

Tiny Tales from the Ramayana



TINY TALES FROM THE RAMAYANA



A Book of Two Hundred 100-Word Stories

Laura Gibbs



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About This Book

The Ramayana — Rama-Ayana, “Rama’s Journey” — is the story of Rama and his wife Sita, avatars of the devas (gods) Vishnu and Lakshmi. Rama was born to vanquish Ravana, king of the fierce rakshasas (demons). There are many versions of the Ramayana in India, and Rama’s adventures are also famous throughout South Asia. In this book, you’ll see Rama’s story revealed in a series of vignettes from the ancient Sanskrit Ramayana composed by the poet Valmiki, along with other Ramayanas from India and beyond. For first-time Ramayana readers, I’ve included a list of characters and additional notes at Ramayana.LauraGibbs.net.

The paragraph you just read about the Ramayana is 100 words long, as is this paragraph, and that’s also the length of each episode in this book. The episodes go by fast, but you can slow down when you find one you like. Read it again. Let it sink in. You might even write your own versions of your favorite episodes, using your imagination to add details. Meanwhile, if you get confused by a particular episode, don’t get bogged down; just keep reading! You can find more 100-word stories from the Ramayana, along with more stories from India, at 100Words.LauraGibbs.net.

THE
MISDEEDS OF
RAVANA



1. Ravana Is Born

Vishrava was a brahmin who loved knowledge and the gods, but his wife, Kaikasi, was a rakshasi, a shape-shifting creature who loved gold and blood.

Their first child, a son, was dreadful to behold, having ten heads and ten pairs of arms. Vishrava gave his son the name Dashagriva, which means Ten-Necks. Later he would be called Ravana, He-Who-Roars.

The sky rained blood at Dashagriva's birth. Jackals howled, and other vicious beasts ran in ill-omened circles around the rakshasi mother and her child.

Vishrava and Kaikasi later had three more children: two boys, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, and a girl, Shurpanakha.

2. Ravana Petitions Brahma

Seeking to become invincible, Dashagriva petitioned the god Brahma. He fasted and prayed for ten thousand years, chopping off one head every thousand years and casting it into the fire.

Dashagriva was about to cut off his last head when the deva appeared. “Ask any boon!” Brahma said.

“Protect me from devas and danavas, from nagas, from gandharvas, from...” Dashagriva’s list went on and on, but he didn’t include humans, as he considered them to be weaklings.

Brahma granted Dashagriva’s petition, giving him a pot of immortal nectar which he hid in his navel.

Brahma also restored Dashagriva’s lost heads.

3. Ravana's Brothers Petition Brahma

Dashagriva's brothers Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna also prayed to the gods for boons.

Vibhishana was an unusual rakshasa: he revered dharma, righteousness. Vibhishana thus prayed that he always uphold dharma, and Brahma granted his prayer.

Kumbhakarna, however, was a monstrous giant, and the devas feared him. At their request, Saraswati, devi of wisdom, confused Kumbhakarna's tongue when he asked for his boon: instead of Nir-deva-tvam (death-to-devas), Kumbhakarna asked for Nidrava-tvam (sleepiness).

As a result, Kumbhakarna was awake only one day each year. If anyone dared disturb his sleep before the year had passed, Kumbhakarna was fated to die that same day.

4. Ravana Confronts Shiva

Dashagriva was riding near Mount Kailasha when an invisible force stopped his chariot.

Before him he saw Nandi, Shiva's bull. "Turn back, Dashagriva!" Nandi shouted. "This is Shiva's home."

"No one can stop me!" replied Dashagriva. To demonstrate his power, Dashagriva extended his twenty giant arms and lifted up the mountain.

Shiva saw this and laughed, and then he pressed down on the mountain with his big toe, trapping Dashagriva underneath.

Dashagriva screamed, and the mighty roar impressed Shiva.

"What a fine voice!" Shiva declared. "I will free you from the mountain, and henceforth you will be called Ravana, He-Who-Roars."

5. Ravana Sings for Shiva

Ravana became a devoted follower of Shiva. To honor the god he decided to make a musical instrument: a veena. Ravana cut off one of his heads and one of his arms and made them into a veena, and to string the veena he used his own guts.

Ravana then sang for Shiva as he played the veena made of his own body.

Impressed, Shiva appeared before Ravana. “Behold the indestructible Moon-sword, Chandrahasa,” said Shiva, as he waved a sword that was crescent-shaped, like the moon. “I give it to you.”

Ravana bowed in reverence, accepting the sword from Shiva.

6. Shiva Rewards Ravana

Shiva offered Ravana another reward. “Tell me what you want,” Shiva said.

“I want her!” said Ravana, pointing to the beautiful woman standing beside Shiva. She was the devi Parvati, Shiva’s wife, but Ravana did not know that. He only knew that she was beautiful and that he wanted her.

Shiva had to grant his wish, but Parvati found a way out. She grabbed a frog and went to see Brahma. “Make this frog [manduka] into a double of me,” she said.

Brahma did so, and that was the woman Ravana took to Lanka.

This was Mandodari, Ravana’s chief wife.

7. Meghanada Becomes Indrajit

Ravana and Mandodari's first-born son roared like thunder, so they named him Meghanada, "Cloud-Roar."

Meghanada became a warrior, and in his father's war against the gods he used a spell of darkness to make himself invisible. That is how he ambushed Indra, King of the Devas, and captured him.

"Free Indra, and I'll grant you a boon," Brahma told Meghanada.

"Make me immortal!" Meghanada replied.

"I cannot do that," Brahma replied.

"Then give me invincible weapons. I will win my own immortality in battle!"

Brahma agreed, and Meghanada set Indra free. Brahma then gave Meghanada his new name: Indrajit, Conqueror-of-Indra.

8. Shurpanakha Argues with Mandodari

Ravana's wife Mandodari was a vegetarian; his sister Shurpanakha, however, was a carnivore.

One day Shurpanakha commanded Mandodari to serve meat for dinner, and Mandodari refused.

Shurpanakha was furious at Mandodari, and at Ravana too. She shouted to her husband Vidyutjiva, "Swallow Ravana! Swallow him NOW!"

Vidyutjiva obeyed. He extended his tongue, wrapped it around his brother-in-law, and swallowed him.

"Help me, Shurpanakha!" shouted Ravana from inside Vidyutjiva's stomach. "Your son will be my heir! I'll find you a new husband!"

So Shurpanakha carved open her husband to rescue Ravana. Vidyutjiva died, and Shurpanakha forever blamed Ravana for his death.

9. Vaishravana Becomes Kubera

Ravana's father, Vishrava, was a brahmin; his father was Pulastya, mind-born son of Brahma.

Vishrava had another wife, and with her, another son: Vaishravana.

Vaishravana practiced austerities for a thousand years, living on water, then air, then nothing.

Brahma offered him a boon.

"Make me a guardian of the world!" Vaishravana said.

Brahma nodded. "Indra guards the east, Varuna the west, Yama the south; you will guard the north. You will be Kubera, lord of yakshas, protector of wealth!"

Kubera lived in Lanka, the golden city. The rakshasas had lived there long ago, but the devas had driven them away.

10. Ravana Occupies Lanka

Ravana's maternal grandfather, Sumali, always hoped Ravana would reclaim the golden city of Lanka. "Take the city from Kubera!" Sumali urged. "Let it be a rakshasa city again as it was long ago."

Ravana's general, Prahasta, agreed. "The devas were wrong to drive the rakshasas from Lanka, and we are right to take it back."

Ravana sent Prahasta to Lanka as his emissary. "Give us back the city," Prahasta said to Kubera, "or we will fight you."

To Prahasta's surprise, Kubera yielded the city. "I will go to the Himalayas," he said. "Tell my brother that golden Lanka is his."

11. Ravana Battles Yama

Next, Ravana vowed to conquer Yama, God of Death, so he rode his chariot south towards the Land of the Dead.

Yama's soldiers attacked Ravana, but Ravana destroyed them all.

Yama himself then rode forth to face Ravana, and Ravana's soldiers fled in terror.

Alone on the battlefield, Ravana and Yama fought fiercely for seven days and nights. Then, as Yama was about to strike Ravana with the Death-Hammer, Brahma appeared.

"Halt!" Brahma shouted. "I gave Ravana my blessing; no deva can kill him, not even the God of Death."

So Yama vanished, and Ravana declared himself Conqueror of Death.

12. The Devas Hide from Ravana

A king named Marutta was conducting a sacrifice. There were many priests in attendance, along with the devas Indra, Yama, Kubera, and Varuna.

Ravana showed up, and the terrified gods disguised themselves as animals: Indra became a peacock, Yama a crow, Kubera a lizard, and Varuna a swan.

Ravana then challenged Marutta to a fight, but the priests advised the king to surrender.

“I have won!” shouted Ravana. He then ate all the priests, drank their blood, and flew away.

Glad for their escape, the devas bestowed blessings on the animals whose disguises had helped them to escape Ravana’s notice.

13. Kubera Rebukes Ravana

Kubera was appalled by Ravana's repeated attacks on the priests, on the devas, and on his own yakshas, so he sent a message to him, brother to brother. "Your deeds dishonor our father," Kubera's messenger told Ravana. "You need to stop your bad behavior."

Enraged, Ravana shouted, "I will kill Kubera for this! And I will kill all the other guardians of the world as well. Nobody speaks to Ravana this way!"

Then Ravana seized Kubera's messenger and sliced off his head.

"Come, rakshasas!" Ravana shouted, and he led his army in an attack on Kubera's home in the Himalayas.

14. Ravana Attacks Kubera

Kubera rallied his yaksha soldiers to defend their mountain home from Ravana's attack. Kubera and the yakshas fought bravely, but they were no match for the rakshasas. Soon the battlefield was littered with yaksha corpses lying in rivers of blood that streamed bright red in the snow.

The surviving yakshas all fled, and Kubera alone confronted Ravana on the battlefield.

"Someday someone will send you to hell," Kubera said, "and then you will understand the consequences of your actions."

The half-brothers fought until Kubera fell, wounded but not dead.

Ravana then stole Kubera's flying chariot and returned, triumphant, to Lanka.

15. Ravana Rapes Rambha

One night Ravana found the apsara Rambha wandering in the woods.

She was very beautiful, and Ravana burned with lust. He grabbed her and whispered, “How lucky for you we have met!”

“Stop it!” she shouted, fighting back. “You are my elder relative, my uncle-in-law! My husband Nalakubara is the son of Kubera. He’s your nephew. Let me go!”

But Ravana knew no shame, and he brutally raped Rambha that night.

When Rambha told Nalakubara what Ravana had done, he cursed his uncle. “If Ravana ever touches another woman against her will, his head will split into a thousand pieces.”

16. Ravana Encounters Vedavati

As Ravana wandered the woods, he saw a beautiful woman practicing austerities at a fire-altar, clothed in a deer-skin, her hair twisted in jatas.

“Lovely lady,” he said, “you should be wearing silks and jewels, not this ascetic garb. Be my wife!”

“I am Vedavati,” she replied, “and I am dedicated to the god Vishnu; I will marry no other.”

Ravana grabbed her hair, but Vedavati magically cut herself free.

“With my dying words I curse you, Ravana!” she said, throwing herself into the flames. “I will be born again for your destruction.”

Vedavati would later be reborn as Sita.

17. Ravana Fights Kartavirya

Ravana was sacrificing to Shiva on a riverbank, singing and dancing in Shiva's honor.

Meanwhile, Kartavirya, Thousand-Armed King of the Haihayas, was relaxing in the river with his wives. As Kartavirya splashed, the waters rose and the flood carried away Ravana's offerings.

Enraged, Ravana fought with Kartavirya in a ferocious battle. Finally, Kartavirya knocked Ravana to the ground, and the devas watching from heaven rejoiced.

Ravana's grandfather Pulastya pleaded with Kartavirya to let Ravana go. Out of respect for the great rishi, who was a mind-born son of Brahma, Kartavirya agreed.

Ravana was strong, but there is always someone stronger.

18. Ravana Fights Vali

Ravana went looking for Vali, the monkey-king, wanting to fight him. He found Vali on the ocean's shore, engaged in worship.

Ravana planned to sneak up on Vali from behind, but Vali grabbed him and shouted, "Got you!" He then tucked Ravana under his arm and soared up into the sky.

Down below, the rakshasas saw their king struggling to get free. They chased Vali but could not catch him.

After flying around the world, Vali landed and let Ravana go.

"I want to be your friend, great monkey!" said Ravana.

Vali laughed and agreed; thus Vali became Ravana's ally.

19. Ravana Battles Rama's Ancestor

Ravana defeated the kings of the earth, one after another.

He then marched on Ayodhya, where Anaranya was king.

King Anaranya led his army into battle, but Ravana incinerated them in a blast of fire, leaving only Anaranya alive.

Anaranya fought on, firing hundreds of arrows at Ravana, but Ravana's armor repelled them all.

Ravana then struck Anaranya on the head, knocking him to the ground.

As he lay dying, Anaranya cursed the rakshasa king. "An avenger will arise from Ayodhya!"

Thus Anaranya's son Khatvanga had a son, Dilipa. His son was Raghu whose son Aja had a son: Dasharatha.

RAMA, SON OF DASHARATHA



20. Dasharatha Longs for a Son

King Dasharatha of Ayodhya married Kaushalya, princess of Koshala. She gave Dasharatha a daughter, Shanta, but not a son.

Dasharatha then went to King Ashwapati of Kekaya and asked to marry his daughter Kaikeyi, for he had heard a prophecy that a princess of Kekaya would give birth to a great son. "I will make your daughter's son king after me," Dasharatha promised. But Kaikeyi did not give Dasharatha any children.

Dasharatha then married Sumitra, hoping a woman who was not of royal birth would give him a son, but Sumitra likewise could not give Dasharatha a child.

Dasharatha despaired.

21. Dasharatha Summons Rishyashringa

King Dasharatha consulted his advisors. “We must conduct a sacrifice so that the devas grant me a son,” he said.

“Long ago I heard a prophecy about this,” said Sumantra, the royal charioteer. “The prophecy said that Rishyashringa, the forest rishi, would bring King Dasharatha a son from heaven. Rishyashringa dwells in the neighboring kingdom of Anga. Summon him here to conduct the sacrifice!”

“I have heard of Rishyashringa,” said Dasharatha. “When there was a drought in Anga, he brought rain to the kingdom. I will ask him to use his powers to bring a royal son to this kingdom.”

22. The Story of Rishyashringa

Rishyashringa was the son of Vibhandaka, a forest rishi. By practicing austerities, Vibhandaka sought to acquire powers that could cause rain to fall or cause infertile couples to bear children.

The god Indra, fearful of Vibhandaka's powers, sent a heavenly apsara to tempt him.

When Vibhandaka saw the apsara, his semen spurted forth and fell to the ground. A doe ate the semen and gave birth to a child, a beautiful boy with the antlers of a deer. That boy was Rishyashringa.

Vibhandaka then raised Rishyashringa in complete isolation, seeking to protect him forever from the females of any species.

23. Rishyashringa Meets a Woman

Because Vibhandaka defied Indra, Indra deserted Anga.

No rain fell. Crops failed. The people starved.

The king of Anga sent his daughter to Vibhandaka's ashram. "Seduce Vibhandaka's son, and bring him here. He will appease the rain-god."

The princess waited for Vibhandaka to go gather food, and then she began singing and dancing.

Rishyashringa was enchanted. "Who are you?" he asked. "What are you?"

"I'm a woman," she said.

Rishyashringa had never seen a woman before. He went with her to the palace, and rains returned to the land.

Later, Rishyashringa went to Ayodhya to help Dasharatha get a son.

24. The Devas Make a Plan

As Rishyashringa was conducting King Dashratha's ritual, the devas begged Vishnu to take birth as Dasharatha's son.

"As Dasharatha's son, O Vishnu, you can put a stop to Ravana's cruelty," said Indra. "He torments the whole earth! You are the only one who can save us."

"Ravana won protection from devas and danavas, from nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, and so on," Brahma explained. "But in his arrogance, he did not request protection from humans."

"I will do as you ask," Vishnu said to the gods. "I agree to be born as Dasharatha's son; Prince Rama of Ayodhya will be my avatar."

25. The Devas Answer Dasharatha's Prayer

As Rishyashringa completed the sacrifice, a celestial being appeared, bearing in his hands a bowl of kheer.

King Dasharatha gave the bowl to Kaushalya, chief among his three wives.

"We must share it," she said.

So Kaushalya ate half, and gave the bowl to Sumitra.

Sumitra ate half, and gave the bowl to Kaikeyi, Dasharatha's favorite.

