade-giving bushes. Make all sides of the pit enjoyable. I shall live there comfortably for the term of my curse. Always surround the pit with fragrant flowers.'

"After making these arrangements, he installed Prince Vasu on the throne and said: 'Be ever-dedicated to righteousness. My son, protect the citizens according to the principles of polity. I stand before you cursed by two brāhmaṇas who were angered by my offense. O best of men, do not be anxious on my account. Destiny is just, by which I have been put into difficulty. My dear son, according to how one acted in the previous life, one achieves what one deserves, one goes where one deserves and one receives the happiness and sorrow that one deserves. Do not lament.'

“After the glorious king spoke in this way to his son, he entered the well-constructed pit to stay there. Thus the great king entered the deep pit decorated with gems after having been angrily cursed by the two brāhmaṇas.”

KING NIMI AND VASIṢṬHA CURSE EACH OTHER

Lord Rāma continued: “O Lakṣmaṇa, I have narrated in detail the story of King Nṛga’s being cursed. If You are interested in hearing, then listen to another story.” When Rāma had finished saying this, Lakṣmaṇa replied: “O king, I never tire of hearing these amazing stories.” After Lakṣmaṇa said this, Rāma, the delight of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, began to relate an important spiritual story:

“There was a great king of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty named Nimi. He was the twelfth son of Mahārāja Ikṣvāku and was fixed in valor and righteousness. At that time the courageous King Nimi lived in a city like that of the gods near the hermitage of the sage Agastya. The well-built city where the glorious King Nimi resided was known by the name Vaijayanta. While residing in that great metropolis, the king got the idea to perform a long sacrifice to please his father’s mind. After consulting with his father Ikṣvāku, a son of Manu, King Nimi chose Vasiṣṭha, the best of brāhmaṇa sages, to be the priest. Afterwards, he invited Atri, Aṅgirasā and the austere Bhṛgu. At that time, Vasiṣṭha said to King Nimi, the best of royal sages: ‘I have already been chosen by Indra to execute a sacrifice, therefore wait.’

“In the meantime, the great brāhmaṇa Agastya came and fulfilled the king’s desire. The glorious Vasiṣṭha also performed the sacrifice for Indra. King Nimi summoned the learned brāhmaṇas to perform the sacrifice near his capital on the slopes of the Himālayas. The king took a vow to perform a sacrifice lasting five thousand years. When Indra’s sacrifice was completed, the venerable sage Vasiṣṭha approached King Nimi to perform his sacrifice. Then he saw that Agastya had begun the sacrifice. Vasiṣṭha, the son of Lord Brahmā, was greatly outraged. He waited for one hour to see the king, but that day the king was overcome by a great deal of drowsiness.

Because he did not get to see the king, Vasiṣṭha became extremely angry and said:

“O king, because you chose another priest, ignoring me, your body will become insentient.’ When the king woke up and heard the curse that had been uttered, he became furious and said to the brāhmaṇa: ‘I was not aware that you had come because I was sleeping. Being contaminated by anger, you uttered against me a fiery curse like Yama’s rod of chastisement. As such, O brāhmaṇa sage, your beautifully effulgent body will also undoubtedly become insentient.’

“In this way, under the influence of anger, the king and the brāhmaṇa cursed each other and suddenly became bodiless. They were both equal in power.”

VAŚIṢṬHA APPROACHES LORD BRAHMĀ FOR HELP

Upon hearing what Rāma said, Lakṣmaṇa joined His palms and asked: “O Rāma, after the brāhmaṇa and king gave up their bodies, how did they get new bodies to take birth again?” When questioned in this way by Lakṣmaṇa, the splendid Rāma replied: “After giving up their bodies because of their curses, being righteous and rich in austerities, they became like the wind.

“Finding himself bodiless, the great sage Vasiṣṭha approached his father in order to get another body. Vasiṣṭha, who was like wind and who was familiar with righteousness, bowed to the feet of the god of gods, Lord Brahmā, and spoke the following words: ‘O venerable lord, because of the curse of King Nimi, I have become bodiless. O god of gods, I have become just spirit. All those who do not have bodies will suffer greatly because all activities are inaccessible for those who are unembodied. Please be merciful to me so that I can have another body.’

“Then the self-born Lord Brahmā whose effulgence is immeasurable said: ‘O famous Vasiṣṭha, enter into the semen of Mitra and Varuṇa. O best of the twice-born, you will thereafter have a supernatural birth. When you acquire tremendous righteousness, you will again achieve the position of being my son.’

“After Lord Brahmā said this, Vasiṣṭha offered him respects, circumambulated him and quickly left for the abode of Varuṇa. At that time, Mitra was carrying out Varuṇa’s affairs. He was being worshipped with Varuṇa by all the great demigods. Meanwhile, by chance Urvaśī, the greatest of apsarās, happened to come there surrounded by her friends. When Varuṇa saw Urvaśī enjoying herself in the ocean, he experienced heightened delight on her account. Varuṇa decided to approach that woman with eyes like the petals of a lotus flower and a face like the full moon for sexual union. Joining

her palms, she stood and said to Varuṇa: ‘O lord, I am already promised to Mitra.’ Panged by Cupid’s arrows, Varuṇa said: ‘O shapely woman with a lovely complexion, if you do not wish to unite with me, then I shall deposit my potency in this urn made by the gods and thus fulfill my desire.’

“When Urvaśī heard the fine statement of Varuṇa, a protector of the world, she was very pleased and spoke the follow words: ‘O lord, although we both are feeling the stirrings of love in our hearts, your affection for me is excessive. Moreover my body belongs to Mitra.’ After Urvaśī said this to Varuṇa, he placed his extraordinary semen which was like blazing fire in that pot. Then Urvaśī went to where Mitra was. However, Mitra was exceedingly angry and said to her: ‘O mischievous woman, previously I chose you as my partner. Why have you rejected me? Why have you chosen someone else as your husband? Because of your misdeed, I am overwhelmed with anger! You will have to live in the world of humans for some time. The royal sage Purūravā is the king of Kāśī and the son of Budha. Go to him, O malicious wench. He will be your husband.’

“After being cursed, she went to the city of Pratiṣṭhāna where King Purūravā, the son of Budha, was. He engendered in Urvaśī a glorious and mighty son named āyu. His son was Nahuṣa, who was equal to Indra in spendor. When Indra was exhausted after assaulting Vṛtra with a thunderbolt, Nahuṣa ruled in place of Indra for one hundred thousand years. Because of the curse, Urvaśī, who teeth and eyes were charming, dwelt in the world of humans for many years. When the period of the curse expired, she returned to the abode of Indra.”

VAŚIṢṬHA'S NEW BODY

When Lakṣmaṇa heard that amazing narration, He was very pleased and said to Rāma: “After the brāhmaṇa and king, who were just like gods, gave up their bodies, how did they get new bodies to take birth again?” Hearing this request, Rāma, whose prowess is always effective, narrated the story of the great soul Vasiṣṭha: “O best of the Raghu Dynasty, that pot was filled with the great Varuṇa’s potency. From it two powerful and first-class brāhmaṇas were produced. First the venerable sage Agastya was manifested from it. He at once told Mitra, ‘You are not my father,’ and left that place. Then in the same pot in which Mitra’s potency had been placed on account of Urvaśī, Varuṇa’s potency was also placed.

“After some time, from the combined potency of Mitra and Varuṇa emerged the spendid Vasiṣṭha. He took birth as the family priest of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. As soon as the faultless Vasiṣṭha was born, the glorious King Ikṣvāku chose him as the family priest for the good of Our dynasty. In this way, I have related how the great sage Vasiṣṭha got a new body. My dear Lakṣmaṇa, listen to how Nimi became manifested again.

“When all the wise sages saw that Nimi was disembodied, they completed the sacrifice. The brāhmaṇas, along with the citizens and royal servants, kept the king’s body in a vat of oil with sandalwood paste, flower garlands and garments. When the sacrifice was completed, the sage Bhṛgu said: ‘O king, I am very pleased with you. Therefore I shall bring you another body.’ All the gods were pleased with King Nimi and said to his spirit: ‘O royal sage, choose a boon. Where should your spirit be placed?’ When spoken to by all the gods, King Nimi’s spirit said: ‘O best of gods, let me rove in the eyes of all living entities. The immortal gods assented to the request made by Nimi’s spirit, saying: ‘You shall rove in the eyes of all living entities. O king, on your behalf eyes will blink so that as you wander in your spirit form you can have repeated rest.’

“After the gods spoke in this way, they all left as they had come. The great sages took King Nimi’s body. Placing a stick of araṇi wood on his body, they began quickly turning the stick. The great sages were twirling the stick of araṇi wood in order to produce fire so that they could perform a sacrifice to procure a son from King Nimi. From the friction which they caused was produced Mithi, who became known as Janaka. Because he was manifested from a corpse, he became known as Vaideha. In that way, Janaka, king of Videha, was previously known as Mithi. He is the same person who is king of Mithilā. Thus I have explained everything in detail regarding the reasons for Vasiṣṭha’s and King Nimi’s mutual cursing and subsequent births.”

ŚUKRĀCĀRYA CURSES KING YAYĀTI

After Rāma had spoken in this way, Lakṣmaṇa replied to Rāma, who was blazing with glory: “O tiger among men, the ancient story of King Nimi and Vasiṣṭha is amazing and wonderful. King Nimi was a kṣatriya, a hero and particularly he was initiated for a sacrifice. It was not proper for him to behave as he did with the great soul Vasiṣṭha.”

When He was addressed in this way by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma, the best of enjoyers, replied with the following words to His effulgent brother: “There is no one more forgiving than King Yayāti. He forgave unbearable anger and considered living according to goodness as foremost. Listen to his story with attention. King Nahuṣa’s son was Yayāti, the aggrandizer of the citizens. The beauty of his two wives was unmatched in this world. The principle wife of Yayāti was named Śarmiṣṭhā. She was a daitya and the daughter of Vṛṣaparva. His other wife was Devayānī, the daughter of Śukrācārya. Although she was very pretty, she was not favored by the king.

“The two women gave birth to handsome sons. Śarmiṣṭhā gave birth to Pūru and Devayānī gave birth to Yadu. Because of his mother and his personal qualities, Pūru was favored by the king. Therefore Yadu became very sad and said to his mother: ‘You were born in the family of Śukrācārya, who never tires in action. You are enduring heart-shattering sorrow and unbearable disrespect. Therefore, let the two of us enter a blazing fire. Let the king enjoy with Śarmiṣṭhā for many nights. But if you prefer to endure all this, then give me permission to give up my life! Please forgive me. I cannot bear it. I shall without a doubt die.’

“When Devayānī heard what her tortured and wailing son said, she became angry and remembered her father. Becoming aware of what his daughter was doing, Śukrācārya hurried to where Devayānī was. Seeing his daughter disturbed, sad and dazed, the father asked her: ‘What is this?’ The angry Devayānī replied as follows to her father Śukrācārya, who was shining

with glory: ‘O best of sages, I shall either enter fire or water, or swallow strong poison, for I cannot bear to live! You are unaware of how I have been slighted and suffering. O brāhmaṇa, when a tree is neglected, it withers and dies. O descendent of Bhṛgu, King Yayāti disrespects you. Therefore he disrespects me and does not think much of me.’

“When Śukrācārya heard what Devayānī said, he became furious. Then he began talking to Yayāti: ‘O son of Nahuṣa, you are a rascal! Because you have disrespected me, you will become old, wornout and weak!’ After saying this, the glorious brāhmaṇa sage consoled his daughter, afterwhich he returned to his own home.”

YAYĀTI GIVES HIS OLD AGE TO PŪRU

Rāma continued: “When King Yayāti heard that Śukrācārya was angry with him, he became anxious. When he was stricken with old age, he said to his son Yadu: ‘O Yadu, you know what is right. O son, please accept my old age on my behalf. I want to enjoy material sense gratification. I have still not finished enjoying sense pleasure. When I am done, I will take back my old age.’ After hearing this, Yadu replied: ‘Pūru is your favorite son. Let him accept your old age. O king, you have denied me wealth and intimate association with you. Therefore let Pūru, with whom you eat, accept your old age.’ After hearing this, the king said to Pūru: ‘O strong-armed one, please accept this old age on my behalf.’ After King Yayāti said this, Pūru joined his palms and said: ‘I am blessed and fortunate. I am at your command.’

“When King Yayāti heard Pūru’s response, he was extremely delighted. Then he transferred his old age to Pūru. After this the king regained youth and performed thousands of sacrifices. He ruled the earth for thousands of years. After a long time, the king said to Pūru: ‘O son, bring my old age and return it to me. I transferred and deposited my old age in you. Now I will take back my old age. Do not be upset. I am very pleased that you accepted my request. I shall lovingly coronate you king.’

“After speaking in this way to Pūru, King Yayāti angrily said to Devayānī’s son: ‘O Yadu, you are a rākṣasa born from me as a miserable kṣatriya. Because you rejected my request, your descendents will not be able to rule. I am your father and preceptor, whom you have disrespected. You will engender horrible rākṣasas and fiends. O foolish one, your descendents will not be part of the lunar dynasty. Your dynasty will be misbehaved just like you. When the sagacious king finished saying this, he coronated Pūru as king and honored him, then he entered a hermitage. After a very long time, he met his ultimate destiny. King Yayāti, the son of Nahuṣa, went to the heavenly planets.

“Then King Pūru reigned very righteously in the excellent city of Pratiṣṭhāna in the kingdom of Kāśī. On the other hand, Yadu, who had been expelled from the royal line, engendered thousands of fiends in a town in inaccessible Krauñcavana. King Yayāti accepted the curse uttered by Śukrācārya in accordance with the duty of a kṣatriya, but King Nimi could not tolerate Vasiṣṭha’s curse. My dear Lakṣmaṇa, I have related all this to You. We have to follow the example of the great personalities. We should not commit the error of King Nṛga.”

In this way, as Rāma, whose face was like the moon, was speaking, there were only a few stars left in the sky. The eastern direction was beginning to light up with golden rays, as if it were covered with a cloth stained with the nectars of flowers.

GREAT SAGES VISIT RĀMA'S COURT

While Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa held such discussions at that time, a spring night arrived that was neither cold nor hot. When the spotless dawn arrived, after performing His morning duties, Rāma, who knew how to attend to the citizens, gave public audience. Then Sumantra came and said to Rāma: “O king, great sages and ascetics have come and are waiting at the entranceway. Cyavana Muni, the descendent of Bhṛgu, has urged me to quickly arrange an audience with You. O tiger among men, those sages who reside on the banks of the Yamunā River are very pleased with You.”

Rāma replied: “Let the highly fortunate brāhmaṇa descendents of Bhṛgu come in.” Accepting the king’s order, the door guard touched his joined palms to his forehead. Then he let the mighty ascetics in. Thereafter more than one hundred great ascetics glowing with their own glory entered the royal palace. Those brāhmaṇas presented Rāma with a great amount of fruits, roots and pots full of water from all the holy places. After accepting all those different fruits and water from holy places with great pleasure, the mighty-armed Rāma said to all those great sages: “Here are prominent seats. Please sit down as you ought to.” Upon hearing what Rāma said, all the sages sat upon the lovely gilded seats.

Seeing that the sages were seated, Rāma, the defeator of enemies, joined His palms and spoke the following words: “What is the reason for your visit? What should I do with full attention? I must do whatever you demand. I am happy to fulfill all of your wishes. This whole kingdom and the soul in My heart—all this is for the brāhmaṇas. I say this to you truthfully.” Upon hearing these words, the sages of formidable austerities shouted in approval. The great sages spoke with great delight: “O best of men, no one else in this world is capable to such action than You. O king, we have approached many monarchs, but after considering our important affair, they were not inclined to assist us. Therefore You will undoubtedly be able to carry it out. You should protect the sages from great danger.”

LAVAṆĀSURA'S ATROCITIES

After the sages spoke in this way, Rāma replied: "O sages, tell Me what should be done. Do not be afraid." When Rāma had spoken in this way, the sages replied: "Please hear the cause of our fear, O ruler of the land. In the last Kṛtayuga there was a very powerful daitya who was the eldest son of Lolā. The great demon was known by the name Madhu. He was surrendered to the brāhmaṇas and had steady intelligence. He had an unequalled friendship with the amiable gods. Madhu was valorous, righteous and attentive. He was greatly respected by Lord Śiva, who therefore gave him a wonderful boon.

"Lord Śiva was very pleased and gave him a powerful and sparkling spear produced from his own spear and said: 'You have pleased me by your unparalleled righteousness. With great love I present to you this fine weapon. O great asura, as long as you are not opposed to the gods and brāhmaṇas, this spear will remain with you, otherwise it will vanish. If anyone comes fearlessly before you to fight, after burning him to ashes, this spear will return to your hand.'

"After receiving this boon from Lord Śiva, the great asura offered respects to him and again addressed him in the following words: 'O lord, you are the lord of the gods. Please let this fine spear always remain in my dynasty.' The deity Śiva, lord of all living beings, replied to Madhu as he was speaking: 'That is not possible. But because I am pleased with you, your good words will not be fruitless. This spear will be a son to you. As long as this spear is in your hands, it will be your son. As long as you are holding this spear, no living being will be able to kill you.'

"After Madhu received this very amazing boon from Lord Śiva, he had a shining palace constructed for himself. His beloved wife was the highly fortunate Kumbhīnasī. She was descended from Viśvāvasu from the womb of Analā and she was very lustrous. Her son was very mighty and formidable,

known by the name Lavaṇa. From childhood he was wicked and sinful in his behavior. Seeing that his son was misbehaved, Madhu became angry and disappointed, but did not say anything to him. Eventually Madhu left this world and entered the abode of Varuṇa. He entrusted Lavaṇa with the spear and informed him about the boon.

“By the power of the spear and because of his own wickedness, he began tormenting the three worlds, especially the ascetics. Such is his strength and the kind of spear he possesses. O Rāma, having heard this testimony, You are indeed our supreme shelter. O Rāma, in the past Lavaṇa terrified many kings and sages. We ask for protection, O hero. We do not have any other protector. Having heard how You destroyed Rāvaṇa along with his army and vehicles, we know that You are the only king in this world who can protect us. Therefore, we want You to protect us who are afflicted with fear from Lavaṇa. O Rāma, thus have we informed You about the cause of fear that has confronted us. You are able to counteract it. Please fulfill our desire.”