Kaikeyi ate half, and then gave the bowl back to Sumitra, who ate what was left.

And so Kaushalya gave birth to Rama, Kaikeyi to Bharata, and Sumitra had two sons: Lakshmana, who was devoted to Rama, and Shatrughna, who was devoted to Bharata.

26. Rama Amazes Kaushalya

One day Kaushalya left Rama in his cradle and went to offer prayers. She was amazed to find Rama there, eating the puja sweets! “How can he be both here and there?” she wondered.

As she stared, Rama displayed his cosmic form: infinite beings, millions of universes contained in every part of his body. All of time, all of existence radiated from him.

Kaushalya bowed her head. “O Lord, I beg you to let me forget what you have shown me here.”

So Kaushalya forgot, and in obedience to his mother Rama never revealed his true form to her again.

27. Kaikeyi Saves Dasharatha

The god Indra asked King Dasharatha to help him fight the armies of the rakshasa Shambara.

Queen Kaikeyi rode with Dasharatha into battle as his charioteer, and when the wheel-axle broke, Kaikeyi bent over the edge of the chariot and stuck her hand through the wheel, using her arm to replace the axle.

Later, when Dasharatha was wounded by the rakshasas' weapons, she carried him away from the battlefield to safety.

"I owe you my life!" said Dasharatha gratefully. "I grant you two boons to use for whatever you want whenever you want."

Later, Dasharatha would bitterly regret this promise.

28. Dasharatha Goes Hunting

King Dasharatha was a skilled hunter; he could even shoot blindfolded, using only sound to guide him.

One day he heard a deer drinking. He fired.

Then, he heard a scream.

He had shot a boy!

“My parents...” the boy gasped, breathing his last.

Dasharatha picked up the boy and carried him through the forest until he found the boy’s parents, old and blind.

They wept over the boy’s corpse, and the father then cursed Dasharatha. “You too will lose a son!” he said. “You will feel our pain.”

The old man’s words haunted Dasharatha, but he told no one.

29. Vishvamitra Visits Dasharatha

The rishi Vishvamitra came to King Dasharatha's court.

"During the sacrifices, unholy rakshasas attack the priests in my ashram," Vishvamitra explained. "I seek royal protection for our rituals."

"I will come gladly!" replied King Dasharatha.

"No, not you," said Vishvamitra. "Your son must come: Rama."

"He is too young to fight rakshasas!" exclaimed Dasharatha.

"You are wrong," said Vishvamitra. "I know Rama."

"I will send my army!"

Without a word, Vishvamitra got up to leave.

Dasharatha relented. "Let Lakshmana go with him," he pleaded. "They have never been apart."

So Rama, accompanied by Lakshmana, went with Vishvamitra to fight rakshasas.

30. The Story of Tataka

There were many rakshasas who had been attacking Vishvamitra's ashram, but the most vicious and dangerous among them was Tataka.

Tataka had once been a beautiful yaksha on whom Brahma bestowed the strength of a thousand elephants.

When the rishi Agastya killed her husband, Tataka vowed revenge, and Agastya in turn cursed Tataka, turning her into a monstrous rakshasi.

Enraged, Tataka and her sons, Maricha and Subahu, attacked every rishi and defiled every sacrifice.

That is why Vishvamitra brought Rama into the forest.

“You must kill Tataka and her sons!” he commanded.

“I will do as you say,” Rama vowed.

31. Vishvamitra Arms Rama

Vishvamitra prepared Rama by giving him many weapons. There were deadly discs and spears, maces and lassoes, plus the divine weapons called astras, unleashed by the power of the mind.

Vishvamitra gave Rama weapons with which he could fight not just rakshasas, but also asuras and danavas, gandharvas and nagas, all possible enemies.

Rama received the weapons, and Vishvamitra recited the mantras that Rama would need to unleash this arsenal of supernatural power. Rama learned all the mantras.

The weapons then spoke to Rama with human voices. “We are yours to command,” they said, “and we will keep you safe.”

32. Rama Faces Tataka

Vishvamitra had brought Rama into the forest and taught him how to wield supernatural powers: arrows powered by the sun and moon, wind and lightning, air and fire, invincible weapons of the mind.

Then Tataka arrived. They could hear her voice shrieking ever louder as she approached the ashram.

“Kill her!” commanded Vishvamitra.

“But she is a woman,” protested Rama.

“The enemy has no gender,” replied Vishvamitra. “Kill her now!”

Rama chanted a mantra and then launched an overwhelming arrow in the direction of her voice.

His arrow struck Tataka in the heart and she fell to the ground, dead.

33. Tataka's Sons Attack

Vishvamitra then commanded Rama and Lakshmana to guard his ashram against rakshasas while the priests conducted sacred rituals.

At night, rakshasas attacked: Maricha and Subahu swooped down, screaming with rage, spewing blood upon the fire-altar. These were Tataka's sons, seeking to avenge their mother's death.

Rama swiftly shot an arrow at Maricha which struck him in the chest, hurling him far away into the ocean.

Lakshmana, meanwhile, shot Subahu, who fell dead on the spot.

Freed from the rakshasas, the priests conducted their rituals in peace.

But the journey was not over; Vishvamitra had still more plans for the princes.

34. The Story of Ahalya

During their journey, Vishvamitra told the princes many stories. One story he told was about Ahalya.

Brahma created Ahalya, the most beautiful woman in the world. He then gave her to the rishi Gautama as a wife.

Gautama, however, had no time for Ahalya, focused as he was on his devotions.

Indra, meanwhile, lusted for the beautiful Ahalya. Disguised as Gautama, Indra took Ahalya to bed.

Gautama found out and cursed them both.

“You, Indra, will become impotent,” he said. Indra’s testicles fell to the ground.

“You, Ahalya, will turn into a stone.” Ahalya was trapped, motionless, inside a stone.

35. They Come to a Deserted Ashram

As they continued their journey over mountains and through forests, Vishvamitra led the princes into a deserted ashram. Rama wondered why Vishvamitra had brought them there. And then... something surprising happened. As Rama's foot brushed against a rock, a beautiful woman suddenly appeared before him.

"You have liberated me, Rama," she said. "I am Ahalya, and I welcome you to Gautama's ashram."

Next, Gautama emerged from the forest. He bowed to Vishvamitra and the princes, and then he extended his hand to Ahalya. Smiling, she took her husband's hand.

All was forgiven.

Rejoicing, the devas rained down flowers from heaven.

36. The Story of Indra

After Ahalya departed with Gautama, Rama asked about Indra. “Was Indra ever freed from Gautama’s curse?”

“Indra begged the devas for help,” said Vishvamitra, “but no one knew what to do. Then Agni had an idea: they could give Indra the testicles of a ram. They found a ram tied to a pole, ready to be sacrificed. They cut off the ram’s testicles and took them to Indra, so that he could replace the testicles he had lost.”

Lakshmana burst out laughing, but Rama knew this was a serious matter. The curse of a rishi can afflict even the gods.

RAMA AND SITA



37. They Go to See Janaka's Bow

"Janaka, king of Videha, has a mighty bow that once belonged to Shiva," Vishvamitra said. "Whoever lifts and strings that bow will marry Janaka's daughter, Sita. Many kings and princes have tried to lift the bow; they all failed."

Rama and Lakshmana looked at Vishvamitra expectantly.

"Let's go see that bow," he said.

Vishvamitra then took the princes to Mithila, Janaka's royal city.

Janaka was delighted by their arrival. "Powerful men have been defeated by this bow, and in their anger they have waged war against me," he said. "I'll gladly wed Sita to Rama if he passes the test."

38. The Story of Sita

This is how Sita became the daughter of King Janaka:

The farmers of Mithila invited their king to begin the sowing season. Janaka brought forth his golden plow and offered prayers to the gods.

As he plowed, he noticed ten tiny fingers rising up from the soil. There, in a freshly plowed furrow, he found a tiny baby, a girl, reaching her arms towards him.

“She is a gift from Bhudevi, the earth-goddess,” Janaka exclaimed, “and she has chosen me to be her father!”

Janaka named her Sita, which is Sanskrit for “furrow,” and he adopted her as his daughter.

39. Another Story of Sita

But where did that baby come from? Here is one story:

Ravana kept the blood of warriors he had killed in a pot.

Meanwhile, a rishi kept sacred milk in a pot, hoping to acquire an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi as his daughter.

Ravana stole that milk and poured it into the warriors' blood.

Horrified, Ravana's wife Mandodari drank the blood and milk, hoping to conceal Ravana's crime. Instead, she became pregnant with an incarnation of Lakshmi.

When the baby was born, Mandodari buried her in the ground far from Lanka.

Janaka discovered that baby.

He named her Sita.

40. Yet Another Story of Sita

This is another story about the baby in the field:

King Padmaksha had a daughter, Padma, an incarnation of Lakshmi.

Ravana attacked the kingdom and killed Padmaksha.

Padma jumped into her father's pyre, which transformed her into a jewel. Ravana put the jewel in a box and returned to Lanka.

Ravana's wife opened the box and found a baby inside. "She brings doom!" Mandodari shouted. "Take her away!"

Then the baby shouted, "I will return and destroy your kingdom."

Ravana buried the box in the ground far from Lanka.

Janaka discovered the baby inside the box.

He named her Sita.

41. Sita Learns to Cook

King Janaka entertained many wise men and women at his court and rewarded them with cows. “May their milk forever serve you as your wisdom has served me,” he proclaimed.

Sita wondered who fed the philosophers while they attended her father’s court. Curious, she went to the kitchen and found her mother Sunaina there: chopping, slicing, stirring, baking.

From Sunaina, Sita learned to cook.

One day a crow carried some food Sita had cooked all the way to Lanka, and it fell into Ravana’s mouth. “I must find this woman!” Ravana exclaimed. “Someday she must come and cook for me.”

42. Sita Surprises Her Sisters

King Janaka had a bow that long ago belonged to the god Shiva. The bow was so heavy that it took a dozen men to move it.

One day, Sita was helping her sisters to clean the palace. “We need to sweep here under the bow,” said Sita.

“That’s impossible,” said her sisters. “No one can lift that bow!”

But Sita, with no effort at all, lifted the bow, while her sisters stared at her in amazement.

Later, Janaka used the bow as a marriage test. “Whoever can lift this bow and string it shall marry my daughter!” he proclaimed.

43. A Stranger Comes to Janaka's Court

Many princes came to Janaka's court, hoping to lift the bow and marry Sita. They all failed.

One day, a stranger arrived. "I will lift and string the bow!" he said.

The stranger bent down. He lifted the bow, but then he slipped, and the bow pinned him to the ground.

King Janaka's guards could not free him, but Sita stepped forward and, all alone, lifted the bow, freeing the stranger.

The stranger was not grateful. He shouted at Sita, "If I cannot lift the bow, no man can!"

Then he stormed out of the court.

That stranger was Ravana.

44. Sita Meets Two Strangers

“Go visit the royal gardens,” Vishvamitra said to the princes, and so they did.

Meanwhile, Sita had gone to a temple in the garden. “Goddess, send a worthy man to be my husband,” she prayed.

Sita and her companions then saw two handsome strangers in the garden, and the strangers saw them.

Rama fell in love with Sita at first sight, and she with him.

When Sita’s companions saw that she was lovestruck, they hurried her away. “It’s late, my lady,” they said. “We must go.”

Sita then returned to the temple to thank the goddess for answering her prayers.

45. Rama Comes to Janaka's Court

Vishvamitra brought Rama and Lakshmana to King Janaka's court. "This is Prince Rama of Ayodhya," Vishvamitra announced. "He wishes to try the bow."

Janaka ordered his servants to bring the bow, and the cart groaned beneath its weight.

Effortlessly, Rama lifted the bow.

Rama strung the bow.

Then he looked up and saw Sita, who was smiling.

Distracted, Rama bent the bow further, and it snapped with a CRACK as loud as a thunderclap.

"Someone has strung the bow at last!" King Janaka shouted. "Prince Rama shall marry my Sita."

But many wondered at the omen of the broken bow.

46. Parashurama Appears

When he heard the sound of Shiva's bow breaking, Parashurama suddenly appeared, the greatest warrior among the brahmins. "Sita's suitor was to string the bow," he shouted, "not break it! Who did this?"

"I did," Rama replied calmly, "Prince Rama of Ayodhya."

"You must shoot me, Prince Rama!"

"I hesitate, Parashurama; you are brahmin-born."

"Your arrow won't kill me," said Parashurama, "but will only transport me to Mount Mahendra, and there I can dwell in peace."

Rama shot an arrow, and Parashurama vanished.

King Janaka sighed with relief. "Well done, Rama!" he said, and Sita smiled, proud of her husband-to-be.

47. Sons and Daughters Marry

After Rama passed the marriage test, King Janaka proposed not one, but four marriages. “Let your three brothers marry Sita’s three sisters!” he proclaimed.

So Sita married Rama, Urmila married Lakshmana, while Mandavi married Bharata and Shrutakirti married Shatrughna.

After the wedding ceremony, Sunaina, the mother of the brides, gave them each two dolls made of sandalwood, a king and a queen, to keep on a sacred altar in the courtyard of their new home.

Sita also brought the seeds of the plants in her mother’s garden so that in Ayodhya she could continue to cook the foods of Mithila.

48. The Story of Arundhati

When the brides arrived at Ayodhya, Arundhati, wife of the priest Vashishtha, warned them to always wear their marriage symbols: beads, bangles, toe-rings, and vermillion in their hair.

“There were once seven couples in the forest,” she said, “seven rishis and their wives. But one day six of the wives worshiped the fire without wearing their symbols. The fire-god Agni, thinking they were unmarried, ravished them, and their husbands then rejected them. They became the Matrikas. But I wore my marriage symbols, and Agni did not touch me, alone of all the wives.”

The brides took her warning to heart.

49. The Story of Ramachandra

When Sita came to Ayodhya, Rama's mother, Queen Kaushalya, was eager to tell her all about Rama.

One day Sita asked, "Rama belongs to the Solar Dynasty of kings that descend from Surya, the sun-god, but you call him Ramachandra, Moon-Rama. Why is that?"

"Little Rama wanted the moon to sleep beside him," Kaushalya explained. "But no matter how loudly he called to the moon, it stayed up in the sky. So we put a pot of water on his bed, with the moon reflected in the water. Thus Rama slept with the moon. That's why we call him Ramachandra."

50. Sita Looks at Ayodhya

One day Sita said to Rama, “There are so many old houses in Ayodhya! I think every house should be a beautiful new mansion filled with splendid furnishings.”

Rama smiled. “I disagree, my dear,” he said. “If every house were new and perfect, what would the carpenters or masons or painters do? What would furniture-makers make? What would carpet-weavers weave? God has created the world so that it is always a work in progress. There is good and bad always, new and old everywhere, with an infinite variety of ways to be and things to do. That is God’s world.”

CRISIS AND EXILE



51. Will Rama Renounce the World?

King Dasharatha wanted Rama to succeed him, but he worried Rama would renounce the world and become a forest rishi. So he sent Vashishtha, the royal priest, to investigate.

“Tell me, Rama,” Vashishtha said, “do you want to renounce the world?”

Rama stared at the priest thoughtfully in silence.

“Do you want to renounce God?” Vashishtha continued.

Rama understood: to renounce the world would be like renouncing God. “Now I see,” he said, smiling. “God has become all things everywhere, in the palace and in the forest.” Then he added, “Tell my father I am ready to become Ayodhya’s king.”

52. Manthara Persuades Kaikeyi

When Kaikeyi's maid Manthara heard that Dasharatha planned to make Rama king, she poisoned Kaikeyi's mind against him.

"Kaushalya will be Queen Mother. You'll be her servant," Manthara hissed. "Your son Bharata will be Rama's servant. Use the boons Dasharatha promised you: make him exile Rama for fourteen years and crown Bharata king instead."

Kaikeyi confronted Dasharatha. "I demand my two boons!" she said. "You promised!"

The king begged her to relent, but Kaikeyi insisted.

"I am bound to do what you ask," said Dasharatha, stricken with grief.

Thus he sent Rama into exile and agreed to make Bharata king.

53. Dasharatha Sends Rama into Exile

When King Dasharatha sent Rama into exile, Rama did not protest.

“A king’s promises must be kept,” said Rama.

“I’ll go with you!” shouted Lakshmana.

“And I will go also,” added Sita.

“It’s too dangerous, Sita,” said Rama.

But Sita insisted. “I am your wife, and I will go with you.”

Then Lakshmana’s wife Urmila said, “I will go also!”

“I can’t protect both my brother and my wife,” said Lakshmana. “You will help me most if you stay here.”

Urmila wept bitterly, but she did as Lakshmana asked.

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana went into exile together.

Urmila stayed behind.

54. The Exiles Depart

Wearing clothes of bark, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana began their exile. A charioteer drove them to the river, while the people of Ayodhya followed.

“Go home, men and women of Ayodhya!” Rama said. But the people did not leave.

In the night, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana departed while the people slept. Guha, the chief of the fisher folk, ferried them across the river in his boat.

In the morning, the men and the women of Ayodhya saw Rama was gone, and they returned home as Rama had commanded.

The hijras, being neither men nor women, waited devoutly until Rama returned.

55. Lakshmana Guards Rama and Sita

During their first night in the forest, Rama and Sita slept peacefully, while Lakshmana watched over them.

The goddess of sleep, Nidra-Devi, appeared before Lakshmana. "You must sleep," the goddess said.

"I cannot," Lakshmana replied. "I must protect my brother and his wife."

"Then someone else must sleep for you," said the goddess.

"Go ask my wife, Urmila," said Lakshmana. "She stayed behind in Ayodhya."

The goddess spoke to Urmila, and Urmila agreed to sleep in Lakshmana's place. So for all the years of exile Lakshmana did not need to sleep; Urmila slept both night and day for her husband.

56. Dasharatha Grieves for Rama

After Rama departed into exile, Dasharatha was grief-stricken, unable to leave his bed.

“There was a boy,” he said in his delirium, remembering the boy he had shot, the son of the blind parents. “All my fault. That is why I have lost Rama.”

Tossing and turning, Dasharatha repeated, “Rama. Rama. Rama.”

Sitting by Dasharatha’s bedside through the night, Sumitra and Kaushalya fell asleep. In the morning, they discovered the king was dead.

All Ayodhya was plunged into grief.

Bharata and Shatrughna were away in Kekaya with their grandfather, and they did not know what had happened in their absence.

57. Bharata and Shatrughna Return

When Bharata and Shatrughna returned, they learned that Kaikeyi had sent Rama into exile at Manthara's urging.

"But why did Rama agree to this madness?" exclaimed Shatrughna.

Then he saw Manthara, looking ridiculous in a fine new gown and fancy jewelry.

He grabbed her by the hair. "You'll die for this!" he shouted, dragging her across the floor towards Bharata. "Kill her, brother!" he shouted.

"No," Bharata replied. "Wicked as she is, she is a woman, and women are not to be killed. Otherwise, I would kill my own mother for her wicked deed. Rama forgave them; so must we."

58. Bharata and Shatrughna Go to Rama

Bharata and Shatrughna went to see Rama in the forest, bringing news of their father's death.

"He was so angry at my mother that he wanted Shatrughna to perform the funeral, not me," Bharata explained, weeping.

"And even after the funeral," said Shatrughna, "his spirit is restless. He won't cross the river of death and comes to me in dreams, demanding that we hunt a wild rhino, his four sons, together."

So Dasharatha's sons hunted and killed a rhino.

A flock of crows feasted on the carcass, and this appeased the spirit of Dasharatha; he no longer troubled Shatrughna's dreams.

59. Bharata Petitions Rama

Bharata begged Rama to end his exile. “Return to Ayodhya now,” he said. “Be our king!”

“I cannot,” Rama insisted. “I must remain true to our father’s promise, even in death.”

“Then let me stay here with you!”

“You cannot,” Rama said. “Ayodhya must have a ruler.”

“I’ll rule, but as regent only,” Bharata agreed. “You will return and be our king.”

Bharata handed Rama the king’s golden sandals. Rama put on the sandals, took them off, and handed them back to Bharata. Bharata then returned to Ayodhya and placed the sandals on the throne, waiting for Rama to return.

60. Manthara Begs Forgiveness

When Bharata came to beg Rama to return to Ayodhya, Manthara accompanied him.

“Forgive me, Rama!” she said.

“There is nothing to forgive,” Rama replied. “Listen: in a previous lifetime you were a celestial gandharvi. You accepted birth as a mortal so that Dasharatha’s eldest son would be sent into the forest.” Manthara was even more surprised by what Rama said next. “We will meet again, Manthara! You will be a woman, hunched over as now, and your name will be Kubja. My name will be Krishna. When I embrace you in that next lifetime, your back will become straight.”

61. Rama Visits Sutikshna

The exiles came to the ashram of the rishi Sutikshna, and he invited them to stay there.

Meanwhile, they heard a loud roaring in the woods.
“What’s that?” asked Sita, frightened.

“Many wild animals live here,” Sutikshna explained.
“They make a ruckus, as you can hear, but they do no harm.”

“I will kill those wild animals!” Rama declared.

“Oh no, great prince!” said Sutikshna. “There’s no need to kill them. We seek peace here, even in the forest.”

Rama pondered the rishi’s words, and after a time they moved on, visiting the ashrams of other rishis in the forest.

62. Rama Visits Sharabhanga

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana came to the ashram of rishi Sharabhanga deep in the forest.

“Hear my story,” the old man said to them. “The god Indra invited me to ascend to Nandana-Vana, the heavenly pleasure-garden, but instead I stayed here. I wanted to gaze upon Rama with my own eyes.” Sharabhanga then looked at Rama and smiled. “I have grown old here, waiting. Now I can depart.”

Sharabhanga told the exiles where they should go next on their journey, and then he entered the fire.

From the flames, a young Sharabhanga emerged, and he rose to heaven at last.

63. Viradha Attacks

A fierce rakshasa grabbed Sita and carried her away. Rama and Lakshmana shot him, and he dropped Sita but grabbed them instead and ran deeper into the forest.

“I am Viradha!” the rakshasa shouted, “Weapons cannot kill me.”

Rama and Lakshmana slashed off Viradha’s arms with their swords.

Viradha collapsed, but he did not die.

“Bury me in a pit!” groaned Viradha. “There I can die.”

So they buried Viradha in a pit.

A celestial being then arose from the earth.

“I am Tumburu,” he said, “a gandharva cursed to live as a rakshasa. You freed me from that existence!”

64. Rama Comes to Panchapsaras Lake

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana heard music in the forest. Following the music, they came to a lake.

“I don’t understand,” said Rama. “Where are the musicians?”

A wandering rishi explained. “The rishi Mandakarni once lived here, and he practiced austerities for a thousand years. The devas feared him, so they sent five apsaras to seduce and distract him. The plan worked: Mandakarni was besotted. He built a house for the apsaras, and then he hid the house beneath this lake. You can hear them even now, as they sing and dance and make merry in the depths of Five-Apsaras Lake.”

65. Sita Tells a Story

Worried about Rama's eagerness to fight rakshasas in the forest, Sita told Rama a story.

"A hermit once lived peacefully in the forest," she said, "forever performing rituals and reciting prayers. Indra feared the hermit's spiritual powers, so he visited the hermit disguised as a soldier. 'Take this,' he said to the hermit, giving him a sword. 'You will find it useful.' The hermit had always lived at peace, but he began carrying the sword with him everywhere. He no longer performed rituals; instead, he practiced using the sword. Eventually, the hermit lost his powers, just as Indra had hoped."

66. Rama Visits Agastya

Rama came to Agastya's ashram.

"Two rakshasa brothers once lived here," said Agastya, "Ilvala and Vatapi. Ilvala would transform into a brahmin and invite another brahmin to dinner. Vatapi would transform into a sheep which Ilvala cooked and served. Then, after the guest ate, Ilvala would shout: Brother, come out! Vatapi would burst through the brahmin's stomach, killing him."

Rama stared at Agastya, horrified.

"But I defeated them," Agastya explained, smiling. "I used my powers to digest Vatapi before Ilvala could summon him. Afterwards, I incinerated Ilvala with the power of my gaze."

Rama then regarded Agastya with great admiration.

67. Agastya Arms Rama

The rishi Agastya bestowed weapons on Rama.

“This diamond-studded bow of gold was made by Vishvakarma,” Agastya said. Next, he gave Rama two quivers, saying, “These quivers are inexhaustible, forever filled with arrows that blaze like the sun.” Then he gave Rama a sword that once belonged to Indra and also a bow that once belonged to Vishnu. “With this bow, Vishnu slew many enemies,” Agastya proclaimed. “May you do the same.”

Rama received the weapons gratefully.

Agastya then directed Rama to go to Panchavati, a pleasant place in the forest where he could live peacefully with Sita and Lakshmana.

68. Lakshmana Chases a Boar

Lakshmana had tracked a wild boar through the dense woods. He then raised his sword to strike the boar, but missed. Instead, he cut off the head of an ascetic. The ascetic had been meditating, motionless and silent; Lakshmana hadn't even noticed he was there.

Lakshmana wept for what he had done, but then the god Indra appeared.

"That hermit was Ravana's nephew," said Indra. "He was meditating in order to acquire powers he could use to destroy me. I sent the boar to lure you here. You have accomplished a great deed, and I thank you!"

Then, Indra vanished.

69. Sita Visits Anasuya

In the forest, Sita met Anasuya, wife of the rishi Atri.

“Listen to my story,” Anasuya said. “Three handsome men once came here, saying ‘We have fasted twelve years. Feed us from your breast.’ I realized they were the gods Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva. I used my yogic powers to turn them into babies and let them suckle. Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Parvati then came and asked me to release them. I made them gods again, and they departed.”

Then Anasuya gave Sita gifts: a garment that stayed ever-clean, a garland that stayed ever-fresh, and cream to make her skin ever-soft.

70. Sita and Rama Wander the Forest

One day Sita and Rama wandered far from camp, and Sita was tired.

“I’ll carry you,” said Rama, lifting Sita into his arms, and they headed back to the camp.

The day was hot, and drops of Sita’s sweat fell to the ground, as did drops of Rama’s sweat.

Later Sita and Rama saw saplings had grown where their sweat had fallen.

The saplings continued to grow and bore fruit. Sita’s trees bore green fruits, and Rama’s red fruits.

“We’ll call these Sita-fruit!” said Rama.

“And these will be Rama-fruit!” replied Sita, laughing.

These fruits still grow in India today.

71. Indra Tests Lakshmana

Indra wanted to test Lakshmana, so he sent a beautiful apsara to tempt him. Lakshmana chased her away, but a few strands of the apsara's hair clung to Lakshmana's clothing.

That evening, Sita noticed the strands of hair and teased Lakshmana. "I see you've found some lovely lady here in the wilderness," she said, laughing. "I wonder what your Urmila would say about that?"

"How dare you doubt my fidelity!" shouted Lakshmana, and he jumped into their campfire.

The fire did not burn him. "You see?" said Lakshmana. "That is the proof that I am forever faithful to my Urmila."

72. Jatayu Appears

In the forest, Rama and Lakshmana saw an enormous eagle.

“Careful, brother!” said Lakshmana. “It might be a rakshasa.”

“I am no rakshasa,” said the eagle. “My name is Jatayu, a friend of your royal father. I was grieved to hear of his death and of your exile, Rama. Know me as your father’s friend, and allow me to watch over you here in the forest.”

Rama accepted Jatayu’s offer gratefully and took him to their camp to meet Sita.

“Dear Sita,” said Jatayu, “this forest is full of dangers. I offer you my help should you ever need it.”

SHURPANAKH
A AND
RAVANA



73. Shurpanakha Sees Rama

Ravana's sister Shurpanakha was roaming the forest when she first saw Rama. Passion overwhelmed her.

"Marry me!" she told him.

Rama laughed and replied, "I already have a wife." Then he pointed to Lakshmana. "You might ask my brother; he's alone here in the forest."

But Lakshmana also rebuffed Shurpanakha.

Then Shurpanakha saw Sita. "If I get rid of her, the man will be mine," she thought to herself.

Shurpanakha ran towards Sita, fangs bared, and Sita screamed.

Lakshmana grabbed his sword and sliced off Shurpanakha's ears and nose.

Blood streaming down her face, Shurpanakha ran shrieking into the forest.

74. Khara and Dushana Attack

With each slice of Lakshmana's sword as he cut off Shurpanakha's ears and nose, one of Ravana's heads fell off. Though he was far away in Lanka, Ravana realized that someone had attacked his sister. "Who would dare do this!" he shouted.

Meanwhile, Shurpanakha ran into the forest. "Khara! Dushana!" she screamed. "Help me, cousins!"

Khara and Dushana led the forest rakshasas against Rama and Lakshmana, but the princes of Ayodhya defeated them all. Khara and Dushana fell in battle, and rakshasa corpses covered the forest floor.

Looking around, Rama said to Lakshmana, "We must be even more vigilant now."

75. Word Reaches Ravana

Ravana's uncle Akampana escaped from the forest and fled to Lanka where he reported to his nephew. "A human killed Khara and Dushana and their army in the forest," he gasped.

Ravana was outraged. "I will kill that human!" he shouted.

"His name is Rama, and he lives in the forest with his brother and his wife," Akampana explained. "His brother mutilated your sister. And his wife is beautiful. Very beautiful! To punish Rama you should abduct his wife."

This idea delighted Ravana. "I will go there at once," he said. "And when I return, I'll have a new wife!"

76. Ravana Visits Maricha

Years ago, Rama killed the rakshasi Tataka, but her son Maricha had escaped. He then retreated into the wilderness, living as a hermit.

Time passed.

Then one day, to Maricha's surprise, the mighty Ravana stormed into his ashram.

"Maricha!" he shouted. "I'm going to kidnap the wife of a man named Rama who lives in the forest, and I need your help."

When he heard Rama's name, Maricha shuddered. He tried to dissuade Ravana, but to no avail.

"You will become a golden deer," Ravana explained excitedly, "and lure Rama away from his wife. That's how I will kidnap her!"

77. Maricha Becomes a Golden Deer

Reluctantly, Maricha obeyed Ravana's command: he transformed himself into a golden deer. He then went to find Rama in the forest.

Sita was delighted when she saw the golden deer near their hut. "Catch it for me, Rama!" she said. "It can be my pet."

"Golden deer don't exist," said Lakshmana. "This is some kind of trick. Do not go, Rama!"

"Please, Rama!" Sita insisted.

"You stay here and keep Sita safe," Rama ordered Lakshmana. "I'm going to catch that deer."

Rama ran off after the deer.

And then... Sita and Lakshmana heard Rama shouting in the distance. "Help me!"

78. Lakshmana Draws a Line

When Sita heard Rama's voice shouting for help, she said, "Go to him now, Lakshmana! He needs your help!"

"No!" replied Lakshmana. "He ordered me to stay here."

"Do you want him to die?" asked Sita accusingly.

Lakshmana was shocked by Sita's words, but he finally relented.

"I will go find out what's happened, but you must stay inside this line," he said to Sita, and he drew a line of protection around the hut. "No matter what happens, do not cross this line until I come back with Rama."

Sita nodded in agreement, and Lakshmana ran into the forest.

79. An Ascetic Approaches Sita

After Rama left to follow the golden deer and Lakshmana left to follow Rama, an ascetic approached Sita, begging bowl in hand. “Feed me, please,” he said.

“Certainly,” said Sita. “Come inside.”

“That would not be right,” replied the ascetic. “You are alone in the house. Come feed me here, in the open.”

Sita gathered some food and then approached the ascetic, hesitating as she crossed Lakshmana’s line.

The ascetic vanished and Sita saw Ravana in his place. He grabbed her, and she struggled to free herself from the grip of his twenty arms. “You’ll never escape,” he snarled. “Never!”

80. Jatayu Fights Ravana

Ravana carried Sita away in his flying chariot. “You’ve vanished without leaving even a footprint!” he laughed. “Rama will never find you.”

“But I’ve found you!” roared Jatayu, the mighty eagle. He dove at Ravana, slashing with his beak and talons. Ravana fought back with his sword.

Sita prayed fervently for Jatayu’s victory. As the fight continued, she removed her bangles and jewelry, dropping them to leave a trail.

Finally, Ravana sliced off Jatayu’s wings, and Jatayu plunged to the earth.

“May your corpse rot in the forest!” shouted Ravana, and then he turned the flying chariot south to Lanka.

81. How Ravana Tricked Jatayu

Here is the story of how Ravana tricked Jatayu:

“Where exactly does your strength reside?” Ravana had asked him.

Jatayu didn’t reply; he just kept fighting.

“My strength is in my right big toe,” Ravana said.

Honor then compelled Jatayu to share his secret, as Ravana had. “My strength is in my wings!” Jatayu said as he swooped down and began pecking at Ravana’s toe.

But nothing happened. Ravana had lied; his strength wasn’t in his toe but in his navel, where he concealed the pot of immortal nectar.

Ravana then tore Jatayu’s wings to shreds, laughing, while Sita wept.