LAVAṆĀSURA'S VORACIOUS APPETITE

When addressed in that way, Rāma replied with joined palms: “What does Lavaṇa eat, how does he behave and where does he live?” Thereafter all the sages began describing how Lavaṇa amused himself: “His food is all living beings, especially ascetics. His behavior is dreadful and he always lives in Madhuvana. Every day he kills many thousands of lions, tigers, deer, birds and human beings and devours them. The powerful demon slaughters different living entities as if he were death personified come for destroying everything at the end of the world.”

Hearing this, Rāma spoke the following words to the great sages: “I shall kill that rākṣasa. Your fear will be dispelled.” After making this promise to the sages with fierce effulgences, Rāma said to all His brothers: “What hero will kill Lavaṇa? To whose lot will this fall, the mighty-armed Bharata or the wise Śatrughna?” When Rāma finished speaking, Bharata replied: “I shall kill this fellow. It shall fall to my lot.” Upon hearing Bharata’s deliberate and heroic statement, Śatrughna got up from His seat. Śatrughna humbly bowed to the king and said: “O Rāma, Bharata has many affairs to attend to in the palace. In the past when You left the city of Ayodhyā vacant, Bharata suffered tremendously and protected it until Your return. O king, while lying on a bed of sorrow at Nandigrāma, the glorious Bharata suffered so much. He ate only fruits and roots. He wore matted locks of hair and tree bark cloth. O king, undergoing such suffering, Bharata always served Me, therefore let Him have no further difficulty.”

After Śatrughna spoke in that way, Rāma replied: “O Śatrughna, let it be so. Please carry out My command. I shall coronate You king of Madhu’s beautiful city. O strong-armed one, if it is improper to burden Bharata, then let Him be. You are a hero, You are trained in the use of weapons and are capable of managing a city and beautiful dominion on the bank of the Yamunā River. If after destorying the dynasty of a king, one does not establish another king over that city, one goes to hell. After killing Lavaṇa,

the son of Madhu, whose mentality is sinful, rule over the kingdom righteously, if You have any regard for My words. Do not try to counter My statments. A younger brother must no doubt carry out the request of his older brother. O Śatrughna, accept Your coronation in accordance with My order. It will be performed by learned brāhmaṇas with appropriate mantras according to the rules. “

CORONATION OF ŚATRUGHNA

After Lakṣmaṇa was spoken to in this way by Rāma, Śatrughna was very embarrassed and slowly replied: “O Rāma, I consider coronation at this time to be unrighteous. How can the younger brother be coronated while the older brothers are still present? O best of men, certainly Your command must be carried out. O highly fortunate one, it is very difficult to avoid Your command. O hero, I have learned this from You and from the Vedic scriptures. I cannot give any reply to My elder brother. O best of men, I have been given a dreadful order to kill Lavaṇāsura. It is My misfortune that I have been given such a bad instruction. One should not counter what one’s elder brother has said, otherwise, by such improper action one would not be able to attain heaven. O descendent of Kakutstha, I have no other choice. I will not protest. If I were to do so, I would deserve punishment. O king, I shall do as You wish. But please counteract whatever injustice I commit!”

After the great hero Śatrughna said this, Rāma joyfully addressed Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa: “Carefully bring all the paraphernalia for the coronation. Now I shall coronate Śatrughna, the tiger among men. By My order, summon the family priest, Vedic scholars, ritualistic priests and all the ministers.” Accepting the king’s order, Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa did as instructed. Placing the family priest before Them, They brought the ingredients for the coronation. Kings and brāhmaṇas thereupon entered the royal palace. Then the coronation of the great Śatrughna began, which greatly pleased Lord Rāma and the citizens. Śatrughna, who was glowing like the sun, was coronated in the same way that Skandha was by Indra and the residents of the heavenly planets.

After Śatrughna was coronated by Rāma, who never tires in action, the citizens and well-studied brāhmaṇas were overjoyed. Kausalyā, Sumitrā, Kaikeyī and other royal ladies performed auspicious rites in the royal palace. Because of Śatrughna’s coronation, the great sages who reside on the banks of the Yamunā considered Lavaṇa already killed. After Śatrughna was

coronated, Rāma sat Him on His lap and spoke the following sweet and empowering words: “O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, here is an unfailing arrow that is divine and victorious over enemies. My dear Śatrughna, with it You will kill Lavaṇa. After Lord Viṣṇu lay down on the Kṣīrodaka Ocean, neither the divine Lord Brahmā nor the gods and asuras could see Him. At that time he could not actually be seen by any living being. Because of His anger, Lord Viṣṇu created this arrow for the destruction of the two wicked demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, as well as all the rākṣasas. Because Lord Viṣṇu wanted to create the three worlds, He killed in battle the two demons with this arrow. After killing Madhu and Kaitabha with this primary arrow, he created the worlds for the enjoyment of the living entities.

“O Śatrughna, I did not use this arrow for killing Rāvaṇa, for its release would have caused a great slaughter of living entities. Lord Śiva gave Madhu an exceptional spear for killing his enemies. He worships that spear in his palace every day and takes it with him wherever he goes. When someone eager to fight challenges him, he grabs the spear and reduces him to ashes. O tiger among men, when he is without that spear and is not in the city, wait for him at the eastern gate. O best of men, if You challenge the rākṣasa to battle before he enters his palace, You will kill him. Doing otherwise, however, he will be unkillable. O hero, if You act in this way, You will destroy him. I have told You all this to explain how to avoid the spear, for Lord Śiva’s action is very difficult to transcend.”

ŚATRUGHNA SALLIES FORTH AGAINST LAVAṆA

Rāma praised Śatrughna again and again when He finished speaking. Then He said the following: “O best of men, these four thousand horses, two thousand chariots, one hundred remarkable elephants and all the provisions that You need from the shopkeepers in the market will go with You, as well as dancers and entertainers. O Śatrughna, taking one hundred million gold coins, go with all this wealth and conveyances. This army has been well-maintained. It is happy, satisfied and well-disciplined. Be happy with these words and gifts. These happy servants standing here have no wealth, wives or relatives.

“Therefore, setting forth with these joyful attendants and great army, go to Madhu’s forest armed with only a bow. You should go in such a way so that Lavaṇa, the son of Madhu, does not know that You are coming with the intention of fighting. O best of men, he cannot be killed by any other means, for whoever Lavaṇa sees will be slain. My dear Śatrughna, when the hot season is over and the rainy season begins, You will kill Lavaṇa, for that is the time to kill that rascal. Putting the great sages at the head of the army, sally forth, because at the end of the hot season it will be easy to cross the waters of the Ganges. Stationing the whole army on the banks of the river, go ahead alone with only Your bow.”

After receiving these instructions from Rāma, Śatrughna summoned the soldiers and said: “Examine wherever You plan on stopping, then stay there without opposition so that no difficulty arises.”

In this way, after saying goodbye to Kausalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī, Śatrughna gave orders to the great army and prepared to set forth. Śatrughna circumambulated Rāma and bowed His head. With joined palms, He humbly bowed to Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata. The self-controlled Śatrughna then offered respects to the family priest Vasiṣṭha. Receiving further orders from Rāma,

Śatrughna circumambulated Him and left. Sending ahead the army crowded with lordly elephants and swift steeds, Śatrughna stayed with Rāma for one month and then He too sallied forth.

ŚATRUGHNA MEETS VĀLMĪKI

Having sent off the army, Śatrughna spent one month with Rāma, afterwhich He hurriedly left alone on route to Madhuvana. After two nights travelling, Śatrughna reached the holy hermitage of Vālmīki. Śatrughna offered respects to the great soul and best of sages Vālmīki, He joined His palms and spoke the following words: “O venerable one, I have come to execute some matter for My elder brother. Tomorrow morning I shall leave for the east.” The outstanding sage smiled and replied to the great soul: “I welcome You, O famous one. This hermitage of mine belongs to the Raghu Dynasty. Kindly accept a sitting place and water for washing the feet and hands.”

At that time Śatrughna accepted the hospitality of fruits, roots and other eatables. After eating them, He was completely satisfied. When he finished eating the fruits and roots, He said to the great sage: “Previously, whose arrangements for sacrifice were these that are near the hermitage?” Hearing this inquiry, Vālmīki replied: “O Śatrughna, hear about whose hermitage this was in the past. Your predecessor was King Sudāsa. He had a son named Vīrasaha, who was courageous and righteous. One day the child Sudāsa decided to go hunting. There he saw two rākṣasas wandering about. Assuming the forms of tigers, those two horrible rākṣasas devoured thousands of animals without becoming satisfied. They could not fill their stomachs. He saw those two rākṣasas rid the forest of animals. Becoming extremely angry, he attacked them with one huge arrow.

“After stiking down one of the rākṣasas, Sudāsa lost his anger and anxiety, and stared at the dead rākṣasa. As he was looking at the corpse, the other rākṣasa became furious and spoke the following words to the formidable Sudāsa: ‘O sinful wretch, because you just killed my innocent companion, I shall give you the reaction.’ Having said that, the rākṣasa became invisible. After a long time, Sudāsa’s son Mitrasaha became king. King Mitrasaha came to this hermitage to perform a horse sacrifice. The

sage Vasiṣṭha was presiding over that great sacrifice and it lasted for many years. The sacrifice was as opulent as those of the gods.

“When the sacrifice was completed, remembering his enmity with the king, the rākṣasa approached the king in the guise of Vasiṣṭha and said: ‘Today the sacrifice has been completed. Therefore quickly give me flesh food to eat. There is nothing to consider in this regards.’ Upon hearing what the rākṣasa in the guise of a brāhmaṇa said, the king ordered expert cooks to prepare food: ‘Quickly prepared tasty and fatty food with meats so that my preceptor may be satisfied.’ When the cooks heard the king’s order, their minds became bewildered. On that occasion, the rākṣasa assumed the guise of a cook. He then brought the cooked human flesh to the king, saying: ‘I have brought this tasty and fatty meat preparation.’ Accompanied by his wife Madayantī, the king presented the food brought by the rākṣasa to Vasiṣṭha. Realizing that the food was human flesh, Vasiṣṭha became infuriated and said: ‘O king, because you wanted to give me this food, this will be your food. Of this there is not doubt.’ Mitrasaha thereafter became angry. Taking water in his hand, he began cursing Vasiṣṭha, but his wife stopped him. She said: ‘O king, the holy sage Vasiṣṭha is our spiritual master. You cannot curse a priest who is just like a god. Then the king threw down the water that was instilled with anger and great power. In that way he sprinkled it on his feet. By doing that the king’s two feet became speckled. From then on the famous King Mitrasaha had speckled feet and was known by the name Kalmāṣapāda (Speckled Feet). After bowing repeated with his wife, the king said to Vasiṣṭha: ‘Someone disguised as you told me to prepare this food for you.’ When Vasiṣṭha heard what the king said, he understood that it was the work of a rākṣasa and said to the king: ‘O king, out of anger I uttered a curse. That cannot be undone. Therefore I give you a boon. The curse will end after a period of twelve years. By my mercy you will not remember what has happened.’ In that way the king suffered the effect of the curse and then regained his kingdom and ruled over it. O Rāma, the beautiful place that You asked about near this hermitage is where he performed his sacrifice.”

After hearing the dreadful tale of King Mitrasaha, Śatrughna offered respects to the great sage and entered the thatched hut.

BIRTH OF SĪTĀ'S TWO SONS

The night that Śatrughna entered Vālmiki's thatched hut, Sītā gave birth to two sons. At about midnight some young sons of sages came and told Vālmiki the good news of Sītā's giving birth: "O venerable one, Rāma's wife has given birth to two sons. Therefore, perform rituals to protect them from evil spirits." Upon hearing these words, the great sage went there. The two babies looked like young moons or the sons of gods, and where tremendously splendid. Vālmiki entered the delivery room in a joyful state of mind and saw the two children. Then he performed rituals to protect them from evil spirits. The brāhmaṇa Vālmiki took a handful of kuśa grass, and then just a little in order to perform the ritual for warding away evil spirits. He said: "Elder women should purify the first-born child with kuśa grass, and therefore his name shall be Kuśa. They should purify the younger child with less kuśa, and therefore he shall be named Lava (less). In this way I give them the names Kuśa and Lava. They will become well-known by these names."

Then the sinless elder women attentively performed the protective ritual, cleansing the two children with the kuśa grass. While the elder women were performing the protective ritual, they chanted the glories of Rāma and Sītā's two beautiful children, praising the members of their dynasty. Śatrughna heard the good news. He entered the thatched hut and said: "O mother, this is very fortunate!" The great soul Śatrughna was so pleased that He passed that night of the month of Śravana of the rainy season in discussion. At daybreak, the valiant warrior performed his morning duties. He said goodbye to the sage with joined palms and again set off toward the east. After spending seven nights on the road, He reached the bank of the Yamunā River and stayed in the hermitage of some sages of pious fame. In the company of those principal sages descended from Bhṛgu, the glorious king stayed there hearing enjoyable stories. In this way, Śatrughna spent the night enjoying the narration of many different stories in the company of Cyavana Muni and other sages.

CYAVANA DESCRIBES THE POWER OF LAVAṆA'S SPEAR

The next night, Śatrughna asked the brāhmaṇa Cyavana, the delight of the Bhrgu Dynasty: “O brāhmaṇa, what is the strength of Lavaṇa and his spear? Whom did he previously kill in duels with his spear when they came to fight with him?”

Hearing his inquiry, the great soul Cyavana replied: “O Śatrughna, Lavaṇa’s activities are innumerable. Listen to an incident that occurred in relation to King Māndhātā of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. In the past, there was a king of Ayodhyā named Māndhātā, the son of Yuvanāśva, who was famous throughout the three worlds. The king ruled the entire earth. The king attempted to conquer everything from here up to the worlds of the gods. Indra and the gods were very afraid of the great Māndhātā’s desire and efforts to conquer the heavenly planets. Vowing that he would take half of Indra’s throne and half of his kingdom, Māndhātā ascended to Indra’s abode.

“Realizing the king’s sinful intention, Lord Indra spoke the following conciliatory words to Māndhātā: ‘O best of men, you are not yet the king of the whole human world. How can you subdue the kingdom of the gods when you have not subdued the whole earth? O hero, if you can subdue the whole earth, then you can rule in heaven with servants, armies and conveyences.’

“Māndhātā then asked: ‘O Indra, where on the earth is my rule not accepted?’ Lord Indra replied to him: ‘O sinless one, In Madhuvana there is a rākṣasa named Lavaṇa, the son of Madhu, who does not obey you.’ Upon hearing this greatly displeasing news from Lord Indra, King Māndhātā hung his head down in shame and was unable to talk. Taking leave of Indra, the king left with his head hanging and returned to this world. Becoming angry in his heart, He returned to his servants, army and conveyences in order to subdue Lavaṇa, the son of Madhu. Desiring to fight with Lavaṇa, he sent a

messenger to him. The messenger related many unpleasant words to Lavaṇa. The rākṣasa devoured the messenger as he was speaking. When the messenger was late in returning, the king became outraged and harried the rākṣasa from all sides with a shower of arrows. Then Lavaṇa laughed and grabbed the spear with his hand and threw it in order to kill King Māndhātā and his servants. That blazing spear burned to ashes the king along with his servants, army and conveyences, afterwhich it returned to Lavaṇa's hand. Thus the great king and his army and conveyences were destroyed, for the spear's power is immeasurable and superb.

“O Śatrughna, tomorrow morning You will undoubtedly kill Lavaṇa. You will certainly be victorious when You suddenly attack him without his weapon. May there be good fortune for the worlds by the activities You perform! Thus have I described to You everything about the immeasurable power of the wicked Lavaṇa's spear. O king, Māndhātā was destroyed because of his attempt to conquer Indra. O great soul, I have no doubt that tomorrow morning You will kill Lavaṇa when he goes out to gather his meat without his spear. You will definitely be victorious, O king.”

ŚATRUGHNA REBUKES LAVANA

The night quickly passed as the great Śatrughna discussed stories and longed for a glorious victory. When the clear morning arrived, the rākṣasa left the city in order to get food to eat. At that time, the heroic Śatrughna crossed the Yamunā River and waited with His bow in hand at the gate of Madhupurī. When it was noontime, the rākṣasa of cruel deeds came carrying a load of many thousands of living creatures. Seeing Śatrughna waiting at the gate and holding a weapon, he said: “O lowest of men, what will you do to me with that weapon? I have angrily eaten many warriors armed like this. Now Your time has come. O rascal, my meal for today is not yet complete. Why have You come here to enter my mouth?”

The rākṣasa laughed repeatedly while he spoke. The courageous Śatrughna shed tears because of anger. All the limbs of the infuriated Śatrughna began beaming with splendor. Śatrughna said to the night-stalker: “O fool, I wish to fight with you in a duel! I am the son of King Daśaratha and the brother of the wise Rāma. My name is Śatrughna, and I have come with the desire to destroy you, My enemy! Give battle to Me, who am eager to fight. You are the enemy of all living beings. You will not escape alive!”

The rākṣasa seemingly laughed while Śatrughna was speaking, then he said: “O fool, it is my good fortune that You have come. O lowest of men, my uncle is the rākṣasa named Rāvaṇa. He was killed by Rāma because of a woman. I have tolerated the destruction of Rāvaṇa’s dynasty and all that. I have particularly had to tolerate Your insulting me to my face. In the past I killed all the fools as if they were straw. I did this in the past and will do so in the future, including You, O lowest of men. O fool, I shall give you, who want to fight, a battle. Wait here for an hour and I will bring my weapon. I shall prepare my cherished weapon with which I will kill You.”

Śatrughna immediately replied: “How can you escape from Me alive? An intellient person should not allow his enemy to go. A fool who

allows his enemy to go because of his unsteady intelligence will be killed like a coward. Therefore, take a good look at the world of the living. I shall send you to the abode of death with numerous sharp arrows, for you are the sinful enemy of the three worlds and of Lord Rāma!"

ŚATRUGHNA SLAYS LAVAṆA

When Lavaṇa heard what the great Śatrughna said, he became extremely angry and said: “Stay where You are! Stand still!” Rubbing his hands together and gnashing his teeth, he began challenging Śatrughna. As the dreadful rākṣasa was doing so, Śatrughna, the slayer of the enemies of the gods, spoke the following words to the dreadful-looking rākṣasa: “You conquered the other persons before I was born. Therefore, today you will go to the abode of Yama after being struck by My arrows. O sinful wretch, as the gods saw Rāvaṇa destroyed, today the sages will see you killed by Me in battle. O night-stalker, you will fall down when scorched by my arrows. Then this city and kingdom will be blessed. Stretching My arms, I shall send arrows like thunderbolts at your heart, as a beam of sunlight enters a lotus flower.”