82. Sita Arrives in Lanka

Ravana brought Sita to Lanka and then dragged her to the door of his palace.

“Stop!” shouted Mandodari, his chief wife. “Stop right there! You cannot bring that woman here against her will. All the rest of us love you, but she does not.”

“She will love me!” Ravana insisted.

“I’m sure she will,” agreed Mandodari. “But until she does, keep her in the ashoka grove. Not here.”

Reluctantly, Ravana took Sita away to the grove. “And when I win her love,” he muttered angrily, “she’ll take Mandodari’s place!”

Silently, Sita thanked Mandodari for keeping her away from Ravana’s palace.

83. Rama Realizes the Danger

When Rama shot the golden deer, the deer shouted in Rama's own voice, "Sita! Lakshmana! Help me!"

Then Rama saw Maricha in his rakshasa form arise out of the golden deer and collapse on the ground in a pool of blood. Recognizing Maricha, the son of Tataka whom he had fought in the forest long ago, Rama realized Sita was in terrible danger. He raced back to the hut, as did Lakshmana, but Sita was gone.

They found the wounded Jatayu who, with his last breath, whispered, "He took her."

Jatayu died, and Rama conducted the bird's funeral, weeping bitterly.

84. Rama Grieves

When Rama realized Sita was gone, he erupted with angry grief, threatening to destroy the whole world.

“I know where she is,” said a goose, “but I won’t tell you!”

Rama grabbed the bird by its neck; that’s how the goose got a long neck.

“Predator must have prey,” said a partridge.

“I curse you to be separated from your beloved,” Rama told the partridge, “and your call will be that of a grieving lover.”

Then Rama shouted, “If the gods do not return her to me, I will attack heaven itself.”

Finally, Lakshmana was able to calm Rama’s rage.

85. A Rakshasi Sees Lakshmana

As Rama and Lakshmana plunged through the forest, desperately looking for Sita, they passed a cave, and in the entrance there stood a rakshasi, monstrously large and misshapen.

When the rakshasi saw Lakshmana she shrieked with delight. “You!” she shouted as she reached out and grabbed him. “You will be mine! My name is Ayomukhi, and I want for you to be my husband. We will dwell here together in the forest!”

Lakshmana recoiled in horror. Without a word he unsheathed his sword and sliced off the rakshasi’s nose, one ear, and one breast.

Ayomukhi fled, screaming, into the forest.

86. Shabari Welcomes Rama

Heading south, Rama and Lakshmana arrived at Lake Pampa where they found a woman, Shabari. She lived there alone in an ashram that had been abandoned long ago.

“You look hungry,” she said. “I can offer you fruit.”

Shabari took a berry and bit into it. “Sweet!” she said, offering it to Rama, who accepted it gladly.

She bit into another berry. “Sour!” she said, throwing it away.

Another berry. “Sweet!” she said, offering it to Lakshmana, who recoiled in disgust.

“Do not judge her, Lakshmana,” said Rama. “She offers food with love.”

Shabari’s berries strengthened Rama in his quest.

87. Kabandha Grabs the Princes

In the forest Rama and Lakshmana encountered Kabandha, a ravenous monster whose head was in his stomach. He grabbed anything that moved, shoveling it into his stomach-mouth.

Rama and Lakshmana sliced off Kabandha's arms. As he lay dying, the monster thanked them. "I was once a gandharva named Vishvavasu," he said, "ravenous for music, food, drink, everything. My all-consuming greed turned me into a monster, but now I am free."

When they cremated Kabandha's corpse, his gandharva form emerged. "Go to King Sugriva in Kishkindha," the gandharva told them. "Sugriva's monkeys will help you."

Then he vanished into the sky.

RAMA AND
THE
MONKEYS



88. Paths Cross

But Sugriva was no longer king of the monkeys in Kishkindha. Vali, his brother, had exiled Sugriva and had taken Sugriva's wife.

Sugriva fled to Rishyamukha Hill, the only place he was safe from Vali, and Hanuman was among the loyal monkeys who followed Sugriva.

One day, Sugriva and Hanuman saw a flying chariot racing across the sky, and they heard a woman screaming.

"Go investigate," Sugriva said to Hanuman.

Hanuman returned with the jewelry that he found on the ground. "She must have thrown this down for us as a sign," Hanuman told Sugriva. "I wonder who she is."

89. The Story of Vali and Sugriva

Vali and Sugriva were brothers. Here is one story of their birth:

Beautiful apsaras sang and danced in the court of Indra, god of rain and storms.

The charioteer of Surya, the sun-god, was Aruna. He longed to see the apsaras, so he disguised himself as a woman: Aruni.

Indra was surprised to see a face in the crowd he didn't recognize. "She is beautiful," Indra thought to himself. "I desire her."

So Indra seduced Aruni in that female form, and she gave birth to a child: Vali.

Surya also slept with Aruni in female form; their child was Sugriva.

90. Another Story of Vali and Sugriva

Others tell a different story about the monkeys:

Gautama left his wife Ahalya and their daughter Anjana alone in the ashram.

Disguised as Gautama, the storm-god Indra slept with Ahalya, and she conceived a son: Vali.

The sun-god Surya did likewise, and Ahalya conceived another son: Sugriva.

Anjana was jealous of her brothers. “They aren’t your sons!” she told Gautama.

Enraged, Gautama cursed the boys, turning them into monkeys.

Ahalya then cursed Anjana to stand on one foot atop Mount Kailasha. “Let the wind feed you!”

The wind-god Vayu made love to Anjana there, and she conceived a son: Hanuman.

91. Another Story of Hanuman

This is another story of Hanuman's birth:

Anjana was an apsara, a celestial dancer, but cursed to be born on earth as a monkey, a shape-shifting monkey able to change her form.

One day Anjana put on her human form and walked across a mountaintop where Vayu, the wind-god, saw her and was captivated by her beauty.

"I am Vayu," he said to her, "and I love you! You will bear my son, and he will be able to move as the wind does, flying as high as he wants."

So Anjana conceived Hanuman, the monkey-son of Vayu the wind-god.

92. Yet Another Story of Hanuman

Others tell a different story about Hanuman:

Dasharatha took the celestial kheer and gave it to his three wives: Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra.

Kaushalya ate and conceived Rama. As she ate, a crow snatched some kheer, flew away, and dropped the kheer into the mouth of the apsara Anjana; she conceived Hanuman.

Kaikeyi ate and conceived Bharata. As she ate, a crow snatched some kheer, flew away and dropped the kheer into the mouth of the rakshasi Kaikasi; she conceived Vibhishana.

No crows bothered Sumitra when she ate the kheer and conceived her two sons, first Lakshmana and then Shatrughna.

93. When Hanuman Was Hungry

Hanuman's mother was Anjana, but when he was born, she left him alone in the forest.

Baby Hanuman grew hungry. Very very hungry.

So when he saw what he thought was a mango in the sky, he wanted to eat that mango. He flew into the sky, eagerly reaching with his hands to grab the mango, ready to bite it with his teeth.

But it wasn't a mango. It was the sun!

Indra the storm-god grew angry and hurled a thunderbolt at Hanuman. Hanuman fell to the ground and broke his jaw.

That's how he got the name Hanuman, Big-Jaw.

94. The Devas Bless Hanuman

Vayu picked up Hanuman and rocked the baby in his lap. Indra's attack on Hanuman made Vayu very angry, so he stopped the air from moving. Nobody in the three worlds was able to breathe!

Brahma then came and healed Hanuman, and Vayu let the air move again so that everyone could breathe.

Next, all of the gods bestowed blessings on Hanuman. Indra gave him protection against thunderbolts, Surya gave him radiance, Yama freed him from all sickness, and Vishvakarma made him invulnerable to weapons.

Thus Hanuman was destined for greatness.

Sugriva would need his help.

And so would Rama.

95. Hanuman Grows Up

Having received boons from the devas, Hanuman grew up to be a strong and fearless monkey. He was also mischievous! He liked to tease the rishis of the forest, breaking their pots, tearing up their clothes, and interfering with their sacrifices.

Finally the rishis cursed Hanuman. “You will forget all your powers!” they shouted at him, and Hanuman no longer remembered the divine boons he had received.

It was not until he heard the words of King Jambavan years later, on the shore of the ocean, that he remembered the supernatural abilities he would need to carry out Rama’s orders.

96. Hanuman Finds a Guru

As he grew, Hanuman sought wisdom. He learned all he could from books and wanted to learn more.

He asked Surya, the sun-god, to be his guru, but Surya refused. “I must travel all day,” Surya said. “I don’t have time to stop for lessons.”

“I will run backwards, never stopping, so that I may learn from you,” said Hanuman.

Thus Surya became Hanuman’s guru, and Hanuman’s face was burned black from looking directly at the sun.

Having completed his studies, Hanuman wanted to give Surya the guru-gift.

“Look after my monkey son, Sugriva,” said Surya.

So Hanuman befriended Sugriva.

97. Dundhubi Challenges Vali

As Vali was older than Sugriva, he was king of Kishkindha.

The bull-asura Dundhubi came to Kishkindha and challenged Vali. “I wanted to fight Ocean,” Dundhubi said, “but Ocean said Mountain was stronger. I wanted to fight Mountain, but Mountain said you were stronger. I want to fight you, Vali!”

But Dundhubi didn’t know that Vali had an amulet given to him by his father, Indra, that deprived Vali’s opponents of half their strength. The stronger the opponent, the stronger Vali became.

Vali grabbed Dundhubi’s horns, easily smashed him to the ground, and threw his mangled corpse into the air.

98. Matanga Pronounces a Curse

When Vali threw Dundhubi's corpse into the air, it flew over the ashram of the rishi Matanga on Rishyamukha Hill.

Drops of Dundhubi's blood rained down upon the ashram, and this made Matanga angry. When he saw Dundhubi's corpse lying on the ground, he shouted out a curse. "Whoever threw this corpse will die if he ever sets foot on Rishyamukha Hill. His head will explode in a thousand pieces!"

So when Sugriva later had to flee from Vali, he hid on Rishyamukha Hill.

Why did Sugriva have to flee his brother Vali?

It was because of Dundhubi's son, Mayavi.

99. Mayavi Challenges Vali

After Vali defeated the buffalo-asura Dundubhi, Dundubhi's son, Mayavi, decided to avenge his father. "I will kill you, Vali!" Mayavi roared as he came crashing through the forest.

Vali and Mayavi fought one another there in the forest, and then Mayavi fled into a cave.

Before following Mayavi into the cave, Vali commanded his brother Sugriva to keep watch. "If I fail and Mayavi emerges from the cave, you must kill him."

Sugriva waited.

And waited.

No one emerged from the cave.

Thinking Vali was dead, Sugriva sealed up the cave and declared himself king.

But Vali was not dead.

100. Vali Returns

Deep inside the cave, Vali fought with Mayavi until he killed the asura and then fell into a deep sleep.

When Vali awoke, he made his way to the cave entrance, only to discover a huge boulder blocking his path. “Sugriva!” he shouted. “What have you done?”

Roaring with anger, Vali smashed the boulder and rushed to the palace, where he found Sugriva on the throne.

Vali tried to kill Sugriva, and Sugriva fled to the only place of safety he could think of: Matanga’s ashram on Rishyamukha Hill where Vali dared not go.

Hanuman joined Sugriva in his exile.

101. Vali Torments Sugriva

Because of Matanga's curse, Vali could not set foot on Rishyamukha Hill. If he did, his head would explode into a thousand pieces.

Thus Sugriva took refuge there, thinking he would be safe from Vali.

Vali, however, still found a way to torment his brother. Every day he would fly over Rishyamukha Hill and kick Sugriva in the head, which was painful and humiliating for Sugriva.

Finally, Hanuman grabbed Vali by the ankle. "Stop it!" Hanuman shouted. "If you come back again, I'll pull you down to the ground."

Knowing that Hanuman meant what he said, Vali stopped tormenting Sugriva.

102. Hanuman Meets Rama

When Sugriva saw Rama and Lakshmana approaching Rishyamukha Hill, he was afraid. “They’re agents of Vali coming to kill me!”

He sent Hanuman, disguised as a brahmin, to find out what the strangers wanted.

“What brings you here?” Hanuman asked. “I inquire on behalf of my king, Sugriva.”

Hearing Sugriva’s name, Rama rejoiced. “We ourselves are seeking Sugriva!”

“So we are well met!” exclaimed Hanuman. “Get on my back, and I’ll take you to him.”

Hanuman changed into his monkey form, growing large enough for Rama and Lakshmana to ride on his shoulders, and he carried them to meet Sugriva.

103. Sugriva Becomes Rama's Ally

Hanuman brought Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva, who was hiding from his brother Vali on Rishyamukha Hill.

“We heard a woman screaming, and we saw a flying chariot. Then, we found these,” Sugriva said, showing Rama Sita’s jewelry.

Rama wept, and he told Sugriva his story.

Then Sugriva told Rama his story. “I too am in exile. My brother Vali took the throne from me. I too have lost my wife. My brother Vali took her from me.”

Rama and Sugriva became allies.

“I will help you kill Vali,” said Rama.

“And I will help you find Sita,” said Sugriva.

104. Sugriva Fights Vali

Sugriva and Rama made a plan: Sugriva would fight Vali, and Rama would shoot Vali from a hiding place in the bushes.

Sugriva and Vali fought, but Rama couldn't tell who was who, so he didn't shoot.

Sugriva fled, and Vali scoffed.

"You didn't shoot him!" Sugriva said to Rama.

"I couldn't tell you apart," Rama explained.

Sugriva put on a flower-garland and challenged Vali again.

Rama aimed at Vali, shooting an arrow in his back.

Vali fell, fatally wounded.

Vali's wife Tara wept bitterly and cursed Rama. "You will rescue your wife," she said, "but still meet with grief."

105. Tara Mourns Vali

As he promised Sugriva, Rama fatally wounded Vali.

Vali's wife Tara wept, and Hanuman consoled her. "Vali's great deeds earned him a place in heaven; don't grieve," he said. "You must help your son Angada honor his father with funeral rites."

Before dying, Vali gave his amulet of invincibility to Sugriva. "It mustn't touch my corpse," he told his brother.

Then Vali died, and all the monkeys bewailed him.

Tara begged Rama to slay her with the arrow that slew Vali, but Rama refused. "God made us as we are," he said. "There's no escaping our destined happiness and sorrow."

106. Sugriva Is Crowned King

It was time to crown Sugriva as king of Kishkindha.

“Noble Rama,” said Hanuman, “we ask you to come to the royal city and conduct the coronation ceremony.”

“Dear Hanuman,” Rama replied, “by my father’s order I may enter no city or village during my exile. I will stay here on Rishyamukha Hill with Lakshmana, awaiting the end of the monsoon. Then we must rescue my Sita!”

“I will come as soon as the monsoon season ends,” vowed Sugriva.

So Hanuman and the monkeys went to the city where they made Sugriva their king, with Vali’s son Angada as crown-prince.

107. Lakshmana Rebukes Sugriva

Rama waited in the forest during the rains, impatient to resume the search. Sugriva, now his ally, had vowed to help.

But when the rains ended, Sugriva continued to eat, drink and make merry with his wives in the palace.

“In my exile, I cannot enter the city,” Rama said to Lakshmana. “You must go speak to Sugriva.”

Lakshmana stormed into the palace, ready to kill Sugriva in his rage.

Ashamed, Sugriva begged Lakshmana’s forgiveness and went to Rama at once. “I will send out search parties,” said Sugriva. “My monkeys will scour the whole world to find your Sita.”

THE SEARCH



108. Hanuman Heads South

Fulfilling his promise to Rama, Sugriva assembled the monkeys and sent them in the four directions to search for Sita. To the south, he sent Hanuman and Angada, together with his ally, King Jambavan, king of the bears.

“I give you one month’s time to return with news!” commanded Sugriva.

Rama then spoke with Hanuman. “Take this ring, engraved with my name,” Rama said. “Sita gave it to me. Now give it as a remembrance to Sita so that she will know you are my messenger.”

Hanuman took the ring and bowed reverently. “I will not fail you,” he promised.

109. The Monkeys Enter the Cave

Hanuman led the search party southwards, and they fell into a vast cave, filled with trees and lakes, mansions and palaces.

There they met Swayamprabha.

“What is this place?” Hanuman asked her.

“Mayasura built this place for his beloved apsara, Hema,” she replied. “I guard it for her.”

Then Hanuman told her of their quest.

Swayamprabha smiled. “Normally those who enter here do not leave, but I will use my powers to help you. Close your eyes.”

The monkeys and bears put their paws over their eyes.

Then Swayamprabha transported them out of the cave, sending them south, towards Sita.