After being spoken to in that way by Śatrughna, Lavaṇa was outraged and threw a tree at Śatrughna’s chest. Śatrughna shattered it into hundreds of pieces. Seeing that his effort had been nullified, the mighty rākṣasa threw many other trees at Śatrughna. The glorious Śatrughna knocked those many trees down with one, three or four knotted-shaft arrows. Then Śatrughna released a shower of arrows over the rākṣasa, but the rākṣasa was undisturbed. Then the valorous Lavaṇa laughed as he raised a tree and struck Śatrughna over the head. Śatrughna’s body shuddered and He fainted. When Śatrughna fell over, a loud cry rose up from the sages, hosts of gods, gandharvas and apsarās. When Lavaṇa saw Śatrughna fallen on the ground, he thought that He was dead. He did not bother entering his palace to get his weapon. Thinking that Śatrughna was dead, he began eating. After about an hour, Śatrughna regained consciousness and again stood up with his weapon. The sages praised Śatrughna as He stood at the city gate. Then He took a divine and infallible arrow that filled all ten directions with its splendor. Its point and speed were like a thunderbolt. It was like Mount Meru and Mount Mandara. All its knots were smoothed and it was indefeatable in combat. It was smeared with red sandalwood paste. It

had a fine blade and was fitted with feathers. It was frightful for the lords of dānavas, mountains and asuras. It was shining like the fire that flares up at the end of the world. Seeing it, all living beings became frightened. Because the whole world with its gods, gandharvas, sages and hosts of apsarās became disturbed, Lord Brahmā came and they said to him: “O lord, the gods and living beings are overwhelmed with fear about the destruction of the world. O lord, we hope the world is not about to be destroyed, for the end of the age has not yet arrived. O grandsire, such a situation has never been seen or heard of before.”

When Lord Brahmā, the grandsire of the world, heard these words, he attempted to dispel their fear. He spoke the following sweet words: “All you gods, please listen. Śatrughna has seized that arrow in order to slay Lavaṇa on the field of battle. All of us distinguished gods have been dismayed by the arrow’s brilliance. O sons, that eternally brilliant arrow which has terrified you belongs to the primeval Godhead Lord Viṣṇu, who is the actual creator of the world. The Supreme Lord created this arrow for slaying the two daityas, Kaitabha and Madhu. Only Lord Viṣṇu is familiar with this arrow. It is in fact the very body of the primeval Lord Visnu. Go from here and watch the great Śatrughna, the younger brother of Rāma, slay Lavaṇa, the foremost of rākṣasas.”

When the gods heard what Lord Brahmā said, they went to where Śatrughna and Lavaṇa were fighting. All living beings saw the dazzling arrow held by Śatrughna which resembled the fire that flares up at the end of the world. Seeing that the sky was filled by the presence of the gods, Śatrughna roared loudly like a lion and then looked again at Lavaṇa. Lavaṇa became furious when he was again challenged by the mighty Śatrughna, and so he stepped forward to fight. Stretching His bow back to His ear, Śatrughna shot that great arrow at Lavaṇa’s broad chest. That arrow which was respected by the gods pierced Lavaṇa’s chest and then entered Rasātala, the nether region. After the gleaming arrow went to Rasātala, it quickly returned to Śatrughna, the delight of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. When he was pierced by Śatrughna’s arrow, the night-stalker Lavaṇa suddenly fell on the ground, like a mountain hit by a thunderbolt. After the rākṣasa Lavaṇa was slain, the gods saw the great divine spear return to Lord Śiva. By shooting just one arrow,

Śatrughna, the protector of the three worlds, dispelled the danger, as the thousand-rayed sun dispels darkness. Thereafter all the gods, sages, nāgas and apsarās worshipped Śatrughna, saying: “Fortunately Śatrughna was victorious. He dispelled our fear and pacified the snake-like Lavaṇa.”

ŚATRUGHNA RESIDES IN MADHUPURĪ

Once Lavaṇa had been killed, the gods headed by Indra and Agni came and spoke the follow sweet words to Śatrughna: “Fortunately You were victorious. Fortunately Lavaṇa has been killed. O tiger among men, choose a boon. O strong-armed warrior, we have come here to give You a boon. The sight of us who wanted You to be victorious cannot be futile.”

Upon hearing what the gods said, the self-controlled Śatrughna raised His joined palms to His head and replied: “The best boon for Me would be to enter as soon as possible this charming city of Madhupurī which was created by the gods.” The gods who were pleased at heart said to Śatrughna: “So be it. This charming city will no doubt have an army of heroic warriors.”

After saying this, the great gods rose up into the heavens. Then the glorious Śatrughna summoned His army. When the army heard Śatrughna’s command, it came quickly. Śatrughna began living in that city during the month of Śravaṇa. Śatrughna lived peacefully for twelve years in the kingdom of the Śūrasenas, which was like heaven. The agricultural fields produced abundant crops and Indra showered rain at the appropriate times. Protected by Śatrughna’s arms, the city was full of healthy and courageous people. That beautiful city on the bank of the Yamunā was shaped like a crescent moon. It was beautified by great mansions, crossroads, shops and streets. In it resided the four castes and it was supplied with commercial produce. Previously Lavaṇa had had constructed many gleaming white buildings. Śatrughna had them decorated with different colored designs. There were gardens and entertainment places everywhere. The city was decorated with beautiful things made by humans and gods. That city was like heaven. It had many commercial goods. It was graced with the presence of merchants from many lands. When the joyful Bharata saw the prosperity of the city, He experienced the highest delight. While residing in Madhupurī, He began thinking that twelve years had passed since He had seen Rāma’s

feet. In that way, Śātrughna who resided in the city of Madhupurī, which was just like a city of the gods and which was teeming with different kinds of people, decided He wanted to see the feet of Lord Rāma.

ŚATRUGHNA LEAVES FOR AYODHYĀ

After twelve years, Śatrughna decided to go with a few servants and soldiers to Ayodhyā, which was protected by Rāma. Summoning His main ministers and generals, he departed in one hundred chariots drawn by fine steeds. Śatrughna made approximately seven or eight stops. When He reached Vālmīki's hermitage, the glorious Śatrughna spent the night there. That best of men bowed to Vālmīki's feet, then He offered him water for washing the hands. After offering him proper hospitality, He clasped the sage's hand. The sage Vālmīki related to the great Śatrughna thousands of different sweet stories. Regarding the slaughter of Lavaṇa, Vālmīki said: "Your slaying of Lavaṇa was a very difficult task. My dear Śatrughna, many kings who fought with Lavaṇa were destroyed along with their armies and conveyences. O best of men, You easily killed the sinful Lavaṇa. Thereafter the world was freed from fear. You pacified the earth by Your strength. It took a tremendous effort to kill the dreadful Rāvaṇa. On the other hand, You executed this wonderful task effortlessly. The gods were highly pleased by the slaughter of Lavaṇa. You performed an action pleasing to all living beings and the whole world. While I was visiting the court of Indra, we all boarded an aerial vehicle, and thus I witnessed the battle in that way. O Śatrughna, There is great affection for You in my heart. I shall smell Your head, for this is the greatest sign of affection."

Having said this, the sage smelled Śatrughna's head. Then he offered Him and His followers hospitality. At that time, Śatrughna enjoyed the superb sweetness of music and the sequential narration of stories about Lord Rāma. It was accompanied with the playing of stringed instruments. The words were vibrated in the heart, throat and head with low, medium and high notes. It was presented in the Sanskrit language with appropriate adornments and an even rhythm. The words described real events that took place previously. When Śatrughna heard that recitation, He was emotionally touched and tears fell from His eyes. He repeatedly sighed for an hour. He listened to that recitation as if the events were actually taking place.

When the king's followers heard that musical presentation, they became melancholic and hung their heads. Speaking to each other, the soldiers said: "What is this? Where are we? What is this dream we are seeing? How is it that we are seeing previous events again in this hermitage? Are we hearing this musical narration in a dream?" In complete amazement, they spoke the following words to Śatrughna: "O best of men, please question Vālmīki, the foremost of sages!" Śatrughna said to all of the inquisitive soldiers: "It is not proper for Me to question the sage. There are many amazing things in his hermitage. It would be improper to question him out of curiosity." Having responded in this way to the soldiers, Śatrughna offered respects to the great sage and entered His own tent.

ŚATRUGHNA STAYS IN AYODHYĀ FOR SEVEN DAYS

When Śatrughna went to bed, He could not sleep because He was thinking about the many topics mentioned in that musical recitation of Rāma's pastimes. After having heard the sweet descriptions of Rāma's pastimes accompanied with the playing of stringed instruments, the remainder of the night passed quickly for Śatrughna. When the night ended and the dawn broke, Śatrughna performed His morning religious duties. Joining His palms, Śatrughna said to the great sage: "O venerable one, I wish to see Rāma, the delight of the Raghu Dynasty. With your permission I wish to leave with My associates who are on a strict vow."

As Śatrughna was speaking, Vālmīki embraced Him and gave Him permission to leave. After bidding farewell to the best of sages, Śatrughna got in His gleaming chariot and quickly left for Ayodhyā, eager as He was to see Rāma. When Śatrughna entered the charming city of Ayodhyā, He entered the palace where Rāma was. There He saw Rāma, whose face beamed like a full moon, sitting in the midst of His ministers, as Indra sits in court among the immortals. Śatrughna greeted Rāma, who seemed to be blazing with glory.

Joining His palms, He said to Rāma, whose prowess is always effective: "O great king, whatever You instructed Me to do, I have done. I killed the sinful Lavaṇa and have resided in his city, Madhupurī. It has been twelve years since I last saw You, O delight of the Raghu Dynasty. I am unable to bear any more separation from You. Please be merciful to Me, O descendent of Kakutstha, as if I were a motherless child. I cannot live abroad for a long time."

Embracing Śatrughna as He spoke, Rama said to Him: "O hero, do not be disturbed! This is not the behavior of a kṣatriya. It is not saddening for a king to live abroad. A king should protect his citizens according to the

kṣatriya code. Come to see Me here in Ayodhyā from time to time, and I will also go to Your city. You are no doubt dearer to Me than My own life. A king certainly has to take care of his kingdom. Therefore, stay with Me for seven nights. Afterwards You can return to Madhupurī with Your sevants, soldiers and conveyences.”

Upon hearing these righteous words that were agreeable to the mind, Śatrughna sadly assented, saying: “So be it.” By the order of Lord Rāma, Śatrughna, the bearer of a huge bow, stayed there for seven nights, then prepared to leave. Bidding farewell to Rāma, Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa, He mounted a large chariot. Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata followed behind on foot for a long distance, then Śatrughna proceeded on to His city.

A BRĀHMAṆA BRINGS HIS DEAD SON TO RĀMA'S PALACE

After sending Śatrughna back to Madhupurī, Rāma justly ruled the kingdom with His brothers and enjoyed great happiness. Some days later an elderly brāhmaṇa from the countryside brought his dead son to the gates of the royal palace. Overwhelmed with affection and sadness, he cried out many different things.

He repeatedly exclaimed: “O son! O my son!” and spoke the following words: “Oh, what misdeed did I do in my previous life, that I see my only son dead? O son, you were a five-year old child who did not even reach adolescence. Your untimely death has saddened me. O son, because of grief for you, I and your mother will no doubt die in a few days. I cannot remember ever telling a lie or committing an act of violence. I do not remember doing anything offensive to anyone. For what sin has my child gone to the abode of death prior to performing the funeral rites of his father? I have never previously seen or heard of such a horrible thing as someone dying prematurely in Rāma's kingdom!

“No doubt Rāma must have committed some great misdeed that a citizen's child has died. The children of other kingdoms are not under any threat of death. Therefore, O king, bring my dead son back to life! I shall die with my wife at the gate of the palace like one who has no protector. Then, O Rāma, You can be happy with the responsibility for the murder of a brāhmaṇa! O king, You will have a long life with Your brothers. We have been living happily in this kingdom of Yours. This misfortune has befallen those who are under Your dominion, so we have come under the influence of time. Therefore we find little happiness.

“The kingdom of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty is now without a protector. Since Rāma has assumed the post of protector, the death of children is certain. Because of the king's faults, the citizens are not being protected

properly. Whenever the king acts improperly, the citizens die untimely. Or else, if the people of the city and countryside act improperly and no one corrects them, then there is danger of death. As such, it is obvious that there is some fault in the king in relation to the city or countryside in that this child has died.”

After the brāhmaṇa had repeatedly crying out in many different ways, the sullen charioteer Sumatra disclosed the matter to the king.

THE REASON FOR THE CHILD'S DEATH

Thereafter Rāma head the brāhmaṇa, who was completely overwhelmed with sadness, crying pitifully. In that way Rāma also felt stricken with sadness and summoned His ministers, Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, His brothers and the citizens. Then eight brāhmaṇas entered the palace with Vasiṣṭha and said to the king, who was equal to God: “May You prosper!” The eight brāhmaṇas were: Mārkaṇḍeya, Maudgalya, Vāmadeva, Kaśyapa, Kātyāyana, Jābāli, Gautama and Nārada. The best of the twice-born then took their seats, afterwhich Rāma joined His palms and offered them respects. Rāma received the ministers and citizens as appropriate. When all these effulgent people were seated, Rāma said: “A brāhmaṇa is blocking My gateway.”

Upon hearing the morose king's statement, Nārada spoke the following auspicious words in the presence of the sages: “O king, hear why the boy died untimely. After hearing it, You may do the necessary. In the past during Kṛtayuga there were only brāhmaṇa ascetics. Those who were not brāhmaṇas never became ascetics. In that age austerity was effulgent, brāhmaṇas were predominant and there was no prevalence of ignorance. At that time all people were free from untimely death and everyone could see what was in the future.

“Then the age called Tretā began. At that time kṣatriyas became dominant and, as did the brāhmaṇas previously, they began practicing austerities. The great souls of Tretāyuga are inferior in power and austerity to those of Kṛtayuga. In the previous age the brāhmaṇas were greater than the kṣatriyas. But in this age the kṣatriyas are equal in power to the brāhmaṇas. Not seeing any particular greatness in the brāhmaṇas or kṣatriyas, Manu established the system of four castes. In the Tretāyuga righteousness was effulgent and predominant and there was no prevalence of sinfulness. Unrighteousness has but one foot on the earth. Because of the influence of unrighteousness, everyone's effulgence will decline.

“In the previous age the sages considered activities in the mode of passion as so much filth. They called it falsehood, and it made its presence in this world with its one foot. In this way falsehood, which is one foot of irreligion, became established. Thereafter the length of life of Kṛtayuga became shortened. After falsehood became established in the world as unrighteousness, those who were devoted to truthfulness and righteousness engaged in auspicious activities. In Tretāyuga those who are brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas practice austerities. All the other people serve them. Service is the highest occupation for the vaiśyas and śūdras. The śūdras in particular should respect all the other castes.

“O best of kings, when unrighteousness and falsehood become established in this Tretāyuga, the brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas will become diminished. After that, unrighteousness will set its second foot upon the earth. Therefore that age will be known as Dvāpara. O best of men, in the Dvāparayuga, when the two feet of unrighteousness become established, unrighteousness and falsehood will increase. In the Dvāparayuga vaiśyas will begin practicing austerities. Thus in the three ages the three castes gradually take up the practice of austerities. In those three ages the righteousness of the three castes becomes reduced. In those ages the śūdras never achieve righteousness.

“O best of kings, a time will come when people without caste will perform tremendous austerities. In the future when the age of Kali begins those who are born in the families of śūdras will practice austerities. O king, it is most incorrect for someone born a śūdra to practice austerities in Dvāparayuga, what to speak of in the present Tretāyuga. Surely somewhere in Your kingdom some greatly foolish śūdra is performing great austerities, for which reason the boy died. If some fool performs unrighteous activities in a monarch’s kingdom, that city loses its opulence, and the king soon goes to hell. Of this there is no doubt. When the king rules over the citizens with righteousness, he enjoys one sixth of the result of the people’s scriptural studies, austerities and pious activities. When he is enjoying that, why would he not protect the citizens? Therefore, O tiger among men, search Your kingdom and wherever You find any misbehavior, try to correct it. If You do like that, righteousness will thrive and the people’s lifespan will increase. Furthermore the child will come back to life.”

RĀMA FINDS A ŚŪDRA PRACTICING AUSTERITIES

When Lord Rāma heard Nārada's statements, He experienced unequalled delight and said to Lakṣmaṇa: "My dear Lakṣmaṇa, go and console that best of brāhmaṇas. Smear the boy's body with fragrant sandalwood paste and place it in a vast filled with scented oil so that the boy's body does not deteriorate. Keep the body in such a way that it will not deteriorate or become damaged or dismembered. After giving these instructions to the handsome Lakṣmaṇa, the widely famous Rāma began thinking of the Puṣpaka airship and summoned it. As soon as Rāma made His desire known, the gilded Puṣpaka arrived in Rāma's presence in a moment's time. Bowing itself, the Puṣpaka said: "O king, here I am. O strong-armed one, Your obedient servant has arrived."

Hearing these pleasing words spoken by the Puṣpaka airship, the king bid farewell to the sages and boarded the airship. Taking with Him a bow, quiver, and glittering sword, he left Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata in charge of the city. Looking here and there, He headed toward the west. Then He headed towards the north, which is bounded by the Himālayas. When He failed to find any sign of misdeed in those areas, He began searching in the east. While seated in the Puṣpaka, Rāma saw that there was only the purest good behavior, like the spotless surface of a mirror. Then He went toward the south. On the northern slope of Śāvala Mountain He saw a great lake. On the shore of that lake Rāma saw an ascetic performing tremendous austerities with his head hanging down.

Rāma approached that ascetic performing great austerities and said: "O sage of good vows, you are most fortunate! What caste were you born in? I am asking you out of curiosity, for I am Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha. What is it you wish to achieve? Do you want to go to the heavenly planets, or something else? For what boon are you performing such difficult

austerities? O ascetic, I wish to hear the goal of your austerities. If you are a brāhmaṇa, then I bless you. If you are a kṣatriya, may you be difficult to defeat. If you are from the third cast, a vaiśya, or a śūdra, be truthful.”

When spoken to in this way by the king, the ascetic nodded his head to Rāma. He then told the king what his caste was and why he was performing austerities.

RĀMA SLAYS ŚAMBŪKA

When the ascetic heard Rāma's inquiry, he nodded his head and spoke the following words: "I who am engaged in formidable austerities was born in a śūdra family. O Rāma, I want to achieve the status of a god and go to heaven in this very same body. I am not telling a lie, O Rāma. I want to go to the world of the gods. Know me to be a śūdra known by the name Śambūka."

While the śūdra was speaking, Rāma angrily drew his spotless glittering sword and cut off his head. When Rāma slew the śūdra, the gods headed by Indra and Agni repeatedly praised Rāma, exclaiming: "Well Done! Well done!" There was a great shower of fragrant celestial flowers. Being carried by the wind, flowers fell everywhere. The gods were very pleased and said to Rāma, whose prowess was always successful: "O Lord, You have performed a task for the gods. Please accept whatever boon You please. By Your action this śūdra will not achieve the heavenly planets."

When Rāma heard what the gods said, He joined His palms and replied to the thousand-eyed Indra, the conqueror of enemy fortresses: "If the gods are pleased with Me, let the brāhmaṇa's son live. Grant Me this boon, which is the one I seek. By My neglect, the brāhmaṇa's only son met with untimely death and was taken to the abode of Yama. Bring him back to life. Bless you. Do not make Me a liar. I told the brāhmaṇa that I would resuscitate his son."

Upon hearing Rāma's request, the gods were pleased and replied to Him: "Be happy, O descendent of Kakutstha! The boy has already come alive and has been reunited with his relatives. The moment You slew the śūdra, the boy regained his life. May You have good fortune! Bless You! O Rāma, we wish to visit the hermitage of Agastya. He is about to take a vow to spend twelve years under water. O Rāma, we are therefore going to encourage the sage. You should also go to see that best of sages."

Rāma assented to the gods' request and boarded the gilded Puṣpaka airship. Then all the gods departed in their numerous aerial vehicles. Rāma also quickly left for the forest of the sage Agastya.

Seeing that the gods had arrived, Agastya, whose wealth was austerity, respectfully welcomed them all in the same way. After they had been received by the sage, the gods respectfully greeted him. Thereafter the satisfied gods returned to the heavenly planets with their followers. After they had left, Rāma arrived in His Puṣpaka and greeted Agastya, the best of sages. After offering respects to the great sage who was glowing with glory and receiving hospitality from him, Rama sat down. Then the great ascetic Agastya said to Rāma:

“Welcome, O best of men! By my good fortune You have come. O Rāma, I have great respect for You because of your many agreeable good qualities. O king, You are my worshipable guest and are situated always in my heart. The gods said that You were coming after having slewn a sinful śūdra and have revived the son of a brāhmaṇa by Your dutifulness. Please spend the night with me in this hermitage. In the morning You can again depart in the Puṣpaka airship. You are Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself. Everything is resting on You. You are the Lord of all the gods and the eternal Personality of Godhead. My dear Rāma, this ornament was made by Viśvakarmā and it shines because of its shape and brilliance. Please accept it and please me, O Rāma, for it is said that one who gives away one's own gift receives an even greater result. You are the only one who can wear this ornament and thus make the great result possible for me. You are able to surpass even the gods headed by Indra. Therefore I give You this ornament in accordance with propriety. O king, please accept it.”

When Agastya finished speaking, Rāma, the great chariot warrior of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, thought about the code of conduct for kṣatriyas and replied: “O venerable one, only brāhmaṇas can accept gifts without fault. O learned brāhmaṇa, how then can a kṣatriya accept gifts? It is reprehensible for kṣatriyas to accept gifts. Therefore you should say that you will give it to a brāhmaṇa.”

When spoken to in this way by Rāma, the great sage replied: “O Rāma, previously in Kṛtayuga when everyone was like a brāhmaṇa, the living beings had no king, although Indra was king of the gods. Then the living beings approached Lord Brahmā in order to have a king and said: ‘O lord of the gods, you established Indra as king of the gods. Please give us a king who is the best of men, by honoring whom we can free ourselves from sin in our lives. We cannot live without a king. This is our firm decision.’

“After that, Lord Brahmā, the best of the gods, summoned the four Lokapālas, including Lord Indra, and said: ‘All of you give me a portion of your effulgence.’ Thereafter all the Lokapālas gave one portion of their effulgence. Then Lord Brahmā sneezed, from which was produced King Kṣupa. Lord Brahmā invested the combined portions of effulgence of the Lokapālas in the king. Then he gave King Kṣupa the post of king over the living entities. With Indra’s portion of effulgence the king ruled over the earth. With Varuṇa’s portion he maintained the bodies of the living entities. With Kuvera’s portion he gave them wealth. With Yama’s portion he had the ability to give punishment to the living entities.

“O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, because You are a king, You are endowed with a portion of Indra’s effulgence. O Lord, please accept this ornament in order to deliver me.”

Then Rāma accepted the ornament from the great sage. The ornament was dazzling, beautiful and brilliant like the sun. Upon accepting it, Rāma asked about the source of the ornament: “O famous sage, how or from where did you get this very wonderful ornament of amazing workmanship? O brāhmaṇa, I ask you with curiosity, for you are the topmost repository of many wonders.”

While Rāma was saying this, the sage said to him: “O Rāma, please listen to an event which occurred in Tretāyuga.”

A CELESTIAL EATS A CORPSE

Agastya continued: “O Rāma, in the past, during Tretāyuga, there was a vast forest which was one hundred yojanas on all sides and which was devoid of animals and birds. My dear Rāma, I went to that uninhabited forest to wander about while performing the highest austerities. I was unable to calculate the beauty of the forest, with its very tasty fruits and roots, and its many trees. In the middle of the forest there was a lake one yojana long. It was teeming with swans and ducks, and was adorned with ruddy geese. It was crowded with blooming lotus flowers and had no duckweed. Its waters were sweet to the taste. It was not muddy and was always undisturbed. It was crowded with flocks of beautiful birds. On the shore of that lake was a large, wonderful hermitage which was ancient and holy.

“One night during the hot season I stayed outside the hermitage. In the morning I got up and went to the lake to bathe and perform my morning rituals. At that time I saw a corpse which was in good condition and unsoiled. It was lying on the bank of the lake and was extremely effulgent. Because of this I began thinking for some time: ‘What could this possibly be?’ After about an hour I saw an amazing divine aerial vehicle which was in the shape of a swan and was very swift. In it was seated a resident of the heavenly planets. He was adorned with sparkling ornaments and was served by thousands of celestial damsels. Some of them were singing pleasant songs, others were playing musical instruments, such as clay drums, vīṇas, and paṇava drums, and others were dancing, others who had eyes shaped like the petals of lotus flowers were bearing golden staffs or yak whisks that were as white as the moon.

“O Rāma, then, as I was watching, that divine being left his lion throne, which was shining like the peak of Mount Meru, got down from the aerial vehicle and ate the corpse. After eating the flesh and fat as he pleased, the celestial being went into the lake and began cleaning himself. After purifying himself with water as required by rule, the celestial being mounted

the aerial vehicle. Seeing him climbing into the aerial vehicle, I asked him the following question: ‘Who are you? You are just like a god, but your food is reprehensible! Please tell me why you ate this corpse. How could it be that you have such a celestial form and eat such things? This is truly amazing. I want to hear the truth. I do not think that it was proper for you to eat this corpse!’

“O king, out of curiosity I questioned the celestial being in this way. When he heard all my questions, he began responding.”

THE STORY OF KING ŚVETA

Agastya continued: “O Rāma, when that celestial being heard my beautifully-phrased question, he joined his palms and replied: ‘O brāhmaṇa, please listen to the inviolable incident causing happiness and sadness which occurred in the past, which is in accordance with what you have asked me. In the past my famous father was king of Vidarbha. His name was Sudeva. He was known throughout the three worlds for his prowess. O brāhmaṇa, he had two wives in whom he engendered two sons. I am his eldest son known as Śveta and his youngest son was Suratha. When my father went to heaven, the citizens coronated me king. Thereafter I ruled the kingdom paying full attention to the principles of righteousness. In that way, O brāhmaṇa, one thousand years passed while I was engaged in ruling the kingdom and dutifully looking after the citizens. O best of the twice-born, once by some means I learned something about my life. Seeing in my heart the time when I would die, I left for the forest. I came to this impassable forest devoid of animals and birds. I engaged myself in the practice of austerities on the shore of this beautiful lake. After installing my brother Suratha as king, I came to this lake and practiced austerities for a long time. For three thousands years I executed austerities in this great forest.

“After performing very difficult austerities, I achieved the elevated abode of Lord Brahmā. O greatest of brāhmaṇas, After reaching the heavenly world I became overwhelmed with hunger and thirst. In that way all my senses became agitated. One day I said to Lord Brahmā, the grandsire of all the three worlds: ‘O venerable lord, this abode of yours is supposed to be free from hunger and thirst, yet I am still plagued with hunger and thirst. What action is this the result of? O grandsire, tell me what my food is.

“Then Lord Brahmā said to me: ‘O son of Sudeva, your food will be to always eat your own tasty flesh! O Śveta, while practicing great austerities you only nourished your own body. O intelligent one, nothing ever grows from an unplanted seed. You never gave even a little charity. You only

practiced austerities. Because you came to the heavenly planets in that way, you are plagued with hunger and thirst. By eating the immortal fluids of your body which was nourished with fine foods, you will free yourself from hunger and thirst. O Śveta, when the great sage Agastya comes to that forest, you will free yourself from this difficulty. My dear Śveta, he is able to deliver the hosts of gods. Why would your hunger and thirst be anything difficult for him?’

“When I heard Lord Brahmā’s advice, I began eating my own body. O brāhmaṇa, although I have been eating this body for many years, it never diminished and I would become satisfied. Free me from this difficulty in which I am. No one else but the sage Agastya could have come to this forest. O best of the twice-born, bless you! In exchange for my deliverance please accept this ornament. Please be merciful to me! O brāhmaṇa, I give you this gold ornament, as well as this wealth, garments and foodstuffs. I give you all desirable and enjoyable things.’

“When I heard the sad tale of the celestial being, I accepted that ornament to deliver him. As soon as I accept that beautiful ornament, the previous body of the royal sage vanished. When this happened, the royal sage was overjoyed. The satisfied and joyful king returned to the heavenly planets. That is why this amazing-looking ornament was given to me by the king who was equal to Indra.”

THE STORY OF KING DAṆḌA

After hearing this wonderful tale from Agastya, Rāma was great surprised and again began to question the sage: “O venerable sage, how did that forest where King Śveta of Vīdarbha practiced fierce austerities become devoid of animals and birds? Why did King Śveta come to this uninhabited forest to practice austerities. I would like to hear the truth.”

When the effulgent Agastya heard the curious Rāma’s question, he began to reply: “O Rāma, in Kṛtayuga Manu ruled the world. He had a son named Ikṣvāku, who was the delight of his family. Manu installed that eldest son of his as king over the earth. He said to him: ‘Create a royal dynasty on the earth.’ Ikṣvāku took a vow before his father to do so. Manu said to his son: ‘I am very pleased with you. You will no doubt do it. Protect the people with a rod of chastisement, but not without due cause. When a king punishes violators according to regulations, that punishment carries the king to the heavenly planets. Therefore, O son, try to dispense proper punishment. Doing that, you will achieve the highest righteousness in this world.’

“After instructing his son in that way, Manu entered a trance and happily ascended to the eternal abode of Lord Brahmā. When Manu had ascended to the heavenly planets, Ikṣvāku, whose splendor was immeasurable, began thinking about how to engender sons. By means of many different pious activities, the righteous Ikṣvāku, the son of Manu, engendered one hundred sons who were just like sons of gods. O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, the youngest of them all was dull and illiterate. Therefore he did not render any service to his elder brothers. His father named him Daṇḍa, or Punishment, because he knew that his body would certainly suffer punishment. O Rāma, because that son was not fit for any dangerous region, King Ikṣvāku gave him Mount Śaivala as his kingdom. He became king of that charming region on the slopes of Mount Śaivala. O Lord, he named his capital Madhumanta and he chose Śukrācārya as his

family priest. Thus the king ruled with his family priest and happy followers, just like Lord Indra in heaven.”

KING DAṆḌA VIOLATES ARAJĀ

When the great sage Agastya finished narrating this story to Rāma, he began relating the part that remained: “O Rāma, then King Daṇḍa ruled there without any difficulty for many, many years with a controlled mind. One day the king went to the sage Śukrācārya’s charming and fascinating hermitage in the month of Caitra. There King Daṇḍa saw Śukrācārya’s outstanding daughter, who was the most beautiful woman in the world, wandering in a part of the forest. Upon seeing her the foolish king became afflicted by Cupid’s arrows. Approaching the frightened maiden, he spoke the following words: ‘O shapely girl, where did you come from, or whose daughter are you? I am asking you this because I am afflicted by Cupid.’

Śukrācārya’s daughter humbly replied in the following way to that king enftuated by lusty desires: ‘Know that I am the eldest daughter of Śukrācārya, who never tires in action. O king, my name is Arajā and I live in this hermitage. Do not forcibly touch me, O king, for I am under the protection of my father. My father is your preceptor and you are his disciple. My father is a great ascetic. If he becomes angry, he can put you into great difficulty. On the other hand, if you wish to have me as your wife, then follow the right path with respect to duty and request my hand from my highly lustrous father. Otherwise you will reap a very dreadful result. My father can burn all the three worlds with his anger. O handsome king, my father will give me to you if you ask him.’

“As Arajā was speaking in this way, King Daṇḍa became overwhelmed with lust. The enftuated king joined his palms, lowered his head and replied: ‘Be merciful to me, lovely woman! Do not waist any time! I am dying for you! After having you, I could die or suffer any dreadful sin. O timid girl, I am your devotee. Accept me as your servant without any anxiety.’

After speaking in that way, he forcefully grabbed her with both arms. As she trembled, he began having sex with her as he pleased. After performing this frightful sin, King Daṇḍa returned to the magnificent city of Madhumanta. The frightened Arajā cried as she saw her godlike father approaching the hermitage from afar.

ŚUKRĀCĀRYA CURSES KING DAṆḌA

Agastya continued: “An hour later, Śukrācārya, whose effulgence was immeasurable, heard about the violation of Arajā and, being hungry, returned to his hermitage accompanied by his disciples. He saw that Arajā was miserable and crying. She was covered with dust. She looked like an eclipsed moon in the morning. Because he was especially hungry, the sage became angry enough to burn the worlds. Then he said to his disciples: ‘See the horrible disaster like a blazing fire that has sprung from my anger toward the ignorant King Daṇḍa who has committed an act contrary to morality! The destruction of that wicked fool and his followers has arrived, which wants to burn like a blazing flame of fire. Because that fool has committed such a terrible sin, he will reap the reaction of his sinful deed. Seven nights from now that sinful-acting foolish king and his sons, army and vehicles will meet with disaster. Indra will send a great shower of dust over the fool’s kingdom for one hundred yojanas around. All living entities, whether moving or nonmoving, will be completely destroyed by the great shower of dust. Wherever Daṇḍa’s kingdom is will be showered with dust for seven nights.’

“After saying this, Śukrācārya, whose eyes were red from anger, said to the residents of the hermitage: ‘Go and stay on the boundary of Daṇḍa’s kingdom.’ When the residents of the hermitage heard what Śukrācārya said, they left for the border of Daṇḍa’s kingdom and stayed there. After giving this instruction to the residents of the hermitage, Śukrācārya spoke the following words to Arajā: ‘O foolish girl, stay here in this hermitage and practice meditation with full attention. O Arajā, wait at this charming lake which extends for one yojana for the period of your offense to expire and enjoy yourself here without any anxiety. Those living beings who come at night and stay with you will never be killed by a dust storm.’

“When Arajā heard this instruction from her father Śukrācārya, she became very sad and said to him: ‘All right!’ Then Śukrācārya went to

another kingdom to stay. After seven days king Daṇḍa, along with his servants, army and conveyances, were reduced to ashes by the curse of the brāhmaṇa. O king, Daṇḍa's kingdom was between the Vindya Mountains and Śavala Mountain. That brāhmaṇa sage cursed King Daṇḍa during the pious age of Kṛta. Afterwards, that part of the earth was called Daṇḍakāraṇya, the forest of King Daṇḍa. In a particular part of the forest ascetics came and resided, therefore it became known as Janasthāna. O Rāma, I have explained everything that You asked me. O hero, it is now time to perform the twilight worship. After bathing, all these sages here will worship the sun with sacred water pots. O Rāma, when the sun hears the prayers of those knowers of the Vedas and accepts their worship, it will set. Now You go and purify your self by sipping water."

RĀMA RETURNS TO AYODHYĀ

Accepting Agastya's instruction, Rāma went to the shore of the lake frequented by apsarās in order to perform His evening worship. When He had sipped water for purification and finished His evening worship, Rāma again entered the great Agastya's hermitage. Agastya offered Rāma a meal made with top-quality tubers and roots and healing herbs. When Lord Rāma finished eating that tasty food which was like nectar, He was pleased and spent the night completely satisfied. In the morning He rose, performed His morning religious duties and approached the sage in order to leave. Offering respects to Agastya, Rāma said: "I ask you for permission to return to My city. Please give Me permission. I am fortunate and grateful to have met you. Whenever I need to purify Myself, I shall come to see you."

After Rāma spoke these wonderful words, the great ascetic Agastya, who saw things through the eyes of righteousness, replied: "O Rāma, Your beautiful words were amazing. You are the purifier of all living entities. O Rāma, one who sees You for a moment becomes purified, becomes qualified to go to the heavenly planets and is worshipable for the residents of the heavenly planets. Any living creature that looks at You with disdain will go to hell to be punished by Yama. O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, a person like You can purify all embodied beings. One who in this world recounts Your pastimes will attain perfection. Go happily and without anxiety. There will be no danger on Your path. Rule Your kingdom righteously, for You are the shelter of the world."