110. The Search Party Reaches the Ocean

The southern search party finally reached the ocean and could go no farther.

Angada despaired. “It is better that we should die here rather than return in failure,” he said. Jambavan and Hanuman sought to console him, but Angada wouldn’t listen. “Maybe Jatayu was wrong all along!” he shouted.

At that moment an enormous eagle approached them, limping along the water’s edge.

“Did you say Jatayu?” asked the eagle. “I am Sampati, and Jatayu is my brother. Tell me more! Perhaps I can help you. While I cannot fly, my eyesight is keen. But first, speak to me of Jatayu.”

111. The Story of Sampati and Jatayu

“Long ago,” Sampati continued, “Jatayu and I decided to race to the sun. We soared through the sky, flying fast. The heat was intense. ‘Turn back!’ I shouted to Jatayu, but he kept flying straight at the sun. I sped in front, spreading my wings to shield him. The sun scorched my wings, and I fell to the ground here. I have had no news of my brother in all this time. Is he well? Tell me everything!”

“Your brother is dead,” said Hanuman sadly. “He died trying to protect Rama’s wife Sita from her abductor. Now we seek Sita.”

112. Sampati Turns his Gaze to Lanka

Sampati turned his gaze towards the ocean, scanning the far horizon.

“I see an island!” he said to the monkeys and bears. “And I see a golden city; that must be Lanka, where Ravana rules. There I see many beautiful women. They are happy and smiling. But there is one woman who is not smiling. That must be Sita. She sits under an ashoka tree, and she looks very sad.”

As Sampati spoke, his wings grew back. He was able to fly again! “I wish you success in your quest,” he said, and then he soared away into the sky.

113. Who Will Jump to Lanka?

From Sampati, they learned that Ravana had taken Sita to Lanka.

“Who among us is strong enough to leap one hundred yojanas over the ocean to Lanka?” asked Angada.

“I can leap ten yojanas,” said one of the monkeys, “but no more.”

“I can leap twenty,” said another.

“Thirty,” said another, “but that’s all.”

Thus they could find no monkey able to reach Lanka and send word to Sita.

Then Jambavan, the king of the bears, spoke up. “There is one among you who can do this, but he has forgotten his own powers,” he said. “That monkey is Hanuman.”

114. Jambavan Inspires Hanuman

“You are the greatest among the monkeys,” Jambavan said to Hanuman, “but you have forgotten your powers. Your father is Vayu the wind-god, and you can fly as high and as far as you want, just like the wind. As a baby, you flew into the sky to grasp the sun. The gods have bestowed blessings upon you.”

Hanuman stared at Jambavan in surprise.

“You must remember who you are!” Jambavan told him. “Then you will be able to make this leap to Lanka to find Sita and to learn how Rama might rescue her. You must jump, Hanuman: jump!”

115. Hanuman Leaps

Encouraged by Jambavan, Hanuman grew in size, rocketing up towards the sky. Hanuman soon towered over the monkeys and bears, who stared at him in awe.

Mighty Hanuman then climbed the towering Mount Mahendra, and as he squeezed the mountainsides in his ascent, the mountain bellowed like a trumpeting elephant. The ground shook violently, and all the animals who lived there looked around in terror as they saw the colossal Hanuman climbing up the mountain.

When Hanuman reached the mountain top, he saluted Surya, Indra, Brahma and his father Vayu, the wind-god. Then, at last, he launched himself towards Lanka.

116. Mount Mainaka Greets Hanuman

As Hanuman soared through the air, a mountain flew up from beneath the waters and offered him a place to rest.

“I am Mount Mainaka,” the winged mountain said. “Long ago, all the mountains had wings and flew through the sky, but Indra grew angry at us and cut off our wings. Vayu the wind-god carried me away from Indra, and I have hidden all these years in the ocean’s depths. Now I have risen up to offer you a resting place.”

Hanuman smiled at the mountain in gratitude. “Thank you,” he said, “but I have no time to rest.”

117. Surasa Attacks Hanuman

The sea-monster Surasa rose up from beneath the waters, her mouth gaping open. “Feed me!” she screamed. “Everyone must give me food, or become my food.”

“I have no food to give you,” Hanuman replied.

“Then I will eat YOU!”

But Hanuman grew and grew until he was bigger than Surasa’s mouth.

Surasa opened her mouth wider.

Bigger. Wider. Bigger. Wider.

Then Hanuman made himself tiny and buzzed through Surasa’s teeth, escaping before she could shut her mouth.

“I offered myself as food and you failed to eat me,” said Hanuman, flying away. Surasa had to admire his clever escape.

118. Simhika Attacks Hanuman

As Hanuman sailed through the air towards Lanka, he cast a shadow on the water below.

The sea-monster Simhika seized Hanuman's shadow, using magic to pull him down towards her.

Hanuman allowed Simhika to swallow him, but then he expanded inside her, bigger and bigger, slashing with his claws, until Simhika exploded into a thousand pieces, and the ocean's waters turned red with her blood.

Hanuman then rose up into the air and continued his journey to Lanka.

The devas had been watching, and they sang Hanuman's praises. "You will surely succeed in your quest, Hanuman!" the gods all shouted.

119. Lankini Challenges Hanuman

When Hanuman landed on Lanka, the eight-armed goddess Lankini challenged him. She held a pot of fire in one hand; in another, a bell. She waved a club capped with a human skull, and also a trident on which an elephant was impaled. In her other hands she brandished a torch, a sword, and an axe, and a snake that spewed poison.

“STOP!” she shouted at Hanuman. “You will go no farther.”

But Hanuman knocked her to the ground with his tail.

Lankini shuddered. “I cannot stop this monkey,” she groaned. “This was foretold: the city of Lanka is doomed.”

120. Ravana Comes to Sita

Hanuman found Sita in the ashoka grove, guarded by rakshasis. He concealed himself in a tree, waiting until he could speak privately to her.

Ravana and his wives then came to the grove.

Ravana attempted to seduce Sita with promises of wealth and power, but Sita rejected his advances. “You should make peace with Rama,” she said, “and release me.”

“Silence!” shouted Ravana. “I give you two months’ time to agree to my demands and become my wife. If you refuse, I’ll take you to my kitchen, kill you, and eat you for my breakfast!”

Hanuman saw and heard everything.

121. The Rakshasis Taunt Sita

The rakshasis taunted and tormented Sita. She sobbed and shouted at them, “Devour me if you want, cruel rakshasis! I don’t care. I refuse Ravana, and my Rama will come and kill you all.”

The rakshasi Trijata described a dream she had in which Rama indeed destroyed all of Lanka.

Made anxious by Sita’s grief and Trijata’s dream, the rakshasis retreated and left Sita alone.

Sita then decided to end her life. “I will use the braid of my hair to hang myself,” she said aloud, thinking nobody was there.

But Hanuman, hidden in a tree, kept watching and listening.

122. Hanuman Addresses Sita

As Sita prepared to hang herself, she experienced powerful omens that gave her hope: her left eye quivered, as did her left shoulder and her left leg.

“I won’t despair!” she vowed out loud.

Then, to her surprise, a voice spoke forth from the ashoka tree. “There was a king named Dasharatha,” Hanuman began, “whose eldest son was named Rama.” Hanuman narrated the events of Rama’s exile and Sita’s abduction, and then how Rama allied himself with the monkey-king Sugriva and sent the monkeys out in all directions to find her.

“And that is how I came here!” Hanuman said.

123. Hanuman Shows Sita the Ring

The monkey climbed down from the tree and said, “My name is Hanuman, and I am Rama’s messenger to you.”

Sita hesitated. Perhaps this was Ravana in disguise, tricking her again?

Then Hanuman showed her Rama’s signet-ring, engraved with his name. “You know this ring,” Hanuman said. “Set aside your doubts. If you want, I will carry you away to Rama now.”

Sita laughed at the small monkey, but then Hanuman grew to an enormous size, and Sita realized Hanuman could do what he said.

“No,” she replied softly. “Let Rama free me. You must bring Rama to me here.”

124. Sita Tells Hanuman a Story

Sita handed Hanuman her hairpin. "Take this to Rama and remind him of this story which nobody else knows. One day in the forest a crow bothered me. It wouldn't leave me alone. I ran to Rama, but the crow pursued me, pecking me until it drew blood. Rama took a blade of kusha grass and made it into a fire-missile. The crow begged for mercy, but the missile could not fail, so Rama had the missile strike the crow's right eye. The crow lost its sight in that eye but survived. Tell that to Rama, and he will remember."

125. Hanuman Runs Wild

“I now have a long journey,” Hanuman said to Sita, “and I am very hungry.”

“I offer you the hospitality of this grove,” said Sita. “These trees are my friends; eat all you want of their fruit.”

Hanuman then began jumping from tree to tree, devouring all the fruit. The guardians of the grove came running when they heard the noise, and Hanuman pelted them with fruit, laughing.

The commotion grew so loud that it woke Ravana. “Catch that monkey!” Ravana shouted at his son Aksha.

But Hanuman killed Aksha.

Aksha was the first casualty of the war to come.

126. Hanuman Fights the Rakshasas

When Ravana learned Hanuman had killed Aksha, he shouted for Indrajit, his eldest son. “Go catch that monkey and bring him here!” Ravana shouted.

Indrajit armed himself with his deadly bow of many colors and then rode out to confront Hanuman.

Hanuman laughed when he saw Indrajit, and he kept on taunting the rakshasas. But when Indrajit fired a Brahma-arrow, Hanuman fell to the ground.

The rakshasas bound Hanuman with ropes, but Hanuman had only pretended to fall, wanting them to take him to Ravana. He shrieked and struggled, pretending to fight, and the rakshasas did exactly what he wanted.

127. Hanuman Warns Ravana

Hanuman bowed before Ravana, who sat proudly on his crystal throne.

“I am Rama’s messenger!” Hanuman proclaimed. “I allowed you to capture me so I could give you this warning: if you wish to survive, you must return Sita to her husband now. You may be the mighty king of the rakshasas, but no one can protect you from Rama.”

“I am going to kill you, monkey!” shouted Ravana.

But Vibhishana intervened. “No, my brother! A messenger’s life is sacred. You cannot kill Rama’s messenger.”

Ravana knew Vibhishana was right, so he said, “I’ll punish the monkey some other way!”

128. Hanuman Spreads the Fire

“Monkeys are proud of their tails!” Ravana snarled. “So I will burn this monkey’s tail. Let him feel both pain and shame!”

Musicians played while the rakshasas wrapped Hanuman’s tail with oil-soaked cotton. “Apply the torch!” Ravana commanded, and Hanuman’s tail burst into flames. Then Hanuman leaped up and set Ravana’s throne-room on fire.

Then the whole palace.

Then he proceeded to burn all of Lanka, house by house.

But Hanuman did not burn the ashoka grove where Sita was praying to the fire-god Agni. “Please keep Hanuman safe, O Agni!” said Sita. “Do not let the fire harm him.”

129. Hanuman Burns the Houses of Lanka

Hanuman then set fire to the royal living quarters. Ravana's wives all ran out, shrieking, "The fire-god Agni has taken the form of a monkey!"

Next, Hanuman found the house of Ravana's general, Prahasta; he leaped to the roof, using his tail to set the house on fire.

One by one, Hanuman set fire to all the great houses of Lanka. Flames and smoke filled the city.

"This is Kala himself, Time-the-Destroyer!" the rakshasas screamed. "Lanka is doomed!"

But in another house, Hanuman saw a rakshasa chanting Rama's name; it was Vibhishana, Ravana's righteous brother. Impressed, Hanuman spared that house.

130. Hanuman Returns

After burning the city of Lanka, Hanuman returned to the ashoka grove to make sure Sita was safe and to bid her farewell. “Rama will come soon,” he promised her, “and he will rescue you from Ravana.”

Hanuman then grew as large as a mountain and leaped back over the ocean, returning to where the monkeys and bears waited for him on the shore.

“You’re alive!” shouted Jambavan with joy.

“Tell us everything!” said Angada, amazed. “We could see the smoke and flames from here, and we feared the worst.”

“You need not fear,” Hanuman replied. “I bring good news!”

131. The Monkeys and Bears Celebrate

Angada led the monkeys and bears back to Kishkindha, hurrying to meet Sugriva's deadline.

On the way they came to Madhuvana, a honey-park belonging to King Sugriva. "Honey for the soldiers who bring news of Sita!" they all shouted. "Honey for the monkeys and bears!"

But Dadhimukha, the monkey who guarded the honey-park, stood his ground. "This grove belongs to King Sugriva!" he said. "The honey is his."

Undeterred, the monkeys and bears overwhelmed Dadhimukha. Even Angada joined in the fight and knocked Dadhimukha to the ground.

Then they got drunk on the honey, dancing and singing songs of victory.

132. Dadhimukha Reports to Sugriva

Driven away by the honey-drunk monkeys and bears, Dadhimukha ran to King Sugriva and reported to him what had happened.

But instead of being angry, Sugriva was delighted. “Summon Lakshmana here immediately!” he told his attendants. “Angada’s expedition to the south has succeeded. They must be returning with news of Sita!”

Then Sugriva turned to Dadhimukha. “Bring Angada here to me, together with Hanuman and Jambavan. We will listen to their news, and then Lakshmana and I will go to see Rama on Rishyamukha Hill.”

Encouraged by Sugriva’s happiness, Dadhimukha returned to the honey-park to carry out his king’s command.

133. Rama Receives Hanuman

Rama had been waiting on Rishyamukha Hill; under the terms of his exile, he could not enter any city. Much time had passed, but no news had come.

At last Rama saw Lakshmana approaching, together with Sugriva, Angada, and Hanuman, their faces shining with happiness. “Is there news?” Rama shouted eagerly.

Angada narrated their trip to the ocean, and Hanuman told Rama about his trip to Lanka.

“Sita is safe and awaits you,” he said. Then, taking Rama aside, he told Rama the story of the crow and also gave him Sita’s hairpin.

Rama wept with joy at this news.

THE WAR



134. Ravana Seeks Advice

Ravana summoned his ministers. “Advise me about Rama, the human who sent that monkey to our city.”

The rakshasas told Ravana there was nothing to fear, but Ravana’s brother Vibhishana did not agree. “There have been many ill omens,” he said. “Snakes have coiled around the sacred poles. Ants have infested the holy offerings. The cows give only curdled milk, and the horses weep. Crows are flocking to the rooftops. Vultures are circling. Jackals are howling.”

All that Vibhishana said was true, but Ravana grew angry and sent him away. “Sita is mine!” Ravana shouted. “I will never surrender her.”

135. Ravana Speaks with Kumbhakarna

Ravana's gigantic brother Kumbhakarna had been sleeping all year long, cursed as he was by Nidra-Devi, the sleep-goddess. He knew nothing about Ravana's abduction of Sita. He even slept through Hanuman's destruction of Lanka.

When Kumbhakarna awoke, Ravana told him about Sita and about Rama's demands. "What should I do?" he asked.

"Taking the woman was not wise," said Kumbhakarna. "But I will use my strength to defeat your enemies. Let Rama come, let his brother come, let the monkey army come! Wake me, and I will kill them all and drink their blood."

Then he went back to sleep.

136. Vibhishana Comes to Rama

Rama led his army of monkeys and bears south to the ocean. There they camped on the shore, deciding how to rescue Sita from Lanka.

To their surprise, a rakshasa came flying through the sky. “Rama,” cried the rakshasa, “give me refuge!” It was Vibhishana, Ravana’s righteous brother.

“He can’t be trusted,” shouted Sugriva. “I’m certain he plans to kill us in our sleep.” Angada and Jambavan agreed that Rama should send Vibhishana away.

But Hanuman said, “I know this rakshasa; I heard him speak in my defense, defying his brother. We can trust him.”

So Rama gave Vibhishana refuge.

137. Rama Petitions the Ocean

Rama sought help from Varuna, the Ocean God, to cross over to Lanka. He conducted rituals by the shore for three days and nights, but the Ocean did not come to him, and Rama grew angry. He attacked the Ocean with arrows, shattering the water and terrifying the Ocean's inhabitants.

Lakshmana rushed towards Rama and restrained him. "You are not a man of anger, brother. Stop this attack."

Ocean appeared at last. "Dear Rama," he said, "the way to cross me is by means of a bridge. The monkey Nala knows how to do this; let him build the bridge."

138. Nala Builds a Bridge

Following Varuna's advice, Rama sought out the monkey Nala, the son of Vishvakarma, architect of the gods. "Yes," Nala told Rama, "I can build this bridge."