When the sage finished speaking, the wise Rāma joined His palms and bid farewell to the truthful sage. After offering respects to Agastya and all the other ascetics, He boarded the gilded Puṣpaka airship. The hosts of sages all around offered blessings to Rāma as He departed, just as the immortals worship Lord Indra. While Rāma was seated in the Puṣpaka airship in the sky, He looked like the moon near a cloud during the monsoon season. After being worshipped in different places, by noontime Rāma

reached Ayodhyā and entered the central area of the city. Getting down from the splendid Puṣpaka airship, Lord Rāma said to it: “You may go! May all be well with you!” Then Rāma spoke the following words to the guard at the gate: “Go to Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata who are quick in prowess and inform Them that I have arrived and that They should come quickly.”

RĀMA DECIDES TO PERFORM A RĀJASŪYA SACRIFICE

Having heard what Rāma said, the doorkeeper summoned the two princes in order to serve Rāma. When Rāma saw that Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa had arrived, He embraced them and then spoke these words to Them: “O descendents of Raghu, I have completed the task of the brāhmaṇa as necessary. Now I want to once again perform the rājasūya sacrifice, which is the bastion of righteousness. In My kingdom this sacrifice produces an undecaying and imperishable result. It increases righteousness and destroys all sin. You two are My own self. Therefore, I wish that the two of You should arrange for this remarkable rājasūya sacrifice which I desire. By doing so, righteousness will be perpetuated. Mitra achieved the status of Varuṇa by performing the rājasūya sacrifice with appropriate oblations. By performing a proper rājasūya sacrifice Soma achieved fame in all the worlds and a perpetual post. This very day You two should consider the means by which We can achieve ultimate good and then tell Me what it is.”

Upon hearing what Rāma said, Bharata, who was an expert speaker, joined His palms and spoke the following words: “O saint, in You is found the highest righteousness, on You rests the entire earth, as well as fame and immeasurable prowess. As the immortals consider Brahmā the lord of the world, so do we and all the kings of the world look upon You. O king, as a son looks at his father, such is the mood of all kings in relation to You. You are the shelter of all living entities. How You should perform that sacrifice is by defeating all the royal dynasties in the world. O king, all those who are concerned with their own amelioration will meet with destruction sprung from anger. O tiger among men, because of Your possession of good qualities, the world is subject to You. As such You should not destroy it.”

Upon hearing Bharata’s nectarean words, Rāma experienced unparalleled pleasure. He spoke the following auspicious words to Bharata, who increases the delight of Kaikeyī: “O sinless one, I am very, very pleased

with what You just said. O tiger among men, the spotless and righteous words which You uttered can deliver the world. O You who know what is right, the idea has occurred to Me to perform a rājasūya sacrifice, but after hearing Your fine words, I feel disinclined to do so. O elder brother of Lakṣmaṇa, intelligent persons should not do anything that unnecessarily burdens the world. One should accept the good advice of those who are younger. Therefore I shall heed Your good advice, O highly intelligent one.”

LAKṢMAṆA NARRATES THE STORY OF VṚTRA

After Rāma had spoken to Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa spoke the following auspicious words to Rāma: “O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, the great aśvamedha sacrifice cleanses away all sins and is difficult to undertake. May it please You to do such a sacrifice! There is a story about how Indra performed an aśvamedha sacrifice to purify himself after having killed a brāhmaṇa. In the past, during the war between the gods and demons, there was a daitya named Vṛtra who was respected by the world. He was one hundred yojanas wide and three hundred yojanas tall. He looked upon all the three worlds with love. He was knowledgeable about the principles of righteousness. He knew when and how to act and possessed great intelligence. He carefully ruled the entire earth with righteousness. During his reign, the earth produced everything one could desire, as flowers, fruits and roots are full of juice. During Vṛtra’s reign the earth produced abundant food grains without ploughing. In this way he enjoyed an opulent and amazing kingdom.

“Once Vṛtra had the following thought: ‘I shall perform the greatest austerity, for austerity brings about true welfare. Any other happiness is just illusory.’ Leaving his eldest son Madhureśvara in charge of the citizens, Vṛtra worshipped all the gods by performing gruesome austerities. When Indra came to know that Vṛtra was practicing austerities, he became very sad. Approaching Lord Viṣṇu, he said: ‘O mighty-armed one, by practicing austerities Vṛtra has conquered all the worlds. Because that righteous soul is so powerful, I cannot subdue him. O Lord of the gods, if he continues to perform such austerities, for as long as the worlds exist, they will be under his control. O Almighty one, You despise that magnanimous asura. If You do not become angry with him, then I shall not be able to live a moment longer. O Lord Viṣṇu, as long as he has love for You, he will have rulership over the worlds. Therefore, be attentive and bestow Your mercy upon the worlds. By

Your efforts the whole world can be peaceful and free from disease. O Lord Viṣṇu, all these gods are looking to You for help. Assist them in the great slaying of Vṛtra! You have always assisted those great personalities. Vṛtra is unbearable for any of us. Therefore, please give shelter to us who have no shelter.”

INDRA SLAYS VṚTRA

After hearing what Lakṣmaṇa said, Lord Rāma said: “O Lakṣmaṇa, please tell the whole story of how Vṛtra was slain.” Upon being requested in this way by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa again began narrating the transcendental story of Vṛtra: “When Lord Viṣṇu heard the plea of Indra and all the gods, He replied to them in the following way: ‘Previously I have felt a bond of friendship with Vṛtra. Therefore I shall not slay the great asura. Yet I must certainly do what will make you happy. Therefore I shall tell you the means by which Indra can kill him. O best of gods, I shall divide My personal effulgence into three parts. With one third of it you will no doubt be able to slay Vṛtra. One third of My effulgence will enter into Indra. Another third will rest in his thunderbolt. The last third will go to the earth, then Indra will kill Vṛtra.’

“When Lord Viṣṇu said this, the gods spoke the following: ‘O slayer of demons, certainly what You say is true. Bless You! We shall leave, eager as we are to slay Vṛtra.’ Then all the gods headed by Indra went to the forest where the great asura Vṛtra was practicing austerities. They saw that while the best of asuras was practicing austerities, he was glowing with brilliance and seemed to be swallowing the three worlds and scorching the sky. When the gods saw Vṛtra, they became frightened and thought: ‘How can we kill him? How might we avoid being defeated?’ As they were thinking in that way, Lord Indra grabbed his thunderbolt with both hands and threw it against Vṛtra’s head. Indra’s thunderbolt was blazing with flames like the fire at the end of the world. When it hit Vṛtra in the head, the world became frightened. It was not proper to kill the offenseless Vṛtra. Therefore the glorious Lord Indra became anxious and wandered from one end of the world to the other. Shortly thereafter the personification of brahminicide chased the fleeing Indra. All his limbs were covered with ruptures, because of which Indra felt agonized. After their enemy was slain, the gods headed by Agni repeatedly worshipped Viṣṇu, the Lord of the three worlds, but Indra was no where to be seen. The gods said: ‘O Supreme Lord, You are our

shelter and the original father of the world. You have appeared as Lord Viṣṇu in order to protect all living beings. This Vṛtra was killed by You, but Indra is suffering because of brahminicide. O tiger among the gods, please indicate how he can be freed from that.'

“When Lord Viṣṇu heard what they said, He replied: ‘Indra should worship Me with a fire sacrifice. Then I shall purify him. By worshipping Me with the holy aśvamedha sacrifice, he will regain his position as lord of the gods without any fear.’ After giving those nectarean instructions to the gods, Viṣṇu, the Lord of the gods, left while being praised by the residents of the heavenly planets.

INDRA PERFORMS AN AŚVAMEDHA SACRIFICE

After narrating the main part of story of the slaying of Vṛtra, Lakṣmaṇa began narrating the remainder: “When Indra slew the mighty Vṛtra, who frightened the gods, being stained with brahminicide, he lost consciousness. Upon reaching the farthest region of the world, he lost consciousness. He stayed there for quite some time, lying on the ground like a snake. When Indra was missing, the whole world became disturbed. The earth was practically desolate and its forests dried up. Also all of its springs, rivers and lakes dried up. All living beings were tormented by the lack of rainfall. While the whole world was perishing, the gods became disturbed. Then they remembered the sacrifice which Lord Viṣṇu had previously mentioned. Thereafter all the hosts of gods, along with priests and great sages went to that place where the bewildered Lord Indra was. Seeing Indra afflicted with brahminicide, they came before him and began performing the aśvamedha sacrifice. O king, then Lord Indra began participating in the great aśvamedha sacrifice. By doing this, Indra became purified of brahminicide. When the sacrifice was completed, the personification of brahminicide came to the gods and asked them: ‘Tell me where I can stay.’ The gods who were pleased and satisfied said: ‘O misfortune personified, you can divide yourself into four parts.’ When the personification of brahminicide, who was previously residing in Indra’s body, heard what the gods said, she divided herself into four parts and then chose places to stay, saying: ‘With one portion I shall reside in the waters of swollen rivers during the four months of the monsoon season, thus I will snuff the pride of those who wish to travel. With another portion I shall undoubtedly always reside in the world. I am telling you the truth. With my third portion I shall reside for three nights of every month in young women and thus destroy their pride. With my fourth portion I shall resort to those who kill brāhmaṇas that were never previously guilty of speaking a lie.’

“Then the gods said to her: ‘O misfortune personified, may all that be so! Do as you wish.’ After that, the joyful gods offered respects to Lord Indra, and he became free from anxiety and sin. When Indra regained his post, the whole world became peaceful. At that time, Indra praised that miraculous sacrifice. O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, such is the power of the aśvamedha sacrifice. O king, please perform the aśvamedha sacrifice.”

When the great soul Rāma, who was as glorious and powerful as Indra, heard Lakṣmaṇa’s fascinating speech, he was very pleased at heart.

THE STORY OF KING ILA

Upon hearing what the eloquent Lakṣmaṇa said, Rāma smiled and said: “O best of men, how You told the story of Vṛtra and the benefit of an aśvamedha sacrifice was very nice. My dear Lakṣmaṇa, it is said that in the past Prajāpati Kardama had a glorious son named Ila who was king of Bāhlika. He was a very righteous king. O tiger among men, that king subdued the entire earth and took care of his kingdom as if it were his child. The magnanimous gods, the wealthy daityas, as well as nāgas, gandharvas and wise yakṣas were always worshipping him because they were afraid of him. When he was angry, the three worlds would become frightened. King Ila, the magnanimous ruler of Bāhlika, was fixed in such righteousness and valor, and possessed intelligence.

“Once, during the pleasant month of Caitra, he went hunting in a lovely forest with his servants, army and conveyances. While in the forest, he killed hundreds and thousands of animals, but the great king was not satisfied by that slaughter. He therefore killed another ten thousand animals of different kinds, then he went to that region where Kārtikeya, the son of Lord Śiva, was born. At that place Śiva, the lord of the gods, was enjoying with his consort Pārvatī in the company of his attendants. Lord Śiva, whose emblem is a bull, assumed the guise of a woman and thus amused Pārvatī, who was standing beside a mountain waterfall. At that time, whatever plants, including trees, that were considered male in that forest became female. Whatever animals were male all became female. At that same time, King Ila, the son of Kardama, who had slain thousands of animals, arrived in that region. There he saw that all the snakes, beasts and birds had become females and that he and his followers had also become females. He was extremely sad when he saw what had happened to himself. Upon learning that this was the doing of Lord Śiva, he became frightened. The king, along with his servants, army and mounts, took shelter of Lord Śiva, whose neck is blue and who wears matted hair. Then Lord Śiva, the granter of boons, who was accompanied by Pārvatī, laughed and said to Kardama’s son: ‘Get up!

Get up! O son of Kardama! My dear royal sage, choose the boon of being without your masculinity!’ When told this by Lord Śiva, the king became stricken with grief. He did not choose from Lord Śiva the boon of remaining a woman, but something else. Then the greatly saddened king bowed before Pārvatī with all his heart and said: ‘O goddess, you are the giver of boons to the world. Your audience is never fruitless. Kindly cast your glance upon me!’

“Upon hearing King Ila’s heart-felt plea, Pārvatī, who was highly thought of by Lord Śiva, spoke the following auspicious words: ‘O king, Lord Śiva will give one half of the boon, and I will give the other half. Therefore request from me that time when you wish to be either a man or a woman.’

“The king was overjoyed when he heard the amazing boon which Pārvatī offered him and so he replied: ‘O goddess, if you are pleased with me, then let me be for one month a woman whose beauty is unmatched in this world, then for the next month I can be a man again.’ Understanding the king’s desire, the lovely Pārvatī spoke the following auspicious words: ‘O king, it will be so! When you become a man, you will not remember that you were a woman, and when in the following month you are a woman, you will not remember that you were a man.’

“In this way, Kardama’s son, King Ila, would become a man for one month, and then for the next month he would become the most beautiful woman in the three worlds.”

KING ILA AND HIS FOLLOWERS BECAME KIMPURUṢĪS

When Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata heard the story of King Ila narrated by Rāma, They were very surprised. The two brothers joined Their palms and again asked the great Rāma about the details of Ila's condition: "O king, why did King Ila choose to become a woman? What activities did he take up when he became a man?" Upon hearing this inquiry with curiosity, Rāma began telling what happened to the king: "The first month he became the most beautiful woman in the world. She was accompanied by women who were previously his followers. Accompanied by his followers, the king in the form of a woman with eyes like the petals of a lotus flower quickly entered a forest full of trees, bushes and creepers, and wandered about on foot. Abandoning their mounts all about, they roamed in the central region of that mountain range. Somewhere in that forest was a beautiful lake not far from a mountain. The lake had many flocks of birds. Ilā saw the demigod Budha, the son of Soma, bathing in the lake. His body was shining just like the full moon. He was practicing severe austerities in the middle of the water and was therefore difficult to overcome. He was glorious, full of love and situated in youth. Ilā was very surprised to see him in the water. Accompanied by her lady attendants who were previously men, she approached the shore of the lake. When Budha saw her, he was hit by Cupid's arrow. His mind and senses became agitated and he began moving through the water. While looking at Ilā, who was the most beautiful woman in the three worlds, he began thinking: 'Who is this woman who is more beautiful than any goddess? I have never before seen any woman more beautiful than her among the women of the gods, nāgas, asuras or apsarās. If she is not married she would be perfect for me.'

Thinking in this way, he left the water and came onto the shore. Reaching this hermitage, he called out to the women. When they approached him, he greeted them. Then he asked them: 'Who is that beautiful woman? Why has she come? Immediately tell me everything!'

When they heard his sweet inquiry, the women all replied with melifluous voices: ‘O brāhmaṇa, this beautiful woman is our perpetual mistress. She has no husband and has come into this forest all of a sudden.’

“When Budha heard the clear explanation given by the women, the brāhmaṇa absorbed himself in spiritual meditation to find out the truth. Thus he understood everything in detail about the king. Budha said to those men in the form of women: ‘Because you have become kimpuruṣīs, you will stay on this mountain. You should immediately choose to reside on this mountain. You may always live on roots, leaves and fruits. In the future you will get husbands called Kimpuruṣas.’

“After the women who had become kimpuruṣīs heard what Budha said, they took up residence on the mountain. Their numbers were great.”

BUDHA HAS UNION WITH ILĀ

After Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata heard how the kiṃpuruṣis came about, They said to Rāma: “That is amazing!” Then Rāma began telling Them more about Ilā, the son of Kardama. When Budha, the best of sages, saw that all the kiṃpuruṣis had left, he smiled and said to the beautiful woman: ‘O woman with a beautiful face, I am the beloved son of Soma. Cast your loving and affectionate glance upon me!’ When she heard this request, being abandoned by her attendants, she replied to the handsome and highly effulgent sage: ‘O son of Soma, I am your servant and am dependent on you. Please instruct me, then do as you please.’

“When Budha heard her remarkable statement, he was very happy. After that the son of Soma, feeling lustful, enjoyed with her. While the passionate Budha fully enjoyed the lovely Ilā, the month of Vaiśākha passed as if it were a moment. When the month was over, the lovely Ilā, who had a face like the full moon, woke up as King Ilā, the son of Kardama. He saw Budha, the son of Soma, practicing austerities in the water. The king spoke to the ascetic, who had his arms raised above his head: ‘O venerable one, I entered this mountainous region with my army and followers, but I do not see them. Where have they gone?’

“Hearing the question of the king who forgot that he had been a woman, Budha spoke the following fine words: ‘Your servants were killed in a shower of hailstones. Terrified by that tempest, you came and fell asleep in my hermitage. O hero, bless you! Do not worry. Be free from fear. Stay here as you like, living on roots and fruits.’ The king felt consoled by the sage’s words. Then, feeling sad because of the destruction of his people, he replied: ‘Although I am deprived of my servants, I shall not give up my kingdom. O brāhmaṇa, I cannot stay here for even a moment. Please give me permission to leave. O brāhmaṇa, my eldest son is righteous and glorious. His name is Śaśabindu. I shall bestow the kingdom upon him. O powerful sage, I cannot

stay here, abandoning my happy servants and wives. You have said something unacceptable for me.'

"After hearing what the king said, Budha gave the following surprising response in order to console him: 'Decide to stay here! O son of Kardama, do not be anxious! After you have stayed here for one year, I shall help you.' Upon hearing Budha's offer, the king decided to stay. After one month he became a woman and enjoyed with Budha. The next month he became a man again and began thinking about his royal duties. After nine months the beautiful Ilā gave birth to a son from Budha. The powerful child was named Purūrava. The child had the same effulgence as Budha. After the child was born, Ilā delivered the child into the hands of its father. After one year had passed and the king was a man again, Budha enjoyed telling him moral stories."

KING ILA PERFORMS AN ĀŚVAMEDHA SACRIFICE

When Rāma finished telling the amazing story of Purūrava's birth, Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata again asked: "O best of men, what did Budha do with Ilā after she had lived with him for one year? Please tell Us in detail." Upon hearing their sweet request, Rāma again began telling the story of Ila, the son of Kardama: "When the king had become a man again, Budha sent for the magnanimous and glorious sage Samvarta, as well as the sage Cyavana, the son of Bhṛgu, Ariṣṭanemi, Pramodana, Modakara and Durvāsā Muni. After summoning all those sages, the wise and eloquent Budha addressed those attentive well-wishers: 'This mighty King Ila is the son of Kardama. You all know what his situation is. Therefore do what is beneficial to him.'

"While the brāhmaṇas were discussing among themselves, the glorious son of Kardama arrived at the hermitage. Also Pulastya, Kratu, Vaṣaṭkāra and the glorious Omkāra arrived at the hermitage. They were all overjoyed to meet each other. Eager to help Ila, the king of Bāhlika, they discussed various options. Kardama spoke the following words beneficial to his son: 'O twice-born brāhmaṇas, listen to my words which are for the good of the king. I do not see anyone but Lord Śiva who is capable of remedying this situation, and there is no sacrifice more pleasing to him than the āśvamedha. Therefore, let us perform an āśvamedha sacrifice for the king.'

"When those foremost of brāhmaṇas heard what Kardama said, they decided to perform the sacrifice in order to worship Lord Śiva. Samvarta had a sagacious and victorious disciple known as Marutta who performed this sacrifice. They then went to Budha's hermitage and performed the great sacrifice, which greatly pleased Lord Śiva. When the sacrifice was completed, Lord Śiva was very pleased. He came to King Ila and said to all the brāhmaṇas: 'I am pleased by this performance of an

aśvamedha sacrifice. What act of kindness should I do for the king of Bāhlika?’

“In this way, the mindful brāhmaṇas placated Lord Śiva so that Ila could achieve full masculinity. Lord Śiva was pleased and restored masculinity to the king, after which he vanished. When the aśvamedha sacrifice was completed and Lord Śiva had disappeared, the brāhmaṇas, who could see the future, left as they had come. King Ila abandoned Bāhlika and took up residence in the central region of India in the famous city of Pratiṣṭhāna. Śaśabindu, the conqueror of enemy cities, became king of Bāhlika and King Ila, the mighty son of Kardama, resided in Pratiṣṭhāna. When King Ila gave up his body, he went to the excellent abode of Lord Brahmā. Then Ila’s son Purūrava became king of Pratiṣṭhāna. Such is the influence of an aśvamedha sacrifice, O best of men. By it King Ila who had become a woman regained his masculinity, as well as other difficult achievements.”

RĀMA ORDERS PREPARATIONS FOR THE SACRIFICE

Having told that story, the splendorous Rāma directed the following dutiful words to Lakṣmaṇa: “O Lakṣmaṇa, summon Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, Jābāli, Kāśyapa and all the foremost of brāhmaṇas who can perform an aśvamedha sacrifice. After consulting with them, I shall diligently perform the auspicious sacrifice.” Upon hearing Rāma’s instructions, Lakṣmaṇa acted quickly. He summoned all those brāhmaṇas so that they could have audience with Lord Rāma. When they saw Rāma, who was godly, glorious and indefeatable, they bowed to His feet. Then they offered Him blessings. Rāma then joined His palms and spoke to those best of brāhmaṇas about the virtuous aśvamedha sacrifice. When they heard what Rāma said, they offered their respect to Lord Śiva, whose emblem is a bull, and then began making all the necessary preparations for the aśvamedha sacrifice. When those foremost brāhmaṇas heard the wonderful news about the proposed aśvamedha sacrifice, they were extremely pleased.

When Rāma saw that the brāhmaṇas were making the necessary preparations for the sacrifice, He said to Lakṣmaṇa: “O strong-armed one, send for the great soul Sugrīva! Return with all the huge forest-dwelling monkeys so that they can enjoy the great festival. Also let the rākṣasa Vibhīṣaṇa who is enjoying all kinds of pleasures come to attend this great sacrifice. Have all those fortunate kings who are dedicated to pleasing Me come immediately with their followers to see the sacrificial arena. O Lakṣmaṇa, invite all the pious brāhmaṇas from one end of the land to the other to come and attend the aśvamedha sacrifice. Summon all the great ascetic sages and their wives from the far reaches of the land. O strong-armed one, take a sword and go to the site of the sacrifice accompanied by dancers and actors. Order the construction of a great sacrificial hall on the bank of the Gomati River in the forest of Naimiṣāranya, for that place is most holy.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, pacify the surrounding area with appropriate rites. Hundreds of knowledgeable people will come to Naimiṣāraṇya to attend this greatest of sacrificial performances. Immediately invite the people, and when they arrive, offer them food, honors and other requirements, and then return. Go with many hundreds of thousands of pack animals laden with rice, sesame seeds, mung beans, chickpeas and black beans. Similarly, take quantities of clarified butter, oil, milk, yogurt and fragrances. Bharata should take more than one billion gold coins and proceed ahead with full concentration. Have merchants set up shops stocked with all necessities around the site. Actors, dancers, cooks, and many women who are always youthful should also go there.

“Taking Bharata, go with the army ahead of You. First You should send ahead Vedic brāhmaṇas, the young and old, alert brāhmaṇas, servants, elders, treasurers, all My mothers, the princes, the residents of the palaces, a gold image of My wife and priests initiated for performing the sacrifice.”

After that, Rāma arranged for the costly accommodations of the important kings and their retinue. He also arranged for food, drink and clothing for them. Then Bharata left for Naimiṣāraṇya with Śatrughna, the great Sugrīva and all the monkeys. Expert brāhmaṇas began preparing food. Accompanied by royal ladies and many rākṣasas, Vibhīṣaṇa offered his respects to the the great ascetic sages.

RĀMA'S CHARITABLENESS

In that way, all the necessary ingredients were sent ahead. Then Rāma released a horse that was as black as an antelope and endowed with auspicious characteristics. After assigning Lakṣmaṇa and the ritualistic priests the task of keeping an eye on that horse, Rāma departed with His army for Naimiṣāraṇya. Seeing the elaborate sacrificial hall, Rāma was overjoyed and said: “This is beautiful!”

While Rāma was staying at Naimiṣāraṇya, all the kings brought Him gifts, and He welcomed them. The kings were given food, drinks, garments and all kinds of gifts. Bharata and Śatrughna were engaged in welcoming the kings. At that time the self-controlled monkeys headed by Sugrīva began serving food to the brāhmaṇas. The multitude of rākṣasas that had accompanied Vibhīṣaṇa engaged themselves in various services for the sages. The mighty Rāma gave luxurious tents for the wise kings and their servants to stay in. In this way, the aśvamedha sacrifice was nicely begun and Lakṣmaṇa watched after the horse as it wandered over the earth. The lion-like Rāma began the excellent sacrifice in this way.

During the sacrifice the only sound heard was “give me this,” or “give me that,” as attendants satisfied the requests of the sacrificial priests. In Rāma's great sacrifice all kinds of things were given, such as sweets and candies. During the sacrifice, the priests did not become distracted, nor did unnecessary words escape from their mouths. The rākṣasas and monkeys distributed different desirable things to the priests as everyone watched. Rāma's excellent sacrifice was crowded with happy and prosperous people. No one was dirty, miserable or weak.

The long-lived sages could not remember any other sacrifice in which such a large amount of charity was given. Whatever amount of gold was needed was available. Those who wanted wealth received it, and those who wanted jewels, received them. The distributors were seen to be

constantly giving out gold, silver, jewels and garments. The great ascetics said that such a sacrifice had never been performed by Indra, Soma, Yama or Varuṇa. The monkeys and rākṣasas were standing everywhere as they gave out abundant garments, wealth and food to the priests. King Rāma's all-perfect sacrifice lasted for more than one year, during which time nothing was wanting.

VĀLMĪKI ARRIVES WITH KUŚA AND LAVA

When that sacrifice was begun, Vālmīki suddenly arrived with his disciples. He saw the divine and amazing sacrifice, and the beautiful thatch huts that were constructed for the sages. He saw many carts full of first-class fruits and roots that were not far from the encampment. After being honorably received by Lord Rāma and the great sages, the glorious Vālmīki, who was self-realized, stayed there. Vālmīki said to two of his disciples, who were hale and hearty:

“You two go about with full attention reciting the whole Rāmāyaṇa poem in great bliss. Recite it in the holy residences of sages and brāhmaṇas, in the streets, on the main roads and in the royal residences. Especially recite it in the doorways of all the edifices built by Rāma where sacrificial activity is going on, as well as before the sacrificial priests. Tasting the different kinds of sweet fruits that grow on this mountain peak, go on chanting. O boys, by eating nothing but these sweet fruits and roots, you will not become fatigued. Please stay outside the city.

“If King Rāma summons you to hear the recitation, you may do so in a befitting manner before the seated sages. Every day recite with a sweet voice twenty chapters of the voluminous Rāmāyaṇa exactly as I taught it to you. Do not desire even the slightest wealth. What use is wealth for those who always live in a hermitage eating only fruits and roots? If Rāma asks you whose sons you are, then you should tell him that you are the disciples of Vālmīki.

“This sweet stringed instrument has never been seen in this region. While playing it, sing sweetly without any anxiety. You should recite this poem from the beginning. Do not disregard the king, for according to the principles of righteousness, the king is the father of all living beings. Therefore, tomorrow morning you two boys should begin reciting very sweetly the Rāmāyaṇa while playing this vīṇā.”

After giving the boys these many instructions, the supremely magnanimous Vālmiki became silent. Having been instructed by Vālmiki, the two sons of Sītā responded: ‘We shall do as you have requested.’ Then they left. The two youths guarded the sage’s wonderful instructions in their hearts, as did the Aśvinī-kumāras when taught the science of polity by Śukrācārya. Eager to begin reciting the Rāmāyaṇa, they passed the night happily.

KUŚA AND LAVA RECITE THE RĀMĀYAṆA

When the night ended and dawn broke, the two brothers bathed and offered oblations into the sacred fire. Then they went everywhere reciting the Rāmāyaṇa as the sage had previously instructed them. Lord Rāma Himself heard that recitation, which was done in accordance with the directions of previous great teachers. The recitation had unprecedented literary decorations. The poem itself was quite lengthy and was accompanied with the playing of stringed instruments. Lord Rāma was greatly amazed when He heard the two youths reciting.

When there was a pause in the sacrificial performance, Lord Rāma summoned the great sages, kings, paṇḍitas, Vedic scholars, Purāṇic bards, orators, elderly brāhmaṇas, those who could understand omens, upright and enthusiastic brāhmaṇas, physiognomists, singers, and especially those expert in performance of rituals, those who were expert in reciting the hymns of the Vedas in accordance with pitch and accent, scholars of poetics, astrologers, experts in Vedic ritualism, linguists and those who knew how to understand different kinds of signals.

He also summoned skilled logicians, theoreticians, scholars, specialists of the Sāma-Veda, historians, Vedic brāhmaṇas, artists, lawyers, expert singers and dancers, scriptural scholars, expert politicians and expounders of Vedānta philosophy. After calling all these people together, Rāma then summoned the two youths. The audience's eagerness to hear their recitation was increasing more and more. Then the two disciples of Vālmīki began singing. The musical presentation was sweet and superhuman. Because of the richness of the singing, no one could hear enough. All the hosts of sages and powerful kings were delighted. As they continually watched the two youths, they seemed to dink them with their eyes.

With full attention they said to each other: “These two youths look just like Lord Rāma. If they were not wearing matted hair and tree bark cloth, we would not be able to distinguish these two singers from Lord Rāma.”

As the citizens of the city and countryside were talking in this way and the two youths were reciting the first chapter of the Rāmāyaṇa, Nārada Muni arrived. The two youths continued reciting until they completed twenty chapters. By then it was afternoon. After hearing the recitation of twenty chapters of the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma said to His brother Bharata: “Immediately give those two great souls a gift of eighteen thousand gold coins, or anything else they may desire.”

Bharata immediately gave each youth gold coins, but Kuśa and Lava did not accept them. The two surprised brothers said: “What is the use of this wealth? We are forest-dwellers. We always live on the fruits and roots of the forest. What would we do with silver and gold in the forest?” Everyone who heard them say this was astonished. Everyone, even Lord Rāma, was surprised. Lord Rāma was very eager to find out where they learned the poem, therefore He asked the two disciples of Vālmīki: “How many verses does this poem have? Who is the author of this great poem? Where does he reside? Where is he now?”

The two disciples of Vālmīki replied to Rāma: “The venerable Vālmīki is the author of this epic poem which You have heard recited in part at this sacrifice. The great ascetic’s work has twenty-four thousand verses and one hundred topics. O king, from the beginning to the end, the great soul composed it in five hundred chapters divided up into six sections. Besides that he also composed a later ancillary section. Our preceptor Vālmīki composed the epic. In it he describes everything about Your life. O king, if You would like to hear it, then when there is free time during the sacrificial performance, hear this recitation in the company of Your brothers.”

Lord Rāma assented to doing so. With Rāma’s permission, the two brothers happily left and went to where the outstanding sage Vālmīki was. Thus it was that Lord Rāma came to hear that sweet recitation in the sacrificial hall in the company of sages and great kings. In this way, on the first day Lord Rāma heard Kuśa and Lava singing the epic poem with

beautiful sounds, sweet words, rhythm and the melody of stringed instruments.

RĀMA LEARNS THAT KUŚA AND LAVA ARE HIS SONS

Lord Rāma listened to the exceptionally beautiful recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa for many days accompanied by sages, kings and monkeys. During that recitation, Rāma came to the understanding that Kuśa and Lava were Sītā's sons. In the midst of the assembly Rāma summoned His messengers of pure behavior and wisely said to them: "Go to the venerable Vālmīki and question him whether Sītā's behavior is pure, or whether She is without sin, then come before this assembly and give the sage's appraisal. After discerning the sage's and Sītā's reactions, inform Me as soon as possible whether She would like to come here to prove the purity of Her fidelity. Tomorrow morning Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, should come before the assembly in order to purify Me of My offense."

When the messengers heard these astonishing instructions, they agreed and went to where the great sage Vālmīki was. After bowing to that great soul who was shining with immeasurable glory, they transmitted to him Rāma's tender and sweet message. After hearing what the messengers said and understanding Rāma's state of mind, the glorious sage spoke the following words: "Let it be so! Bless you! Sītā will do exactly as Rāma said, for a woman's husband is her worshipable deity."

When the powerful sage finished saying this, the messengers returned to Rāma and related everything that the sage said. Rāma was overjoyed to hear the great sage's response and He said to the sages and kings who were gathered there: "Hear Me all you sages with your disciples and kings with your followers! If anyone wants, let them see Sītā's pledge of purity." Upon hearing Lord Rāma's declaration, all the prominent sages loudly shouted: "Very good!" The kings also praised Lord Rāma: "O best of men, such a decision was only possible for You, not by anyone else in this world."

Having thus annouced the news that Sītā would make a pledge of purity on the next day, Rāma, the crusher of enemies, dismissed them all, giving them permission to return to their accommodations.

VĀLMĪKI VERIFIES SĪTĀ'S PURITY

When night ended with daybreak, King Rāma went to the sacrificial hall. Then He summoned all the sages. Vasiṣṭha, Vāmadeva, Jābali, Kāśyapa, Viśvāmitra, Dīrghatamā, the great ascetic Durvāsā, Pulastya, Śakti, Bhārgava, Vāmana, the long-lived Mārkaṇḍeya, the celebrated Maudgalya, Garga, Cyavana, Śātānanda, the powerful Bharadvāja, Suprabha, the son of Agni, Nārada, Parvata, the glorious Gautama, Kātyāyana, Suyajña and Agastya, whose wealth was asceticism—these and many other numerous great sages who practiced difficult austerities arrived there out of curiosity. Courageous rākṣasas and mighty monkeys all came there because of their curiosity. Thousands of brāhmaṇas observing vows, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras came from many different lands. People who were cultivating knowledge, engaging in fruitive activities or in the practice of yoga came to witness Sītā's pledge of fidelity. When they had gathered in the royal assembly, they were as still as rocks. When the sage Vālmīki heard this, he quickly came there with Sītā. She followed behind the sage with Her head hanging down. Holding Her palms together as tears flowed from Her eyes, She thought of Rāma. Seeing Sītā following behind Vālmīki, as the revealed scriptures follow Lord Brahmā, there arose a loud shout of approval. At that time everyone's heart became afflicted with sorrow and they were overwhelmed with grief so that there was a loud commotion. Some people shouted out: "May all be well with Rāma!" Others shouted: "May all be well with Sītā!" Anyone who could see Sītā and Rāma shouted out blessings to Them.

Then the preeminent sage Vālmīki entered into the midst of the throng of people with Sītā and addressed Rāma: "O son of King Daśaratha, here is Sītā, who is practicing good vows and observing religious principles. Because of adverse criticism, You abandoned Her near my hermitage. Because You are afraid of public criticism, I shall give You proof of Sītā's purity. Please give me permission to do so. These two brothers are Sītā's sons. They are actually Your sons and are therefore difficult to overcome. I

am telling You the truth. I am the tenth son of Varuṇa. I do not remember ever having told a lie. These two youths are in fact Your sons. I have practiced austerities for many thousands of years. If there is any fault in Sītā, then may I not achieve the fruit of those austerities! I have never previously committed any sin by my mind, actions or words. If Sītā is sinless, then I shall enjoy the fruit of such a life. O descendent of the Raghu Dynasty, with my five senses and mind I determined that Sītā was innocent and gave Her shelter beside a forest spring. She is pure in behavior, faultless and worships Her husband like a god. Therefore, to You who are afraid of public criticism I give this testimony. By my transcendental vision I discerned Her purity. Out of fear of public condemnation, You abandoned Her who is dearer to You than Your own life, even though You know She is pure.”

VĀLMĪKI VERIFIES SĪTĀ'S PURITY

When Vālmiki finished saying that, Lord Rāma looked at Sītā and replied with joined palms in the midst of the assembly: O you who know what is right, what you say is true. O brāhmaṇa, on the basis of your words I believe Sītā is blameless. On a previous occasion in the presence of the gods I accepted proof of Sītā's purity. At that time She swore regarding Her purity, on the strength of which I let Her again stay in My home. But later, there was strong public criticism of Her, for which I abandoned Her. O brāhmaṇa, although I knew She was blameless, I abandoned Her because of My fear of public opinion. Please forgive Me. I also know that these two young brothers, Kuśa and Lava, are My sons. Having been proved pure before the world, Sītā is very dear to Me."

Knowing what Rāma's intentions were, the mighty Indra and the best of gods headed by Lord Brahmā all came in order to witness Sītā's pledge. āditya, Vasu, Śiva, the Viśvedevas, the hosts of Maruts, the sādhyas, all the great sages, nāgas, Garuḍa and the siddhas were all pleased at heart and came there to witness Sītā's pledge. Seeing that the gods and sages had arrived, Lord Rāma again spoke: "O you best of gods! I would be very pleased to accept as proof the faultless words of Vālmiki regarding Sītā's purity before the world."