Thousands of monkeys and bears dragged trees and rocks to the ocean's edge. Nala chose the rocks, fitting them one to another, and on each rock he wrote Rama's name. Thanks to the power of the Rama-nama, the stones floated on the water; they did not sink.

As they saw the bridge stretching farther and farther towards Lanka, everyone whooped with joy. Even the gods and the gandharvas gazed down from heaven in amazement.

139. A Squirrel Wants to Help

While monkeys and bears hurried to build the bridge, dragging huge trees and enormous rocks to the seashore, a squirrel wanted to help. So the squirrel rolled in the sand, ran to the bridge, and shook the sand out of his fur. Again and again.

Then an angry monkey kicked the squirrel out of the way. “We need real workers!” he shouted.

But Rama rebuked the monkey. “The squirrel’s work matters,” explained Rama. “That sand is filling gaps between the stones.”

In gratitude, Rama ran his fingers over the squirrel’s back.

That is why the squirrels of India have stripes.

140. A Woman's Body Washes Ashore

One morning, they saw something floating in the water... a woman's body, tangled in the seaweed.

Lakshmana ran up. "It's Sita!" he wailed in horror.

Rama came running, and the princes wept, stricken with grief.

But Hanuman was suspicious. He built a pyre, put the body on top, and set it on fire.

"Stop, Hanuman!" Rama shouted. "What do you think you are doing?"

Before Hanuman could answer, the supposed corpse rose up and shrieked.

"It's not Sita!" said Hanuman. "This is Benjakai; I saw this shape-shifting sorceress in Ravana's palace."

Howling in defeat, Benjakai fled back into the ocean.

141. Who Destroyed the Bridge?

The bridge soon reached halfway to Lanka.

But then, during the night, sea-monsters destroyed the bridge. In the morning, they saw the sea-monsters splashing in the ruins, dragging away the rocks.

“I’ll find out who did this!” Hanuman shouted. He dove down into the water. There he found a palace, and inside the palace he found the mermaid Suvannamaccha.

“Ravana asked me to destroy your bridge,” she said. “But you are a very handsome monkey. I like you! My creatures will help repair the bridge. Forgive me, please!”

Hanuman smiled at the mermaid.

Later, she would bear his son: Macchanu.

142. Rama Marches to Lanka

When they finally finished building the bridge, Rama led his army of monkeys and bears on their way to Lanka.

But Ravana was watching! Before Rama and his army could enter Lanka, he shot two massive arrows that destroyed each end of the bridge.

Rama's army could not go forward or backward, and hungry sea-monsters were swarming in the waters around them.

"Help us, Hanuman!" shouted Rama.

The mighty Hanuman leaped to Lanka and then enlarged himself, expanding his tail to span the gap.

Rama's army then marched over Hanuman's tail into Lanka.

Rama had thwarted Ravana's plans once again.

143. The Army Meets the Enemy

Rama and his army were about to march onto the shore of Lanka when Vibhishana shouted a warning.

“Stop, Rama! Stop!” he yelled. “Do you see that rakshasa coming towards us?”

“Yes!” said Rama. “He’s wearing a blindfold. Who is he?”

“That’s Bhasmalochana,” Vibhishana explained. “His eyes incinerate everything that he gazes at. I brought this just in case!” Vibhishana handed Rama a mirror.

Rama grasped the mirror and pointed it in the direction of Bhasmalochana.

Then, as soon as the rakshasa removed his blindfold, he found himself gazing into the mirror and incinerated himself.

Rama had thwarted Ravana again.

144. Ravana Summons a Magician

Ravana knew Rama's army was ready to invade Lanka, so he summoned the greatest magician among the rakshasas.

"I want you to conjure up Rama's head," Ravana said, "and I will show it to Sita."

The magician did as Ravana commanded.

Ravana then entered the ashoka grove and threw Rama's head at Sita's feet.

"Behold!" Ravana shouted. "Rama, who was your husband, is dead. Now I will be your husband."

Sita fainted, but when she recovered she stared at Ravana coldly.

"Kill me too," she said. "I will join my husband in heaven."

The head vanished.

Ravana's plan had failed.

145. Rama Sends Angada to Ravana

After Rama and his army marched across the bridge to Lanka, they built camp.

Then Rama sent the monkey Angada to Ravana on a diplomatic mission. “Tell Ravana this: free Sita, and we will depart in peace.”

Angada went to the palace, but Ravana ordered his guards to seize Angada and kill him.

Angada broke free and jumped to the roof of Ravana’s palace, punching holes in the roof with his fists and stamping with his feet until the roof collapsed.

Angada then leaped back to Rama. “There can be no peace with Ravana,” he explained. “There will be war.”

146. Indrajit Attacks

Ravana's soldiers carried the usual weapons of war, while Rama's soldiers wielded trees and rocks, fighting with their teeth and claws. The armies clashed day after day, and blood flowed everywhere, the blood of rakshasas mingling with the blood of monkeys and bears.

Ravana's son Indrajit then used his invisibility to penetrate Rama's defenses. He appeared out of nowhere, attacking the princes with his serpent-arrows. "Die!" he shouted. "Die, both of you!"

As they writhed in agony, pinned to the ground by Indrajit's arrows, Indrajit disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

The monkeys and bears all howled in despair.

147. Sita Visits the Battlefield

Indrajit returned to Ravana in triumph, shouting, "I have killed both Rama and Lakshmana!"

Ravana rejoiced and then summoned Trijata, one of the rakshasis who guarded Sita, ordering her to take Sita to see the bodies. "You can use my flying-chariot," he said. "This time it is no trick; she can see for herself that my son has killed her Rama."

Trijata did as Ravana commanded, and when Sita looked down from the sky, she saw both Rama and Lakshmana, pinned to the ground with arrows, lying in a pool of blood. Then Sita burst into tears, her heart broken.

148. Trijata Consoles Sita

Sobbing, Sita pointed to the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana on the ground. "Look!" she said to Trijata. "There lies my Rama, with his noble brother Lakshmana lying beside him."

But Trijata, who had become Sita's friend and confidant, did not despair. "They must still be alive," she told Sita. "This divine vehicle cannot bear the weight of a widow's grief. If your husband were truly dead, the chariot would plunge to the ground. Rama must still be alive, and his brother too. Take heart! I know the news will reach Lanka soon: Rama lives. The war is not over."

149. Garuda Arrives

On the battlefield, the monkeys and bears wept over the bodies of the two princes, but Vibhishana said, “The serpent-arrows have only paralyzed them; they are not dead.”

Then the eagle-god Garuda, enemy of all serpents everywhere, hurtled down from the sky like lightning. When the serpent-arrows saw Garuda, they fled underground, hissing in terror.

Garuda then bent over the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana, caressing their faces, and the two princes revived. At his touch, their wounds were healed. Even better: Rama and Lakshmana were now stronger than before, imbued with Garuda’s powers.

All bowed before Garuda in thanks.

150. Rama Worships Durga

To prepare for war, Rama honored Durga, the warrior-goddess. “I will offer her 108 perfect blue lotuses,” Rama said, “one for each of her sacred names.”

So Rama gathered the lotuses and began chanting the names, offering one lotus for each name.

But when Rama reached the last name, he realized he had miscounted: he was short one lotus. Without hesitating, Rama took an arrow, ready to extract one of his eyes to offer instead.

At just that moment, the goddess appeared. “Stop!” she said. “Your offering is complete, Lotus-Eyed Rama.”

Then the goddess blessed Rama, bestowing victory upon him.

151. Ravana Awakens Kumbhakarna

Ravana's spies confirmed the rumor: Rama was alive! Enraged, Ravana launched an assault, but the monkeys and bears repelled the rakshasas, felling them with trees, crushing them with rocks, and slashing them with teeth and claws.

Ravana then woke his brother, the giant Kumbhakarna, who had gone back to sleep. "Save me!" Ravana said.

So Kumbhakarna marched into battle, grabbing monkeys and bears by the handful and devouring them.

But Vibhishana reassured Rama. "Ravana has awakened our brother too early!" he explained. "Kumbhakarna will die this day; he cannot escape his fate. Launch a counterattack, and you will be victorious."

152. Kumbhakarna Marches into Battle

Hanuman bravely attacked Kumbhakarna, hurling a mountain-top at the giant. Kumbhakarna stumbled but did not fall, and then landed his spear in Hanuman's chest. Seeing Hanuman wounded, thousands of monkeys jumped on Kumbhakarna, but the giant shook them off.

Sugriva then struck Kumbhakarna with a boulder, smashing it to pieces on his head while Rama aimed his arrows at Kumbhakarna's heart. Still the giant did not fall.

Rama then used his arrows to chop off Kumbhakarna's arms.

Then his legs.

With one more arrow, Rama sliced off Kumbhakarna's head.

So Kumbhakarna died in battle. He could not escape his fate.

153. Indrajit Attacks Again

After Rama killed Kumbhakarna, Indrajit conducted a ritual to imbue his weapons with even greater power and then returned to the battlefield, invisible.

As Indrajit began to rain down deadly arrows on the monkeys and bears, they screamed in terror, defenseless against this invisible warrior.

“Indrajit has come for us, brother,” Rama said to Lakshmana. “We must expose ourselves to him now, before he kills us all.”

So Rama and Lakshmana rushed forward, and Indrajit launched his Brahmastra directly at them. The two princes sank to the ground, and Indrajit flew back to Lanka, roaring with the joy of victory.

154. Hanuman Goes to the Himalayas

“That was Indrajit’s Brahmastra,” shouted Vibhishana in despair. “I don’t know any remedy.”

“But I do,” said Jambavan the bear. “Hanuman must go to Rishabha Mountain in the Himalayas and bring back the sanjivani herb. Do it now, Hanuman!”

Hanuman leaped into the air and headed north. When he reached Rishabha Mountain, he didn’t know how to find the sanjivani, so he tore the mountain from the ground and carried it to Lanka.

Hanuman flew so fast that the mountain caught fire, and when Rama and Lakshmana inhaled the smoke of the burning herbs, they revived.

Then the war continued.

155. Indrajit Conjures an Illusion

Indrajit conjured a Sita illusion and rode towards Hanuman on the battlefield. When he was sure Hanuman was watching, Indrajit grabbed Sita's hair, pulled her head back, and slit her throat with his sword.

Hanuman wailed, overcome with grief, while Indrajit turned and rode back to Lanka.

When Hanuman told Rama what he had seen, Rama stared at him, shocked into speechlessness.

Lakshmana shouted, "I will kill this Indrajit! He must die. He must die today!"

"Be calm," Vibhishana told the princes. "This is another of Indrajit's illusions."

"Will you help me kill Indrajit?" asked Lakshmana.

"I will," replied Vibhishana.

156. Indrajit Conducts a Sacrifice

Indrajit worshipped the war-goddess Pratyangira in a hidden shrine, conducting an elaborate ritual so that the devi would make him invincible.

Vibhishana, however, knew where the shrine was. “I will take you there,” he said to Lakshmana.

With Vibhishana’s help, Lakshmana attacked the shrine, forcing Indrajit to break off the ritual. When Indrajit saw that it was Vibhishana who had betrayed him, he shouted, “Uncle, what have you done?”

“Your father has violated every law of good conduct,” Vibhishana replied. “I fight for Rama now. I fight for Dharma.”

In response, Indrajit attacked both Vibhishana and Lakshmana, but they escaped.

157. Lakshmana Confronts Indrajit

Indrajit returned to Lanka for his chariot and then rode back into battle, determined to kill both Lakshmana and Vibhishana.

When Lakshmana saw Indrajit approaching, he launched an arrow that killed Indrajit's charioteer, and Vibhishana killed all four of Indrajit's horses.

Indrajit and Lakshmana then clashed on foot, raining down arrows on one another.

"I have vowed to kill you!" Lakshmana shouted, invoking Rama as he nocked an arrow.

Lakshmana fired, and the arrow severed Indrajit's head.

Thus Lakshmana fulfilled his vow.

He had killed Indrajit.

The monkeys and bears rejoiced, and Rama embraced his victorious brother, full of gratitude.

158. Indrajit's Wife Comes to Rama

Lakshmana's arrow severed Indrajit's head with such force that it flew through the air and landed at Ravana's feet.

"Father, forgive me," said the head. "I failed you." Then the head spoke no more.

Sulochana, Indrajit's wife, was determined to cremate Indrajit's head and body together, so she walked fearlessly across the battlefield until she found Indrajit's body.

"Indrajit was an obedient son, like you," she said to Rama. "I am a faithful wife, like Sita. I beg you: let me take my husband's body away from here."

Rama agreed, and Sulochana carried Indrajit's body away, grieving for her husband.

159. Rama Battles Taranisen

Across the battlefield, Rama saw a rakshasa ferociously attacking the monkeys and bears. As he watched, Rama realized the rakshasa was tattooed all over with his name.

“He bears my name!” Rama said to Vibhishana. “Who is he?”

“His name is Taranisen,” Vibhishana explained, “and he worships you. He bears your name everywhere, but not on his teeth. Strike him in the teeth, and he will fall.”

So Rama struck the strange warrior in the teeth, and the blow killed him.

Afterwards, Rama asked Vibhishana, “How did you know about his teeth?”

“Because,” Vibhishana said sadly, “he was my son.”

160. Rama Duels with Ravana's Son

Ravana's son Virabahu was devoted to Vishnu. Seeing Rama in battle, he recognized Rama as Vishnu on earth.

"O God!" shouted Virabahu, bowing down before Rama. "I am yours! Let your sword send me to heaven." Then he offered his neck to Rama's sword.

"I cannot kill someone who shows such devotion," Rama said.

"Then I will make you kill me," shouted Virabahu, and he launched an attack. They fought violently, until finally Rama's sword cut off Virabahu's head.

The head's mouth kept chanting the name of Rama.

Rama bent down and touched the head, and Virabahu ascended to heaven.

161. Ravana Invokes Kali

Ravana decided to pray to the warrior-goddess Kali for protection. With Kali's help, he could become completely invincible, safe even from humans and monkeys.

"You must stop him!" Vibhishana said to Hanuman and Angada, so they flew to Lanka and found Ravana deep in meditation. The monkeys pelted Ravana with fruits and flowers he had offered to the goddess, but they could not break Ravana's meditation.

Then they began stripping off Mandodari's clothes. "Husband," she screamed, "help me!"

This broke Ravana's meditation. He came to Mandodari's aid, and the monkeys flew away, mission accomplished: Ravana received no boon from Kali.

162. Ravana Threatens Sita

Overwhelmed by all his failures, Ravana grabbed a sword and ran to the ashoka grove. “SHE did this!” he screamed. “SHE killed my brother. SHE killed my sons. I am going to cut that wretched woman’s throat myself!”

Sita prepared for death calmly, with some regret that she had not let Hanuman carry her away. “Perhaps I am to blame,” she thought.

At the last moment, one of Ravana’s ministers, an honorable rakshasa named Suparshva, restrained him. “This woman is not the enemy,” he said. “Your enemy awaits you on the battlefield.”

So Ravana went to challenge Rama at last.

163. Ravana Rides into Battle

Ravana rode into battle, armed with the Tamasa, Bringer-of-Darkness. “I will destroy Rama and Lakshmana,” Ravana shouted, “and all their army!”

He then launched the Tamasa, incinerating thousands of Rama’s soldiers, and his chariot ran over their ashes.

Meanwhile, Rama and Lakshmana stood firm. They nocked their arrows, invoking the gods to destroy the Tamasa. Their arrows dissipated the darkness, but Ravana kept coming, hurling weapons at the princes.

Lakshmana then fired an arrow that shattered Ravana’s bow, while Vibhishana killed Ravana’s charioteer and horses, and Rama launched mighty weapons of fire.

Defeated again, Ravana retreated behind Lanka’s golden walls.

164. Rama Duels with Ravana

Next, the god Indra sent his chariot to Rama, driven by his charioteer Matali, who gave Rama the Brahmastra.

“Death awaits you, Ravana!” Rama shouted, and Ravana once again rode out into battle.

Rama’s arrows broke Ravana’s flag-staff, and the flag fell to the ground. Rama then sliced off one of Ravana’s heads, and another, and another, but a new head appeared for each head Ravana lost.

“Use the Brahmastra,” Matali urged. “Aim at his navel!”

Rama fired the weapon directly into Ravana’s navel, thus shattering the pot of immortality Ravana concealed there.

Ravana then toppled from his chariot, dead.

AFTER THE WAR



165. Vibhishana Grieves for Ravana

Vibhishana grieved for his dead brother.

“Ravana died in battle,” said Rama, “as a great warrior should. Do not mourn. Honor him instead with funeral rites.”