Thereafter Vāyu blew a gentle and fascinating breeze scented with divine fragrance all about, which delighted the crowd of people. All the people who had come from every country watched with full attention this inconceivable event as if they were back in time during Satyayuga. When Sītā, who was dressed in saffron cloth, saw that everyone had arrived, She joined Her palms and spoke the following words with Her head bowed down: "If My mind never thinks of anyone but Rāma, then let the earth goddess open up for Me! If I worship Rāma with My mind, body and words, then let the earth goddess open up for Me! If I speak truthfully when I say I know no one else but Rāma, then let the earth goddess open up for Me!"

After Sītā swore in this way, a miracle occurred. From out of the earth came a divine lion throne. It was adorned with sparkling gems. It was being carried on the heads of courageous nāgas with divine bodies. The earth goddess was also there. With both her arms she welcomed Sītā with an embrace and sat Her on the throne. Seeing Sītā seated on the throne and entering into the subterranean region of Rasātala, the gods showered celestial flowers down over Her. A loud cry of approval rose up from the gods, who exclaimed: “Very good! Very good! O Sītā, Your character is so perfect!” The gods hovering in the sky also spoke in many ways. Their minds were overwhelmed with delight when they saw Sītā entered the earth. The sages present at the sacrificial hall, as well as the kings, were all completely dumbfounded. So too were all the moving and nonmoving beings in the sky and on the earth, including the gigantic dānavas and the serpent kings in Pātāla. Some people shouted for joy. Others were absorbed in thought. Some watched Lord Rāma. Some were dazed and stared at Sītā. Upon seeing Sītā enter the earth, all the assembled people became bewildered for about an hour.

LORD RĀMA'S BEREAVEMENT

When Sītā entered into Rasātala, all the monkeys and sages who were around Rāma cried out: “Well done! Well done!” Rāma, however, was very sad. His mind was depressed. He was leaning on a stick. His eyes were overflowing with tears and His head was hanging down. He cried and shed profuse tears for a long time. Overwhelmed with anger and sorrow, Rāma spoke the following words: “Today My mind wants to experience unprecedented sorrow in that I saw the disappearance of Sītā, whose form was like the goddess of fortune. When Sītā was on the other side of the ocean, She was out of My sight. But since I had brought Her back from there, why has She left the surface of the earth? O earth goddess, please return Sītā to Me! If you refuse, then I shall exhibit My anger! Surely you are My mother-in-law. When King Janaka was ploughing the ground, he uncovered Sītā from within you. As such, return Sītā or swallow Me up also. I can live in heaven or hell with Sītā. Please bring back Sītā, for I am crazy about Her. If you do not return Sītā to Me as She was, I shall completely destory you along with your mountains! I shall destory the entire earth! Then there will only be water here.”

While Rāma, who was afflicted with anger and sorrow, was speaking in this way, Lord Brahmā accompanied by hosts of gods said to him: “O Rāma! O Rāma! Do not be so disturbed. Remember Your previous existence, O crusher of enemies! I am certainly not reminding You of Your transcendental position. O invincible warrior, remember at this moment Your appearance as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The chaste Sītā is faultless. She was Your consort previously. Now She has gone to dwell comfortably in Nāgaloka. On the strength of Her austerities She will again achieve You. You two will be reunited in the spiritual world. Of this there is no doubt. Therefore, pay close attention to what I say in this assembly. The epic poem about Your pastimes which You heard is the greatest of poems. O Rāma, it no doubt describes all of Your activities. From Your appearance to the times when You experienced happiness and distress, and Your later pastimes in the

future—all that has been described by Vālmīki. O Rāma, This is the first poetic work and it is based on You. There is no one else who is glorious enough to merit such a poem, except for You. Previously I heard this poem about You in its entirety in the company of the gods. It is transcendental and astonishing. Everything in it is true, there is nothing false. O tiger among men, please listen to the remaining part of the epic poem Rāmāyaṇa concerning future events with full attention as a matter of duty. O illustrious Rāma, the remaining portion of the Rāmāyaṇa is called Uttara. Listen to it in the company of these preeminent sages. O descendent of Kakutstha, You should not do anything else before hearing this excellent poem!”

After saying this, Brahmā, the lord of the three worlds, returned to his heavenly abode along with his relatives and the gods. The great sages who reside in Lord Brahmā’s abode got his permission to remain because they wanted to hear the Uttara-kāṇḍa portion of the Rāmāyaṇa about Lord Rāma’s future. After Rāma heard Lord Brahmā’s instruction, He said to the supremely effulgent Vālmīki: “O venerable one, the sages who reside in Lord Brahmā’s abode wish to hear the remaining portion of the Rāmāyaṇa. Therefore tomorrow morning the Uttara-kāṇḍa should be recited.” When Rāma finished giving this instruction, He dismissed the crowd of people. He passed the night absorbed in thought of Sītā.

RĀMA'S MOTHERS PASS AWAY

At the crack of dawn, Rāma summoned the sages and said to His two sons: “Chant without any anxiety.” When the great sages had taken their seats, Kuśa and Lava began reciting the Uttara-kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, which deals with the future activities of Rāma. After Sītā had entered the earth by means of Her transcendental potency, Rāma’s mind was extremely disturbed at the end of the sacrifice. Not seeing Sītā, He considered the whole world as void. Because His mind was so disturbed by sorrow, He could not find any peace. Rāma gave valuable gifts and bid farewell to all the kings, bears, monkeys, the general populace and foremost brāhmaṇas. Having concluded the sacrifice in that way in accordance with the rules and having dismissed everyone, Rāma then entered Ayodhyā with His mind absorbed in thoughts of Sītā.

After the sacrifice was completed, Rama lived with His two sons. Rāma did not care to marry another woman in place of Sītā. Whenever He performed a sacrifice, He had a golden statue of Sītā present to represent His wife. He performed sacrifices for ten thousand years, including aśvamedhas and ten-fold vājapeyas, in which He gave away large amounts of gold coins. The glorious Rāma also performed the agniṣṭoma sacrifice, as well as the atirātra, with dairy products and great wealth. While ruling the kingdom in this way, the exceptional King Rāma passed His time in righteous activity. The bears, monkeys and rākṣasas remained under Rāma’s rule. All the kings of the earth engaged themselves in pleasing Lord Rāma every day. During Rāma’s reign the monsoon always arrived on time. The weather was always nice. The city and countryside were crowded with happy and prosperous people. While Rāma ruled, no one died untimely, no living being suffered from disease and no one was poor.

After a long time, Rāma’s glorious mother Kausalyā passed away surrounded by her sons and grandsons. Sumitrā and the illustrious Kaikeyī also followed the same path. Because these ladies performed many kinds of

pious activities, they reached the threefold abode of God in the spiritual world. There they reunited with King Daśaratha and enjoyed with him. Those fortunate queens achieved the fruit of their pious activities. From time to time Rāma gave large amounts of charity to ascetic brāhmaṇas on behalf of His mothers without distinguishing among them. The righteous Rāma gave valuable gifts to the brāhmaṇas during the anniversary funeral rites of his parents, and performed sacrifices to satisfy the forefathers and gods. By always performing different kinds of sacrifices to increase piety, Rāma passed many thousands of years happily.

BHARATA GOES TO THE LAND OF GANDHARVA

After some time had passed, Yudhājit, the king of Kekaya, sent his own preceptor to Lord Rāma. The preceptor was the brāhmaṇa sage Gārgya, the son of Aṅgirasā. As a sign of affection, King Yudhājit sent a superb gift of ten thousand horses, blankets, jewels, brightly colored cloth and other beautiful ornaments. When the wise Rāma heard that the great sage Gārgya had arrived with valuable gifts from King Aśvapati's maternal uncle, Yudhājit, He approached him on foot from two miles away along with His younger brothers. Then He welcomed him, just as Indra welcomes Bṛhaspati. After welcoming the sage and accepting the gifts, Rāma also presented the sage with gifts. Then He inquired about the well-being and everything else of the sage and His uncle.

After the sage was seated, Rāma asked him the following question: "What message does My uncle send that your honorable self has come here? You are the most eloquent person, a direct manifestation of Bṛhaspati." Upon hearing Rāma's inquiry, the great sage began describing the wonderful purpose of his visit: "O mighty-armed one, Your uncle King Yudhājit sends You this affectionate message. Listen if You wish to hear it: 'The kingdom of Gandharva abounds in edible fruits and roots. The beautiful country rests on both sides of the Sindhu River. O heroic Rāma, it is protected by thirty million strong gandharvas armed with weapons and skilled in combat who are sons of Śailūṣa. After defeating them, You can reside in Your own beautiful city of Gandharva. You are the only shelter for that most beautiful land. Be pleased to do so. I am not telling You what to do, for that would be unbeneficial.'"

Rāma was very pleased to hear this message from His uncle related by the great sage. Assenting to do so, Rāma glanced toward Bharata. Claspng the hands of the sage, Rāma said to him: "O brāhmaṇa sage, these

two young warriors, Takṣa and Puṣkala, who are Bharata's sons, will go to that country. Under the protection of My uncle, they will rule the land righteously. These two princes and their armies will go in advance of Bharata. After they defeat the gandharvas, they will settle down in two different cities. When Bharata enters those two cities and settles His two sons there, the righteous Bharata will return to Me."

When Rāma finished saying this to the brāhmaṇa sage, He then commanded Bharata to coronate His sons as kings and then to depart with His army. When there was an auspicious asterism, Bharata placed Aṅgirasā's son, Gārgya, in the fore and departed with His two sons and army. The army left the city of Ayodhyā as if it had been sent by Lord Indra. Lord Rāma, who was indefeatable even by the gods, accompanied them for quite some distance. Carnivorous beasts and blood-thirsty rākṣasas preceeded ahead of Bharata. Thousands of extremely frightful flesh-eating goblins who were eager to eat the flesh of the gandharvas accompanied the army. Many thousands of lions, tigers, boars and airborne birds also accompanied the army. Spending a month and a half on the road, the army arrived without mishap at the land of Kekaya, which was full of happy and prosperous people.

BHARATA DEFEATS THE GANDHARVAS

When Yudhājit, the king of Kekaya heard that Bharata, the commander of the army, had arrived with Gārgya, he was greatly pleased. The king of Kekaya set out in a hurry with a great crowd of people and Bharata to where the gandharvas who could change their form at will resided. Bharata and Yudhājit arrived with their armies at the city of the gandharvas. Hearing that Bharata had come, the courageous gandharvas assembled for combat and roared loudly everywhere.

Then a tumultuous and hair-raising battle took place, which lasted for seven nights without either side winning. Rivers of blood flowed. The swords, spears and bows were its alligators. Human cadavers were floating all about in the currents of those rivers of blood. Then Bharata became very angry and shot at the gandharvas a frightful mystic weapon named Samvarta that belonged to Yama. In this way, Bharata annihilated thirty million gandharvas in a moment, tearing them to pieces with the Samvarta weapon of Yama. The residents of the heavenly planets could not remember ever having seen such a fierce battle. In just a second Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī, slaughtered all those mighty gandharvas. Then He settled down in two opulent cities. In the charming land of Gandharva, the city where Takṣa stayed became known as Takṣaśilā, and the city where Puṣkala stayed became known as Puṣkalāvati.

The two cities possessed abundant gold and jewels. They were landscaped with groves of trees. The two cities seemed to be competing with each other with their excellent features. Both cities were so very nice. The affairs of both cities were faultless. They were full of gardens and vehicles. The cities were well-divided by streets with market places at the ends. The cities looked gorgeous with their spacious mansions and many multi-storied buildings everywhere about. The cities were beautified by large temples and graced with trees, such as tāla, tamāla, tilaka and bakula. Bharata stayed there for five years, then He returned to Ayodhyā. When

Bharata arrived, He greeted Rāma, who was like a second Dharmarāja, as Indra would greet Lord Brahmā. Then Bharata informed Rāma of all that had happened in the kingdom of Gandharva. After hearing how Bharata had lived in that kingdom, Rāma was very pleased.

ANĠADA AND CANDRAKETU RECEIVE KINGDOMS

When Rāma heard from Bharata the news of the successful venture in the kingdom of Gandharva, He experienced great joy with His brothers. Then He spoke the following wonderful words to His brothers: “O Lakṣmaṇa, the two sons of Yours, Anḡada and Candraketu, are expert in determining what is right. They have the firmness and valor necessary for protecting a kingdom. I shall coronate them kings and You can assign them a suitable land where the two archers can reside without any problems. My dear brother, look for a country where they can live without being harassed by other kings, where hermitages will not be destroyed and where we may not become offenders.”

Bharata replied to Rāma: “There is a beautiful country called Kārupatha which is disease-free. Anḡada can live in a city there and Candraketu can live somewhere else in another beautiful and healthy city.” Rāma accepted Bharata’s suggestion. Since Rāma had already subdued that country, He bestowed it upon Anḡada. Lord Rāma settled Anḡada in the charming city called Anḡadīyā, which was well-protected. Candraketu, who had the body of a wrestler, was settled in the divine and heavenly city called Candrakāntā in the land of Malla. After this, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata were supremely pleased. Those invincible warriors coronated the two princes. After their coronation, the two princes set off with full attention. Anḡada went toward the west and Candraketu headed toward the north. Lakṣmaṇa personally went with Anḡada and Bharata went as the companion of Candraketu. Lakṣmaṇa stayed for one year in Anḡadīyā. When His invincible son Anḡada was firmly established, Lakṣmaṇa returned to Ayodhyā. Bharata also stayed in the city of Candrakāntā for something more than one year, then He returned to Rāma’s feet.

Both Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata were devoted to serving Rāma's feet. Because of Their love, a long time passed while they were engaged in Their duties without Them realizing it. Thus ten thousand years passed while the three brothers were engaged in handling the affairs of the citizens. The three brothers passed Their time with Their minds fully absorbed as They dwelt in the righteous and opulent city of Ayodhyā. They were like three sacrificial fires flaring up from the burning wood and oblations.

PERSONIFIED TIME VISITS RĀMA

Some time later, after Rāma had been engaged in executing His duties, the personification of time came in the guise of an ascetic to the gate of the royal palace. He said to the firm and illustrious Lakṣmaṇa: “I have come on some very important business. Please inform Rāma of my arrival. O mighty Lakṣmaṇa, I am the messenger of a powerful great sage of immeasurable effulgence and I have come to see Rāma over an urgent matter.”

When Lakṣmaṇa heard what he said, He hurriedly informed Rāma of the ascetic’s arrival: “O lustrous one, may You conquer this world and the next by executing Your royal duties! A messenger as bright as the sun has come to see You.” Upon hearing what Lakṣmaṇa said, Rāma said: “My dear brother, let the powerful sage bearing a message enter!” Lakṣmaṇa replied: “So be it!” Then he had the sage come in. The sage was blazing with glory like the scorching sun. When the effulgent sage reached Lord Rāma, he spoke to Him the following sweet words: “May You prosper!”

Rāma then welcomed the sage by offering him various forms of hospitality, such as water for rinsing the hands, and began inquiring about his general well-being. After being questioned in this way by Rāma, the eloquent sage sat on his golden seat and responded. Then Rāma said: “O wise one, I welcome you. Whose messenger are you that you have come here and what is the message?”

When urged by the king, the sage spoke the following words: “Since we are both men, I shall tell you something for Your own good, if You wish to hear it. The message of the sage, if You wish to hear it, is that You will pass away soon.” Rāma verbally assented to this and then said to Lakṣmaṇa: “Go stay at the door and send the gatekeeper away. The sage and I shall discuss about how I am to pass away.” After stationing Lakṣmaṇa at the entranceway, Rāma said: “O sage, please speak. Please relate the guarded

message which you have brought without any anxiety. My heart is eager to hear it.”

RĀMA HEARS LORD BRAHMĀ'S MESSAGE

The sage continued: “Hear, O mighty king, the reason for which I have come. Lord Brahmā sent me. O conqueror of enemy citadels, I am all-devouring time. In a previous age You created me by Your internal potency. Therefore I am Your son. This is what the grandsire Lord Brahmā says: ‘My dear Rāma, Your time for protectiong the worlds has expired. In the past You withdrew the worlds into Yourself by Your transcendental potency and then reclined on the great ocean. Then, at the begining of this creation, You engendered me. While You were lying down on the gigantic many-hooded serpent named Ananta, who was floating in the water of the ocean, You engendered by Your potency two powerful entities—Madhu and Kaitabha. From their pile of bones this earth with its mountains was produced. From Your navel sprouted a lotus flower as brilliant as the sun, from which I also emerged. Then You assigned me the task of engendering all the living entities. When You entrusted me with that responsibility, I worshipped You as the Lord of the world and prayed:

O Lord, please protect all the living entities, for You are the one who has bestowed power upon me.

“Then You agreed to my request, saying that You would appear in Your capacity as the eternal Lord Viṣṇu to protect the living entities. Later You appeared as the powerful son of Aditi. You assisted Your brother Lord Indra in his affairs and increased his opulence. When Rāvaṇa began terrorizing the living entities, You decided to slay him by appearing in the guise of a human being. At that time You decided to personally stay in this world for eleven thousand years. O best of men, by Your decision You appeared as someone’s son. Now the time span for Your life among human beings is finished.’

“This is Lord Brahmā’s message. That is why I have come to You. O great king, if You wish to stay longer to protect the living entities, You may

do so. Bless You! Or else, if You wish, You may go back to the spiritual world. With Lord Viṣṇu as their protector, may all the gods be without anxiety!”

When Rāma heard Lord Brahmā’s message delivered by the personification of all-devouring time, He smiled and replied: “I have heard Lord Brahmā’s amazing message. As such your visit has pleased Me very much. I appeared in this world to protect the worlds. Bless you! Now I shall return to where I came from. It so happens that I was just thinking of you, and that is why you have come. I have no doubt about it. O destroyer of everything, I am always obliged to assist the gods in their affairs, just as Lord Brahmā said.”

RĀMA FEEDS DURVĀSĀ MUNI

While Rāma and the sage were talking, the venerable sage Durvāsā arrived at the royal gate in order to see Rāma. Approaching Lakṣmaṇa, the great sage said: “Immediately let me see Rama! I have a matter which can only be taken care of by Him.” After hearing the sage’s demand, Lakṣmaṇa bowed to the sage and said: “Tell Me what matter it is. What is it you want? What should I do? O brāhmaṇa at present Rāma is busy, therefore please wait for some time.”

When that tiger among sages heard this, he became overwhelmed with anger. Then he spoke the following words to Lakṣmaṇa, as if he was going to incinerate Him: “O Lakṣmaṇa, let me see Rāma this very moment! If You do not do so this very moment, I shall curse You, this kingdom, this city, Rāma, Bharata and Your offspring! I cannot keep this anger in my heart!”