As Vibhishana prepared the funeral pyre, Ravana’s wives came forth from Lanka and kneeled in grief around his body, still lying in the dust of the battlefield. Mandodari unbound her hair and wept.

After Vibhishana conducted Ravana’s funeral, Rama crowned Vibhishana as King of Lanka.

Matali saluted Lanka’s new king as he soared aloft in Indra’s chariot, returning to the abode of the devas.

And then, at last, Rama sent Vibhishana to fetch Sita.

166. Vibhishana Fetches Sita

“Your husband awaits,” Vibhishana said to Sita. “Bathe and adorn yourself; then we will go.”

“I would go now,” Sita replied, “just as I am.”

“No, Sita,” Vibhishana told her. “Let it be as Rama commands.”

Sita bathed and adorned herself, and then Vibhishana brought her to Rama.

Rama was torn between love for Sita and the shame of public scandal. She had been in another man’s house, and everyone knew it.

“For the insult Ravana did me, I have killed him,” Rama said. “The war is over. I wish you well, and now you may go where you like.”

167. Sita Rebukes Rama

Rama's words made Sita feel angry and ashamed. "How can you treat me with such contempt?" she said, sobbing. "How can you have so little regard for womankind? Ravana overpowered and abducted me, but I was forever faithful to you, and I will prove it."

Sita turned to Lakshmana. "Build a fire!" she ordered.

Lakshmana obeyed.

Sita then prayed to Agni, the fire-god. "Demonstrate my faithfulness for all to see, and do not burn me."

Sita entered the fire.

It did not burn her.

Agni himself emerged from the fire, carrying Sita in his arms.

Rama received her with joy.

168. The Story of Maya-Sita

Some say that it was not Sita who entered the fire, but Maya-Sita, a double of Sita. Ravana didn't bring the real Sita to Lanka. Instead, the devas snatched Sita from Ravana's chariot when he wasn't looking, replacing the real Sita with Maya, an illusion.

Ravana took Sita's double to Lanka, and it was Sita's double who came to Rama on the battlefield after the war was over.

When she stepped into the fire, the Maya-Sita was destroyed, and Agni restored the real Sita to Rama.

So it was Maya-Sita who entered the fire, but the real Sita who emerged.

169. Indra Grants Rama a Boon

Indra then appeared, descending from the heavens in his celestial chariot.

“You have done well, Rama,” he said, “and the devas have sent me to grant you a boon. Tell me what you wish.”

“Restore life to all my monkey and bear soldiers who fell in battle so that their mothers and wives may rejoice in their return,” Rama replied. “Let them rise up stronger than before!”

Indra nodded and as he ascended into the sky, the monkeys and bears were restored to life, staring at one another in amazement.

“Let’s hurry now to Ayodhya,” Rama shouted. “Bharata awaits us.”

170. Rama Goes Home

“Take Ravana’s flying chariot,” Vibhishana said, and Rama did so, sending Hanuman ahead with a message for Bharata: “The exile is over, and Rama is coming!”

Receiving this news, Bharata rejoiced and began preparations for Rama’s coronation.

When Rama reached Ayodhya, Bharata placed the royal sandals at his feet. “These sandals sat on the throne in your place,” he said. “Now you will be our king.”

When Rama and Lakshmana returned, even their own mothers didn’t recognize them. Fourteen years had changed the princes; the boys were now men. Kaushalya embraced Rama, Sumitra embraced Lakshmana, and both mothers embraced Sita.

171. Rama Becomes King

After embracing Lakshmana, Sumitra said, “Go wake Urmila!”

Lakshmana’s wife Urmila had been sleeping all those years so Lakshmana could stay awake.

Lakshmana found his wife fast asleep in their bed. “We have returned,” he whispered. Urmila opened her eyes and wept with joy when she saw him.

Rama was then crowned king, and Sita was his queen. The royal priests conducted the ceremony, and the devas showered them with flowers from heaven.

Thus began the reign of King Rama. Rama’s brothers and their wives rejoiced, as did Hanuman, Sugriva, Jambavan, and Vibhishana, along with all the people of Ayodhya.

172. Sita Rewards Hanuman

After Rama's coronation, Sita honored Hanuman with a pearl necklace.

Hanuman started biting the pearls, cracking them open and looking inside.

"What are you looking for?" Sita asked, laughing, and all the people in attendance laughed too.

"I am looking for you," said Hanuman, "and for Rama. Without you inside, these pearls are useless."

"Rama and Sita are on their thrones!" the people shouted.
"How could they be in the pearls?"

"In the same way they are in my heart," Hanuman replied, tearing open his chest; everyone could see Rama and Sita there. "Are they not in your hearts also?"

173. Hanuman Honors Rama

The rishi Narada came to Ayodhya one day, shortly after Rama's coronation. He saluted Rama and Sita in the throne room, and then he noticed that Hanuman was there.

"O Hanuman!" said Narada, "Sita wears a vermillion dot on her forehead to honor Rama. How do you honor him?"

Hanuman rushed to the marketplace and bought all the sacks of vermillion that were for sale. He returned to the palace, emptied the sacks in a heap on the floor, and rolled in the powder until he was covered all over.

"I honor him this way," Hanuman said, beaming with pleasure.

174. Sita Has News for Rama

King Rama delighted in the company of Queen Sita. He would spend the morning occupied with royal duties, and then spend the rest of the day with his queen. Sita, likewise, performed her duties and attended to the queen-mothers in the morning, and then spent the rest of her day with Rama.

When Rama learned Sita was pregnant, he was overjoyed. "I could not be happier," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I would like to visit the rishis in their forest ashrams again. Do you remember?" Sita said.

"Of course I remember," Rama said, smiling.

VALMIKI AND
THE
RAMAYANA



175. The Story of Ratnakar

To understand what happens next, listen to the story of Ratnakar:

Ratnakar was a robber, supporting his family by theft and murder.

One day, Ratnakar had robbed a man and was about to kill him. That man was the rishi Narada.

“Stop!” Narada said. “Would your wife and children approve?”

Ratnakar was surprised by this question and went to ask his family.

“I earn my living by robbery and murder,” he told them.
“Do you approve?”

“The crime is yours alone, not mine,” said his wife.

His children said the same.

Ratnakar became a new man; he renounced crime forever.

176. Ratnakar Becomes Valmiki

After Ratnakar renounced his life of crime, he went deep into the forest to live a hermit's life.

As he sat there, unmoving, deep in meditation, ants built an anthill around him. The anthill, "valmiki" in Sanskrit, became his home. Plants wrapped their tendrils around him, and birds nested in his matted hair and beard.

Meanwhile, he thought only of Brahman, the Cosmic Reality. "All is Brahman, all is God. All this Universe is Brahman, all that lives and moves and dies."

Years later, he awoke, enlightened, and emerged from the anthill.

Ratnakar the robber was now the rishi Valmiki.

177. Valmiki Becomes a Poet

Two cranes, devoted to one another, lived by a river near the rishi Valmiki's ashram.

One day as Valmiki watched the birds making love, a hunter shot an arrow from the bushes. One crane fell to the ground, dead, and his mate screamed in grief as she gazed at his blood-spattered corpse.

In anger and sorrow at this reckless slaughter, Valmiki cursed the hunter in verse:

The hunter who this loving bird did slay

For his great crime a grievous price will pay.

These lines of verse were the first poem in the world, and Valmiki was the first poet.

178. Narada Tells Valmiki about Rama

The rishi Narada visited Valmiki in his ashram.

“You’re the man I almost killed!” Valmiki exclaimed.

“I’m glad you didn’t,” said Narada, smiling. “And now, we meet again.”

“In your wisdom, perhaps you can tell me: who is the perfect man?” Valmiki asked. “What man possesses strength and a sense of duty? What man is truthful and steadfast in his vows, compassionate and wise, handsome and powerful, free from anger and envy, but fearsome when he is roused to righteousness?”

“That rare person is Rama,” replied Narada, “the son of King Dasharatha...”

Narada then told Valmiki the story of Rama.

179. Valmiki Reads Hanuman's Ramayana

Valmiki composed the Ramayana, the epic story of Rama's journey.

The devas and devis all praised his poem; Valmiki was proud.

But then Narada said, "Hanuman's is better."

Valmiki stared in disbelief.

"Go read it yourself! He lives in an orchard in the Himalayas, and he wrote his Ramayana on banana-tree leaves."

Valmiki went to Hanuman's orchard, and there he read Hanuman's Ramayana on the leaves.

"Hanuman's is better," Valmiki admitted, weeping.

Then Hanuman appeared. "Why are you weeping?" he asked.

Valmiki explained.

Hanuman grabbed the leaves and swallowed them. "Now your Ramayana is the best," Hanuman told Valmiki, smiling.

180. Gossip Spreads

One day Rama was laughing and joking with the friends of his youth. "Tell me," Rama said, "what is the talk of the town these days?"

"The citizens are still talking about your victory over Ravana, delighting in your triumph," they said.

"Tell me more," Rama insisted. "Not just the good, but the bad also."

"Well," one of his friends admitted, "some men complain that you allowed Sita to come back into your house. They now wonder if they must do the same for their gadabout wives."

This gossip affected Rama deeply. He dismissed his friends and then summoned Lakshmana.

181. Rama Makes a Decision

“The people are complaining about Sita,” Rama said to Lakshmana. “I know she was faithful to me, but the people doubt her. Their doubt fills me with sorrow.”

Lakshmana looked at his brother in confusion.

Rama continued. “Tomorrow you will take Sita into the forest, leaving her there near Valmiki’s ashram. She has been wanting to visit the forest ashrams.”

All the color drained from Lakshmana’s face.

“And you will never speak to me of Sita again.” With tears in his eyes, Rama left the room.

Lakshmana stood there, unable to believe what his brother had asked him to do.

182. Lakshmana Takes Sita to the Forest

“Rama asked me to take you to visit the forest ashrams,” Lakshmana said. “Let’s go there now.”

Sita smiled at Lakshmana. “I told Rama I wanted to visit the ashrams again,” she said happily, expecting Rama would join them later.

When they reached the forest, Lakshmana began to weep. “Rama has ordered that I leave you here, Sita. He urges you to go to the rishi Valmiki, who will shelter you in his ashram.”

Sita also wept. “Do what you must,” she said, and Lakshmana left her there.

When Lakshmana disappeared from view, Sita fell to the ground in despair.

183. Sita Meets Valmiki

As Sita lay sobbing on the ground, the sons of the rishi Valmiki called to their father and ran to help her.

“So she has come,” Valmiki said to himself. He was not surprised, for the gods had revealed this to him in a vision.

Still, Valmiki was moved to pity when he saw the queen. She began to explain what had happened, but he interrupted her. “Say no more,” Valmiki assured her. “I know you aren’t to blame, and my home is yours.”

Valmiki brought her to the ashram, and Sita lived there with Valmiki’s family and his followers.

184. Sita Gives Birth

While living in Valmiki's ashram, Sita gave birth to her twins.

Valmiki performed a ritual with kusha grass to protect the first-born son. "This child will be named Kusha," said Valmiki, and Sita smiled.

Valmiki had saved a portion of kusha grass for the second son. He performed the ritual again, and said, "This child will be named Lava," ("Lava" means "portion"). Sita smiled again.

The boys grew up in Valmiki's ashram, and later Valmiki taught them the song he had composed, the Ramayana, the song of their father's adventures, but the boys did not know Rama was their father.

185. Another Story of the Twins

Others, however, say that Sita gave birth to only one son, Lava, and she raised him in Valmiki's ashram.

One day, Sita went to the river to do the laundry, leaving the toddler in Valmiki's care. When Valmiki wasn't looking, Lava wandered off. Valmiki couldn't find him anywhere!

In desperation, Valmiki took a handful of kusha grass and used a mantra to turn the grass into a boy, a duplicate of Lava.

At that moment, Sita returned, holding Lava in her arms. Surprised to see the second child, she asked, "Who is that?"

"That is Kusha," said Valmiki, "Lava's twin."

186. Shatrughna Hears the Twins Singing

One day a stranger arrived at Valmiki's ashram: Shatrughna, Rama's brother. He had gotten lost in the forest and was seeking shelter.

Recognizing her brother-in-law, Sita was overcome with emotion and hid in a hut where Shatrughna would not see her.

Valmiki offered the noble prince food and water. Then after the meal, the twins, Lava and Kusha, sang Valmiki's Ramayana, the song of Rama.

Shatrughna listened in amazement. The song included everything; even Shatrughna was part of the boys' song.

"What a beautiful song," Shatrughna exclaimed, "and what beautiful boys!"

But he did not guess they were Rama's sons.

187. Valmiki Takes the Twins to Ayodhya

The song Valmiki composed about Rama was very long. “You must memorize it all,” he said to Lava and Kusha. The boys obeyed, learning the whole Ramayana by heart.

Everyone who heard the boys’ song was amazed; they gave the boys gifts and blessed them.

Valmiki then took the boys to Ayodhya, where Rama heard them sing.

“Who are these two boys? They look like celestial gandharvas, the musicians of heaven! But how do they know of my adventures?” Rama wondered. From high on his golden throne, King Rama commanded the boys, “Sing! Sing some more!”

188. Rama Summons Sita

Because the Ramayana was so long, and because Rama wanted to hear the whole song from beginning to end, he kept inviting the boys to return to the palace.

Meanwhile, the people of Ayodhya were very curious. “Those boys resemble our king,” they whispered to one another. “Who are they really?”

As the boys reached the end of their story, describing how Sita gave birth in exile, Rama stared at them in wonder, realizing who the twins must be.

“Bring your mother to the palace,” Rama told the boys. “Let her prove her innocence again in front of all Ayodhya.”

189. Sita Arrives

Valmiki brought Sita to Ayodhya and presented her to Rama. "Here is the blameless woman you exiled because of gossip," said Valmiki. "And these boys are your sons. Now Sita will again prove her innocence."

Sita kept her eyes fixed on the ground. "If I was loyal to Rama, thinking of no one else," she said, "let the earth-goddess Bhudevi receive me."

The goddess arose from under the ground, seated on a shining throne. Bhudevi took Sita in her arms, and then they sank back down, and the ground closed over them.

The gods rained down flowers in Sita's honor.

190. Rama Makes Plans

After Sita vanished into the earth, all that remained were blades of grass.

Sita's hair.

Overwhelmed with grief, Rama caressed the grass, thinking of the past.

He then embraced Lava and Kusha, acknowledging them as his sons, princes of Ayodhya.

Later, Rama secured kingdoms for the sons of his brother Bharata, and likewise for the sons of his brother Lakshmana.

Following Bharata's advice, Rama declared that his own sons, Lava and Kusha, would rule Ayodhya after him. Legend reports that Lava founded the city of Lavapura (modern Lahore), and Kusha founded the city of Kasur to the south of Lavapura.

191. Rama Makes a Statue

After Sita vanished forever, everyone expected Rama to remarry.

“Who will be his bride?” the people wondered. “Perhaps someone from Ayodhya!” said some. “Perhaps a princess from the south!” said others. “Or the north!” “Or the west!” “Or the east!” “A princess from a nearby kingdom!” “A princess from far away!”

But Rama refused to remarry.

His priests protested. “You must have a queen! You should have a queen by your side when you conduct the holy rituals.”

“Sita is still my queen,” said Rama, and he had a golden statue made of Sita, keeping that statue by his side.

192. The Statues Speak to Rama

Some say that Rama had a new golden statue of Sita made for every sacred ritual. Then, after each ritual, the golden statue would be installed in a special temple.

One day Rama went to visit the temple, and the golden statues of Sita all called out to him. “Husband!” they cried. “Husband! Who will take care of us when you depart this earth?”

“I will see you again,” Rama promised, “and we will be reunited in love during my next lifetime.”

In his next lifetime, Rama would return as Krishna, and the golden statues would be Krishna’s beloved gopis.

193. Rama Confronts Shambuka

An old brahmin came to Rama, carrying his dead child. “This is your fault!” he said to Rama. “Things are out of control. My son has died before me.”

Not sure what to do, Rama sought advice from Narada. “There is a low-born man practicing austerities in the forest,” Narada said. “He is a shudra, the lowest caste, and a shudra should not aspire to gain heaven by practicing austerities. His name is Shambuka, and you must stop him.”

Rama found Shambuka in the forest and beheaded him.

At that very instant, the dead brahmin boy came back to life.

194. Kala Comes to Rama

Once when Rama entered Ayodhya, Hanuman glimpsed Yama, God of Death, lurking in the crowd. Hanuman lashed his tail on the ground in warning.

Death fled in fear.

Then Kala, God of Time, came to Rama. "Let no one disturb us," Rama ordered Lakshmana. "Whoever disturbs us must die."

Meanwhile, the rishi Durvasa arrived. "I must see Rama!" he said.

"Please wait," said Lakshmana.

"I shall curse Rama, his sons, and his kingdom!" shouted Durvasa.

To save the kingdom, Lakshmana let Durvasa in.

"Lakshmana must die," said Kala.

Thus Lakshmana departed for the Sarayu river, and he beheaded himself there.

195. Rama Grieves for Lakshmana

After Lakshmana's death, Rama went to the river every day and wept for his brother.

There was also a monk who came to the river. Rama saw him fill his watering can and then pour the water over a large rock. The monk did this every day.

"That rock is not a plant," Rama told him. "It can't grow or produce fruit. So why do you water the rock?"

"Why do you shed tears for your brother?" replied the monk.

Rama then understood that his weeping served no more purpose than watering a rock, and he set his grief aside.

196. Hanuman Seeks Rama's Ring

Rama dropped his ring, and it fell through a crack.

"I'll get it!" shouted Hanuman.

He jumped down through the crack into the land of the nagas, and they took Hanuman to Vasuki, their king.

"I seek Rama's ring," said Hanuman.

Vasuki offered Hanuman a platter of rings: hundreds of identical rings!

"Which one is Rama's?" asked Hanuman.

"They all are," Vasuki explained. "There have been as many Ramas as there are rings. When a Rama incarnation ends, his ring falls down. By now, your Rama will have departed."

Hanuman rushed back to Ayodhya.

What Vasuki had said was true.

197. Rama Departs

After Lakshmana departed, Rama was overcome by grief. “Bharata will now be king,” he declared.

Bharata, however, refused. “I have no wish for the kingdom without you in it,” he said. “You should crown Kusha and Lava instead.”

So the boys became the kings of Ayodhya, and Rama left the city. His bow and his arrows took on human form and walked with him. His brothers Bharata and Shatrughna followed, along with all the people of Ayodhya.

Rama stepped into the Sarayu river, and the devas applauded. “Welcome, Rama!” they shouted. “Come, Vishnu!”

So Vishnu returned at last to heaven.

198. Afterword: A Story about Tenalirama

The royal painter decorated the palace walls with Ramayana murals. Tenalirama scoffed. “Where’s the rest of Lakshmana?” he asked, pointing to one figure.

“That’s a profile!” replied the painter. “You have to imagine the rest.”

“I will decorate the summer palace with my own Ramayana paintings!” boasted Tenalirama.

A month later, he was done. The king came to see ... and there were only noses. Everywhere! Noses painted all over the walls!

“What is this?” he shouted angrily.

“Well, this is Rama, of course. And Sita, Lakshmana...” Tenalirama pointed out each nose one by one. “You have to imagine the rest.”

199. Another Story about Tenalirama

A courtesan invited Tenalirama to recite the Ramayana, the epic story of Rama's adventures, just for her.

Tenalirama began with the story of King Dasharatha and Rama's birth, followed by the intrigue in King Dasharatha's court, then Rama's exile into the forest, accompanied by his devoted wife Sita and his loyal brother Lakshmana.

"So," he said, "Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, went into the forest to begin their exile."

Then Tenalirama fell silent.

The courtesan waited, and finally she could wait no longer. "Then what happened?" she demanded.

"Be patient," said Tenalirama. "They are still walking through the forest."

200. A Story about Shiva

The world's maya is like a magician's magic. The magician is real; the magic isn't. The illusion lasts for only a moment.

Shiva was sitting atop Mount Kailasha with his bull Nandi. Suddenly, a loud shout reverberated through the air and the earth shook.

"What was that?" asked Nandi.

"Ravana is born," replied Shiva.

A few minutes later there was more shouting and the earth quaked.

"What was that?" asked Nandi again.

"Ravana is dead," replied Shiva, smiling.

Birth and death are like bubbles in water; the water is real, but the bubbles arising from the water appear and disappear.

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Glossary of Characters and Terms

Visit Ramayana.LauraGibbs.net for a clickable list linking to Wikipedia articles and other online resources.

Agastya. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages).

Agni. god of fire.

Ahalya. wife of the rishi Gautama.

Aja. king of Ayodhya; father of Dasharatha, Rama's father.

Akampana. son of Sumali; brother of Kaikasi; uncle of Ravana.

Aksha. youngest son of Ravana and Mandodari.

Anaranya. ancient king of Ayodhya; Rama's remote ancestor.

Anasuya. wife of the rishi Atri.

Anga. ancient kingdom of eastern India; home of Rishyashringa.

Angada. monkey; son of Vali and his wife Tara; Rama's ally.

Anjana. mother of Hanuman.

apsaras. beautiful celestial beings skilled in music and dancing.

Aruna. charioteer of Surya, the sun-god.

Aruni. female form of Aruna.

Arundhati. wife of the rishi Vashishtha.

ashoka trees. flowering trees.

ashrams. secluded homes of holy persons; hermitages.

Ashwapati. king of Kekeya; father of Kaikeyi, wife of Dasharatha.

astras. celestial weapons imbued with supernatural power.

asuras. supernatural beings, often hostile to devas and humans.

avatar. the “descent” of a god or goddess who lives on the earth.

Atri. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages); husband of Anasuya.

Ayodhya. capital of the kingdom of Koshala.

Ayomukhi. rakshasi who lives in a cave in the forest.

Benjakai. rakshasi with special magical powers.

Bharata. brother of Rama; son of Dasharatha and Kaikeyi.

Bhasmalochana. rakshasa warrior who possesses a deadly gaze.

Bhudevi. goddess of the earth; also called Bhumi.

Brahma. god of creation; consort of the goddess Saraswati.

Brahma-arrow. celestial weapon given to Rama by the rishi Agastya.

Brahman. Ultimate Reality, the cause of everything.

Brahmastra. the Brahma-weapon, which is immensely powerful.

brahmins. members of the priestly class.

Chandra. god of the moon.

Chandrahasa. sword that Shiva gave to Ravana.

Dadhimukha. monkey; guardian of the honey-grove in Kishkindha.

danavas. type of asura, often at war with the devas.

Dashagriva. birth name of Ravana; it means “Ten-

Necked."

Dasharatha. king of Ayodhya; father of Rama.

devas. divine beings, gods.

devis. divine beings, goddesses.

dharma. that which is right and true; duty; justice.

Dilipa. king of Ayodhya; Rama's great-great-grandfather.

Dundubhi. asura in the form of a bull; father of the asura Mayavi.

Durga. goddess of war; manifestation of the goddess Parvati.

Durvasa. rishi, notorious for his bad temper.

Dushana. rakshasa warrior.

gandharvas. celestial musicians.

gandharvis. female gandharvas.

Garuda. divine bird; the vehicle of the god Vishnu.

Gautama. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages); husband of Ahalya.

gopis. female cowherd.

Guha. ferryman who takes Rama across the river into exile.

gurus. teachers, guides, spiritual experts.

Haihaya. ancient kingdom of central India; ruled by King Kartavirya.

Hanuman. divine monkey; son of Anjana and Vayu, the wind-god.

Hema. apsara; wife of Mayasura; mother of Mandodari.

hijras. people of the third gender; transgender people.

Himalayas. mountain range in northern India.

Ilvala. rakshasa; brother of Vatapi.

Indra. god of storms and the sky; guardian of the eastern direction.

Indrajit. rakshasa warrior; son of Ravana and Mandodari.

Jambavan. king of the bears; ally of Rama.

Janaka. king of the Videha kingdom; adopted father of Sita.

jatas. matted, twisted hair (locs; dreadlocks).

Jatayu. celestial bird; brother of Sampati; friend of Dasharatha.

Kabandha. headless rakshasa; originally a gandharva, Vishvavasu.

Kaikasi. rakshasi; wife of the rishi Vishrava; mother of Ravana.

Kaikeyi. wife of King Dasharatha; mother of Bharata.

Kailasha. peak in the Himalayas; home of the god Shiva.

Kala. god of time, associated with destiny and with death.

Kali. goddess of war; manifestation of the goddess Parvati.

Kartavirya. thousand-armed king of Haihaya.

Kasur. city in the Punjab to the south of Lahore; now in Pakistan.

Kaushalya. chief wife of King Dasharatha; mother of Rama.

Kekaya. ancient kingdom of northern India, ruled by King Ashwapati.

Khara. rakshasa warrior.

Khatvanga. king of Ayodhya; Rama's great-great-great-grandfather.

kheer. sweet rice pudding, also called payasam.

Kishkindha. kingdom of monkeys (vanaras).

Koshala. ancient kingdom of northern India.

Krishna. eighth avatar of the god Vishnu (following Rama, the seventh).

Kubera. king of the yakshas; son of Vishrava; half-brother of Ravana.

Kubja. woman with a hunched back cured by Krishna.

Kumbhakarna. gigantic rakshasa; brother of Ravana; cursed to sleep.

- Kusha. one of the two sons of Rama and Sita.
 kusha grass. sacred plant of India, called “salt reed-grass” in English.
- Lahore. city in the Punjab; modern Lahore is in Pakistan.
- Lakshmana. brother of Rama; son of Dasharatha and Sumitra.
- Lakshmi. goddess of wealth; consort of the god Vishnu.
- Lanka. home of Ravana, king of the rakshasas.
- Lankini. divine protectress of Lanka.
- Lava. one of the two sons of Rama and Sita.
- Lavapura. Lava-City, associated with the modern city of Lahore.
- Macchanu. son of Hanuman and the mermaid Suvannamaccha.
- Madhuvana. honey-park (Madhu-Vana) belonging to King Sugriva.
- Mahendra. legendary mountain range on the eastern coast of India.
- Mainaka. legendary flying mountain that hides in the ocean.
- Mandakarni. rishi who lives in Panchapsaras (Five-Apsara) Lake.
- Mandavi. sister (or cousin) of Sita; wife of Bharata.
- Mandodari. wife of Ravana; mother of Indrajit and Aksha.
- Manthara. loyal servant of Queen Kaikeyi; she has a humped back .
- mantra. sacred words or sounds; some mantras are used as weapons.
- Maricha. rakshasa; son of Tataka; brother of Subahu.
- Marutta. king mentioned in the Uttara Kanda of Valmiki’s Ramayana.
- Matali. charioteer of the god Indra.
- Matanga. rishi whose ashram was on Rishyamukha Hill.

Matrikas. mother-goddesses.

maya. trick or illusion; a play-show that people mistake for reality.

Mayasura. architect among the asuras; husband of Hema.

Mayavi. asura; son of the asura Dundhubi.

Meghanada. birth name of Indrajit, son of Ravana and Mandodari.

Mithila. capital city of the ancient kingdom of Videha.

nagas. divine snake-beings with supernatural powers.

Nala. monkey engineer; son of the god Vishvakarma.

Nalakubara. son of Kubera; husband of Rambha.

Nandana-Vana. “Pleasure-Garden” of Indra’s heaven.

Nandi. divine bull; the vehicle of the god Shiva.

Narada. divine rishi tells stories, shares wisdom, and spreads gossip.

Nidra. goddess of sleep.

Padma. “Lotus,” the daughter of King Padmaksha.

Padmaksha. “Lotus-Eyed,” a king, father of Princess Padma.

Pampa. lake in southern India; one of the five sacred lakes of India.

Panchapsaras. a lake; the name means “Five-Apsaras.”

Panchavati. location on the Godavari River; now called Nashik.

Parashurama. sixth avatar of Vishnu; a brahmin hostile to kings.

Parvati. goddess of fertility and power; consort of the god Shiva.

Prahasta. rakshasa, one of Ravana’s generals.

Pratyangira. goddess of war; manifestation of the goddess Parvati.

pujas. devotional rituals that may include offerings of food or flowers.

Pulastya. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages); father of Vishrava.

Pushpaka. flying chariot (vimana).

Raghu. king of Ayodhya; great-grandfather of Rama.

rakshasas. supernatural beings, often hostile to devas and humans.

rakshasis. female rakshasas.

Rama. son of Dasharatha; the seventh avatar of the god Vishnu.

Rama-fruit. fruit called “custard-apple” in English.

Ramachandra. another name of Rama: Rama-Moon.

Ramayana. Rama-Ayana, Rama’s Journey; a composition by Valmiki.

Rambha. apsara; wife of Nalakubara, son of Kubera.

Ratnakar. bandit who later became the rishi Valmiki.

Ravana. king of the rakshasas in Lanka; son of Vishrava and Kaikasi.

Rishabha Hill. Himalayan peak where Hanuman sought healing herbs.

Rishyamukha Hill. site of Matanga’s ashram.

rishis. enlightened persons, sages.

Rishyashringa. son of the rishi Vibhandaka.

Sampati. celestial bird; brother of Jatayu.

sanjivani. healing herb found in the Himalayas.

Sanskrit. language in which Valmiki composed his Ramayana.

Saptarishis. the Seven Rishis, or Seven Sages.

Saraswati. goddess of wisdom; consort of the god Brahma.

Sarayu. river in northern India that flows past the city of Ayodhya.

Shabari. old woman who lives in an abandoned ashram.

Shambara. rakshasa who challenged the god Indra.

Shambuka. shudra who conducted rituals reserved for

brahmins.

Shanta. daughter of Dasharatha and Kaushalya.

Sharabhangha. rishi whom Rama visits in the forest.

Shatrughna. Rama's brother; son of King Dasharatha and Sumitra.

Shiva. destroyer-god; consort of the goddess Parvati.

Shrutakirti. sister (or cousin) of Sita; wife of Shatrughna.

shudras. lowest of the classes: brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, shudra.

Shurpanakha. rakshasi; sister of Ravana.

Simhika. monstrous asura able to control shadows.

Sita. adopted daughter of Janaka; wife of Rama; avatar of Lakshmi.

Sita-fruit. fruit called "sweet-apple" in English.

Subahu. son of the rakshasi Tataka; brother of Maricha.

Sugriva. younger brother of Vali; after Vali's death, King of Kishkindha.

Sulochana. wife of Indrajit; also known by the name Promila or Pramila.

Sumali. a rakshasa; father of Kaikasi, mother of Ravana.

Sumantra. royal charioteer of King Dasharatha.

Sumitra. wife of Dasharatha; mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Sunaina. wife of King Janaka; adopted mother of Sita.

Suparshva. honorable rakshasa serving Ravana's court.

Surasa. supernatural being who attacks Hanuman on his way to Lanka.

Surya. god of the sun.

Sutikshna. rishi whom Rama visits in the forest.

Suvannamaccha. mermaid; lover of Hanuman; mother of Macchanu.

Swayamprabha. holy woman; friend of the apsara Hema.

Tamasa. supernatural "darkness" weapon in Ravana's

possession.

Tara. wife of Vali, king of Kishkindha; mother of Angada.

Taranisen. rakshasa devoted to Rama; son of Vibhishana.

Tataka. born a yakshini, cursed to become a rakshasi.

Tenalirama. court poet of southern India in the sixteenth century.

Trijata. rakshasi; friend of Sita; daughter of Vibhishana.

Tumburu. gandharva; cursed to live as the rakshasa Viradha.

Urmila. daughter of Janaka; sister of Sita; wife of Lakshmana.

Vaishravana. another name of Kubera.

Vali. monkey; son of Indra; husband of Tara; father of Angada.

Valmiki. rishi; the world's first poet, he composed the Ramayana.

Varuna. god of the sea; guardian of the western direction.

Vashishtha. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages); priest of Ayodhya.

Vasuki. king of the nagas.

Vatapi. rakshasa; brother of Ilvala.

Vayu. god of wind; father of Hanuman

Vedavati. woman devoted to Vishnu; avatar of the goddess Lakshmi.

veena. stringed musical instrument like a lute.

vermilion. sindoor; bright red powder used for sacred purposes.

Vibhandaka. rishi; father of Rishyashringa.

Vibhishana. rakshasa; brother of Ravana; father of Trijata.

Videha . ancient kingdom of northern India; ruled by King Janaka.

Vidyutjiva. rakshasa; husband of Shurpanakha.

Virabahu. son of Ravana.

Viradha. rakshasa; originally a gandharva named Tumburu.

Vishnu. god of preservation; consort of the goddess Lakshmi.

Vishrava. rishi; father of Ravana and of Kubera.

Vishvakarma. god of architecture.

Vishvamitra. one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages); Rama's guru.

Vishvavasu. gandharva; cursed to live as the rakshasa Kabandha.

yakshas. spirits of mountains, trees, lakes, etc.; Kubera is their king.

yakshinis (yakshis). female yakshas.

Yama. god of death and of justice; guardian of the southern direction.

yojana. measure of distance; appx. 8 miles or 12 kilometers.

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