Upon hearing these angry words of the great soul, Lakṣmaṇa began thinking about the import of what the sage said: “If I alone am killed, that is all right, but not so if everyone is destroy.” Thinking in this way, He decided to inform Lord Rāma. When Rāma heard what Lakṣmaṇa had to say, He dismissed the personification of time, then He hurried to see Durvāsā, the son of Atri. After bowing before the great soul who was glowing with glory, Rāma joined His palms and inquired for what reason the sage had come. Durvāsā, the best of sages, replied: “Listen, O You who are fond of righteousness! O sinless one, I have been fasting for one thousand years. Today I would like to eat something in order to complete it.”

When King Rāma heard this, He was pleased at heart and arranged for that eminent sage to be fed. After eating that nectarean food, that best of sages thanked Rāma and returned to his own hermitage. When the sage passed by Lakṣmaṇa on the way to his hermitage, Rāma began remembering the message delivered by personified time, and He therefore became

morose. Thinking about the horrible thought of being separated from His family relations and others, He was stricken with anguish. With His mind depressed, His head sagged down and He was unable to talk. Contemplating with intelligence the message brought by personified time, Rāma realized that nothing was going to last. Then He became silent.

LAKṢMAṆA GIVES UP HIS BODY

Rāma was as sullen as the moon caught in the grips of an eclipse. Seeing Him with His head hanging down, Lakṣmaṇa joyfully spoke the following sweet words: “O mighty-armed one, You should not feel sorry for Me, for one’s destiny is determined by one’s activities in the previous life. My dear brother, please kill Me without any hesitation and thus uphold Your promise! O Rāma, those who break their promise go to hell. O king, if You are pleased with Me, if You are merciful to Me, then kill Me without any anxiety! Increase Your own righteousness!”

When Rāma heard what Lakṣmaṇa said, His mind and senses became disturbed and He summoned His ministers and family priests. Then He told them what had happened, how He had made a promise to personified time and about Durvāsā’s visit. Upon hearing all this, the ministers and priests sat quietly. Then Vasiṣṭha said the following: “O strong-armed Rāma, I have already foreseen Your hair-raising demise and Your separation from Lakṣmaṇa. Destiny is very powerful. You should give up Lakṣmaṇa. Do not break Your promise. When promises are broken, righteousness is destroyed. When righteousness is destroyed, the three worlds with all moving and nonmoving beings, including the hosts of gods and sages, are destroyed without a doubt. Therefore, O tiger among men, for the protection of the three worlds, dispose of Lakṣmaṇa.”

After Rāma heard what Vasiṣṭha said in that assembly of ministers, priests and everyone else, He spoke the following words to Lakṣmaṇa: “O Lakṣmaṇa, I send You away so that righteousness may not be harmed. For a pious person, to be abandoned or killed are both the same.” When Rāma finished speaking, His eyes were brimming with tears. Lakṣmaṇa hurried away without even visiting His own home. Going to the bank of the Sarayū River, Lakṣmaṇa sipped water three times for purification. Joining His palms, He controlled His senses and gave up His life. When Lakṣmaṇa

ceased breathing, Indra and all the other gods, sages and apsarās showered down flowers over Him. Lakṣmaṇa vanished with His body from the sight of all people. At that time, Indra accompanied Lakṣmaṇa as He entered the heavenly world. When those preeminent gods saw that Lakṣmaṇa, the one quarter part of Lord Viṣṇu, had arrived, they worshipped Him with great delight.

RĀMA CORONATES KUŚA AND LAVA

After Rāma sent away Lakṣmaṇa, He was afflicted with sorrow. Then He spoke the following words to His family priests, ministers and citizens: “Today I shall coronate Bharata, who is fond of righteousness, as ruler of Ayodhyā, then I shall go to the forest. Get all the paraphernalia ready. Do not let time pass. Today I shall go to the same place Lakṣmaṇa has gone.”

When all the citizens heard what Rāma said, they bowed their heads to the ground as if they had died. When Bharata heard what Rāma said, He fainted. He expressed contempt for the kingdom and spoke as follows: “O king, I swear by truth that without You I do not care for this kingdom or the enjoyment of heaven. O king, please coronate Kuśa and Lava. Kuśa can rule over the southern part of Kośala and Lava can rule over the northern part. Let messengers hurriedly go to Śatrughna and inform Him of Our imminent departure. This should be done immediately.”

Upon hearing Bharata’s statement and seeing the hanging heads of the sorrowful citizens, Vasiṣṭha said: “My dear Rāma, look at these citizens of the land! Knowing their cherished goal, do not displease them!” On the insistence of Vasiṣṭha, Rāma had the people rise and asked them: “What do you want Me to do?” Then all the citizens said to Rāma: “O Rāma, we shall go wherever You go! O descendent of Kakutstha, if You are pleased with the citizens, if You love them greatly, let us go with our wives and children on the same path You travel! Wherever You go, whether to an austere forest, an impassable place, a river, or the ocean, we shall go with You. If You are unable to abandon us, then take us with You. That would be the most pleasing thing for us and the best boon. O king, it would be entirely pleasing to us to follow You.”

Seeing the steadfast devotion of the citizens, Rāma assented to their request. Having decided to do His duty, that very day Rāma installed Kuśa as king over the southern half of Kośala, and Lava as king over the

northern half of Kośala. After coronating those two great souls, Rāma sat them in his lap and embraced them. After that He smelled their heads and assigned them to their respective kingdoms.

He gave each of them gifts of thousands of chariots, tens of thousands of elephants and hundreds of thousands of horses. He also bestowed upon them abundant jewels and gold and surrounded them with happy and prosperous people. Then He sent them to their respective cities. After coronating Kuśa and Lava and established them in their own capitals, Rāma sent messengers to the great soul Śatrughna.

RĀMA DECIDES WHO WILL ACCOMPANY HIM

On the order of Lord Rāma, messengers of speedy prowess were sent. They quickly left for Madhupurī without stopping along the way. After three days and nights they reached Madhupurī. Then they related everything in detail to Śatrughna, namely, Rāma's promise to personified time, Lakṣmaṇa's abandonment, the coronation of Rāma's two sons, the arrival of the citizens, Rāma's orders to build a charming city named Kuśavatī on the slopes of Vindhya Mountains for Kuśa, Lava's residing in the charming city of Śravastī, Rāma's and Bharata's depopulation of Ayodhyā and Their efforts to return to the spiritual world. In this way the messengers informed the great soul Śatrughna of everything, saying: "O king, please hurry! Then they were silent.

When Śatrughna heard about the horrible destruction of His family, He summoned the citizens and His family priest Kāñcana and told them everything. He decided that He would also give up His body with His brothers. Therefore He installed His two sons as kings. Subāhu became king of Madhupurī and Śatrughātī became king of the outlying areas. Śatrughna divided the army of Madhupurī between His two sons and bestowed wealth upon them. After installing Subāhu over Madhupurī and Śatrughātī over the outlying regions, Śatrughna left for Ayodhyā in a chariot.

When He reached Ayodhyā, He saw the great soul Rāma blazing like a fire. He was dressed in fine silk and was accompanied by immortal sages. After offering respects to Rāma with a controlled mind and joined palms, He spoke to Rāma with due consideration for His rightful duty: "O delight of the Raghu Dynasty, I have coronated My two sons and come. O king, know that I am determined to accompany You. O hero, do not say anything else or give Me any other instruction. I especially do not want that one like Me should have to refuse Your order."

Upon understanding Śatrughna's firm resolution, Lord Rāma said to Him: "All right!" At the end of this conversation monkeys able to change their form at will, as well as multitudes of bears and rākṣasas, arrived in great numbers. They all arrived being led by Sugrīva. Eager to see Lord Rāma, they came with the intention of going to heaven. Knowing that Rāma was about to depart, all those sons of gods, sons of sages and sons of gandharvas had come.

All the monkeys and rākṣasas offered their respects to Rāma and said: "O king, deciding to go with You, we have come. O Rāma, if You go without us, we will be slain by You as if by Yama's rod of chastisement." Meanwhile, the mighty Sugrīva also offered respects to Rāma in accordance with custom and informed Him of his own ambition: "O king, having installed Aṅgada as king, I have come. You should know that I have decided to accompany You."

Upon hearing Sugrīva's statement and considering him a friend, Rāma replied: "My dear friend Sugrīva, I could not go to the world of the gods or to the spiritual world without you!" Thereafter Rāma smiled and agreed to the request of the monkeys and rākṣasas. Then Rāma spoke to Vibhīṣaṇa, the king of the rākṣasas: "O courageous Vibhīṣaṇa, as long as there are people living in this world, you should remain in Laṅkā and maintain your self. As long as the sun and moon shine and the earth exists, as long as the stories about Me are current in the world, your reign will last. I have told you this out of friendship. You should follow My order. Protect the citizens righteously. Do not say anything else. O powerful lord of the rākṣasas, I want to tell you something else. Worship Lord Jagannātha, the Lord of the universe and worshipable Deity of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. He is always worshipped by the gods headed by Indra."

Vibhīṣaṇa agreed to Rāma's request and remembered it always. After speaking to Vibhīṣaṇa in that way, Rāma said to Hanumān: "You were determined to live for a long time. Do not break this decision. O lord of monkeys, for as long as My stories are current in the world, enjoy yourself happily while upholding My command." After being addressed in this way by Rāma, Hanumān was extremely delighted and said: "As long as stories about You are current on the earth, I shall remain here upholding Your order."

Then Lord Rāma said to the elderly Jāmbavān, the son of Brahmā, as well as Mainda and Dvividā: “You five—Jāmbavān, Vibhīṣaṇa, Hanumān, Mainda and Dvividā—shall live until the end of Kaliyuga.” After saying this, Rāma addressed all the bears and monkeys: “All right, all of you come with Me as you said.”

RĀMA PREPARES TO LEAVE FOR THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

In the morning, the broad-chested and illustrious Rāma said to His family priest: “A sacred fire should be carried ahead on the path by twice-born brāhmaṇas, as well as the brilliant white umbrella used in the vājapeya sacrifice.” Then Vasiṣṭha arranged for all the necessary things required by rule for the great departure. Lord Rāma put on fine silk garments and wore rings of kuśa grass on both hands. Then He recited Vedic mantras as He walked to the Sarayū River. No one said a single thing, nor did they do anything as they tread that joyless path. They left their homes as the does the shining sun.

On Rāma’s right side was the goddess of fortune Lakṣmī holding a lotus flower. On his left side was the earth goddess Bhūmī. And before Him was His power for destruction. Different kinds of arrows, long and excellent bows, and other weapons all walked along in human forms. The Vedas in the form of brāhmaṇas, the goddess Gāyatrī who protects everyone, as well as the praṇava omkāra and the mantra vaṣaṭ devotedly followed Rāma. Great sages and all the brāhmaṇas followed Rāma, who was the open doorway to heaven. The palace women, children, elderly, maids and servants all followed Him. Also the women of Bharata’s and Śatrughna’s palaces followed that procession led by the sacred fire. All those great souls and their wives and sons gathered together on that great journey led by the sacred fire in order to follow the wise Rāma. All the ministers, servants and their children, relatives, followers and animals joyfully followed Rāma. All the happy and prosperous citizens followed behind Rāma while absorbed in thoughts of His qualities. In that procession men, women, relatives, birds and beasts who were all Rāma’s followers were joyful and free from sin. All the hale and hearty monkeys were freshly bathed and overjoyed. They chattered noisily as they followed Rāma. There was no one in that crowd who was sad or embarrassed. United together as they were, they looked jolly and amazing.

Whatever people of the countryside came to see Rāma leaving also joined the procession. The bears, monkeys, rākṣasas, and residents of the city of Ayodhyā all followed attentively behind Rāma with the highest devotion. Whatever unseen beings were left in the city also joined the procession in order to go to heaven. Whatever moving or nonmoving beings saw Rāma passing also began followed behind Him. One could not find even the tiniest living thing in Ayodhyā. All living creatures were following Rāma.

RĀMA ASSUMES HIS VIṢṆU FORM

After travelling one and a half yojanas toward the west, Rāma saw the holy waters of the Sarayū River. Approaching the river which was full of whirlpools, King Rāma and the citizens came to a certain place on the bank. At that time, Lord Brahmā, the grandsire of the world, accompanied by all the gods, sages and great souls, went to where Rāma had come in order to ascend to heaven. He arrived surrounded by millions of gleaming aerial vehicles. The whole sky was lit up with brilliant light as if it were made of sparkling light. Those self-effulgent beings who were residents of the heavenly planets by dint of their pious activities were illuminating the sky with their effulgence. A favorable breeze was blowing that was fragrant and pleasurable. The gods were showering down flowers in huge amounts. Hundreds of drums sounded and gandharvas and apsarās were gathered in crowds.

Rāma placed His two feet in the Sarayū River. Then Lord Brahmā spoke from the sky: “O Viṣṇu, please come! Bless You! O Rāma, it is our good fortune that You have arrived. O strong-armed one, accompanied by Your godly brothers, assume Your own transcendental form. Enter into the form which you choose. Either manifest Yourself as Viṣṇu, or else enter directly into the eternal spiritual sky. You are the shelter of the world. No one knows You in truth except Your internal potency who is Your consort, the broad-eyed Sītā. You are inconceivable, the greatest being who is imperishable and ageless. As such, enter whatever form You want.”

Upon hearing Lord Brahmā’s words, Rāma reflected for a while, then accompanied by His brothers, He entered His own Vaiṣṇava potency. Thereafter the gods headed by Indra and Agni, as well as the sādhyas and Maruts worshipped the Lord in His form as Viṣṇu. Also the hosts of divine sages, gandharvas, apsarās, Garuḍa, nāgas, yakṣas, daityas, dānavas, and rākṣasas were there. The gods praised the Lord, saying: “By Your presence all

our desires are fulfilled and we are prosperous and delighted. All our sins are gone. All glories to You!”

Then the splendorous Viṣṇu said to Lord Brahmā: “O observer of good vows, I give to You this world with its multitudes of people. All these people have followed Me out of love. These glorious people are My devotees. Because they have given up their lives for My sake, I must be merciful to them.” Upon hearing what Lord Viṣṇu said, Lord Brahmā said: “All these people who have come will go to the planets called Santānaka. Whatever animals were thinking of You will give up their lives with devotion and reside in the Santānaka planets. The Santānaka planets are invested with all spiritual qualities and are beyond Brahmaloḥa, My own abode.”

The monkeys and bears who were all engendered by the gods all took births similar to their respective progenitors. They all entered into their parents, while Sugrīva entered into the orb of the sun. While beholding all the gods, those bears and monkeys achieved forms like their parents. After Lord Brahmā had spoken, everyone went to the holy place of Gopratāra on the banks of the Sarayū River and bathed as tears streamed from their eyes in ecstasy. Whoever dunked themselves in the water gave up their lives happily. As the human beings gave up their bodies, they boarded aerial vehicles. Millions of birds and beasts entered the waters of the Sarayū River, then achieved divine bodies and ascended to the threefold spiritual world. With their effulgent bodies they were as splendorous as demigods. When both moving and nonmoving beings had bathed in the waters of the Sarayū River, they ascended to the spiritual world. In that way, whatever bear, monkey or rākṣasa bathed in the Sarayū River, gave up their bodies and entered the spiritual world.

THE GLORIES OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

Kuśa and Lava say: “Such is the story of Lord Rāma composed by the great sage Vālmīki along with its final section called Uttara-kāṇḍa. This work was highly appreciated by Lord Brahmā. In that way Lord Viṣṇu, who pervades this world of moving and nonmoving living entities, was again manifest in His own spiritual abode as He was previously. Afterwards the gods, gandharvas, siddhas and topmost sages would always gladly listen to the poem of the Rāmāyaṇa in the heavenly planets.

“This story of Rāma increases life and good fortune. It destroys sin. The Rāmāyaṇa is as good as God Himself. The wise listen to it during obsequial rites. The childless get children. The poor get wealth. One who reads just one verse is freed from all sins. If one who has committed sins every single day reads even one verse, he or she will be freed from all sins. One should give cloth, a cow and gold to the reciter of this Rāmāyaṇa. When the reciter is satisfied, all the gods are satisfied. One who reads this Rāmāyaṇa will be long-lived. He or she will have sons and grandsons in this world and after passing away, will be glorified in this world. One who attentively recites this Rāmāyaṇa in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon or at twilight will never have any problems. The charming city of Ayodhyā will remain vacant for many years. When Rṣabha becomes king, he will reside there.

“Vālmīki, the son of Varuṇa, has composed this epic poem, which greatly pleased Lord Brahmā, and included the final section about future events. One who listens to one chapter achieves the result of one thousand aśvamedha sacrifices and ten thousand vājapeya sacrifices. One who hears the Rāmāyaṇa achieves the result of visiting holy places like Prayāga, holy rivers like the Ganges, forests like Naimiṣāranya and plains such as Kurukṣetra. One who gives away gold at Kurukṣetra during a solar eclipse and one who listens to the Rāmāyaṇa in this world both achieve the same

result. One who listens to the story of Rāma during an anniversary funeral ceremony becomes free from all sin and goes to Lord Viṣṇu's abode. The original epic poem was composed in the past by Vālmiki. One who always listens to it will achieve a body similar to Lord Viṣṇu's. By hearing it, one will get a wife and children, wealth and descendents. Knowing that this is true, one should hear it with a concentrated mind. This transcendental Rāmāyaṇa is a manifestation of the Gāyatrī mantra. One who always recites or hears the pastimes of Lord Rāma with devotion will become sinless and have a long life. One who wants to achieve good fortune should always think of Lord Rāma. One should hear this story every day from brāhmaṇas. One who reads this entire story of Lord Rāma will at the end of his or her life undoubtedly go to the transcendental abode of Lord Viṣṇu. Not only that, even his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, his father and his father too will undoubtedly go to Lord Viṣṇu's abode. Lord Rāma's pastimes bestow the four pursuits of human life: religiousity, economic development, sense enjoyment and liberation. As such one should endeavor to regularly hear this great poem. One who hears with devotion one verse or a quarter of a verse will achieve Lord Brahmā's abode and will be worshipped by Lord Brahmā always. Thus is this ancient story. Bless you all! May Lord Viṣṇu enjoy without interruption and may His might increase!