

True Story of Harish Chandra in Sade Sati

The story of **HARISHCHANDRA & TARAMATI** is told in the Vishnu Purana and in the Markendeya Purana.



THE TRUTHFUL KING: HARISHCHANDRA King Harishchandra was the son of Trishanku, who was sent to heaven with his physical body by the grace of the sage Vishwamitra but was jealously pushed down by the deities, as a result of which, he kept hanging in between heaven and earth.

Harishchandra was renowned for his charitable nature, devotion and virtue. His empire was free from famines, epidemics and other calamities because of his religious powers. His subjects were content, happy and religious like him.

His truthfulness was famous in all the 3 Lokas (worlds). When Indra came to know about it from sage Narad, he became jealous of the king and to test his truthfulness, he sought Vishwamitra's help.

Vishwamitra, by the powers of his penance came in the king's dreams and demanded his whole kingdom to which Harishchandra readily agreed to give. Though, it all happened only in the dreams and it was far from reality, yet when Vishwamitra came to his palace, the very next day and made the same demand, the king gave him his whole kingdom and wealth. The whole earth was his kingdom and after relinquishing it for the benefit of Vishwamitra, he decided to move away to 'Kashi' as it is believed to be based on the Trishula of Lord Shiva. The scriptures have prohibited the use of things, once donated hence, 'Kashi' was the only place on the whole earth which was outside Vishwamitra's authority.

But, Vishwamitra demanded something as Dakshina (honorarium) to make such a great donation successful. But, Harishchandra had nothing in his possession. He sold his wife 'Shaivya' to a Brahmin to meet his demand his son Rohitashva went along with his mother. But even the selling of his wife was not enough to meet Vishwamitra's demand. So, he had no choice but to sell him to a man whose profession was to guard the cremation place and to collect the taxes for cremating the dead bodies

HARISHCHANDRA After being thrown out from his kingdom by Vishwamitra, Harishchandra reached the holy town of Varanasi, which was an abode of Lord Mahadev. There Harishchandra saw Vishwamitra standing before him. Vishwamitra said- A month has been completed now. Now, give me my Dakshina. Harishchandra said- There is still half an hour in the completion of this month. Please wait. I will give your Dakshina. Vishwamitra said- I will come after half an hour. Saying this, Vishwamitra departed.

When Vishwamitra left, Harishchandra started to worry as to what would happen to him in his next birth if he did not keep his promise made to a Brahmin. Seeing him perplexed, queen Shaivya tried to console him. She said-

Man requires a wife only to produce a child. Now we already have a child- Rohit. Hence I am no longer useful for you. You sell me and pay the acquired wealth as Dakshina to the Brahmin. Harishchandra fainted after hearing his wife's words. The queen began to wail at her husband's condition. Thus wailing, the queen also fell unconscious. The little Rohit also felt perplexed by his parent's condition. He began to cry-

Varanasi, as the special property of Siva, could not be possessed by any mortal. Here he found the relentless Vishvamitra again waiting for him, and ready to press his demand for the payment of his sacrificial gift, even before the expiration of the full period of grace. In this extremity Saivya the queen suggests with a sobbing voice that her husband should sell her. On hearing this proposal Harishchandra swoons, then recovers, utters lamentations, and swoons again, and his wife, seeing his said condition, swoon also. While they are in a state of unconsciousness, their famished child exclaims in distress, " O father, father, give me bread ; O mother, mother give me food : hunger overpowers me and my tongue is parched." At this moment Vishvamitra returns, and after recalling Harishchandra to consciousness by spinkling water over him, again urges payment of the present. The king again swoons, and is again restored. The sag threatens to curse him if his engagement is not fulfilled by sunset. Being now pressed by his wife, the King agrees to sell her ading, however, "If my voice can utter such a wicked word, I do not what the most inhuman wretches cannot perpetrate." He then goes into the city and in selfafusing language offers his queen for sale as a slave. A rich old Brahman offers to buy her at a price corresponding to her value, to do his household work. Seeing his mother dragged away, the child ran after her, his eyes dimmed with tears, and crying 'mother'. The Brahman purchaser kicked him when he came up; but he would not let his mother go, and continued crying 'mother, mother.' The queen then said to the Brahman, ' Be so kind, my master, as to but also this child, as without him I shall prove to thee but a useless purchase. Be thus merciful to me in my wretchedness, unite me with my son, like a cow to her calf." The Brahman agrees: "Take this money and give me the boy." After the Brahman had gone out of sight with his purchases, Vishvamitra again appeared and renewed his demands ; and when the afflicted Harishchanda offered him the small sum he had obtained by the sale of his wife and son, he angrily replied, "If, miserable Kshatriya, thou thinkest this a sacrificial gift befitting my deserts, thou shall soon beheld the transcendent power of my ardent austere fervour, of my spotless Brahmanhood of my terrible majesty, and of my holy study. Harishchandra promises an additional gift, and Vishvamitra allows him the remaining quarter of the day for its liquidation. On the terrified and afflicted prince offering himself for sale, in order to gain the mean of meeting this cruel demand, Dharma (Righteousness) appears in the form of a hideous and offensive Chandala, and agrees to buy him at his own price, large or small. Harishchandra declines such a degrading servitude, and declares that he would rather be consumed by the fire of his persecutor's curse than submit to such a fate. Vishvamitra however again comes on the scene, asks why he does not accept the large sum offered by the Chandala ; and, when he pleads in excuse his descent from the solar race, threatens to fulminate a curse against him if he does not accept that method of meeting his liability. Harishchandra implores that he may be spared this extreme of degradation, and offers to become Vishvamitra's slave in payment of the residue of his debt; whereupon the sage rejoins, "If thou art my slave, then I sell thee as such to the Chandala for a **huge lumsome**

"The Chandala was no other then Yamraj or Dharmaraj delighted, pays down the money, and carries off Harishchandra, bound beaten, confused and afflicted, to his own place of abode. Harishchandra is sent by the Chandala to collect grave clothes in a cemetary and is told that he will receive two-sixths goind to his masters, and one-sixth to the King. In this horrid spot, and in this degrading occupation, he spent in great misery, twelve months, which seemed to him like a hundred years. He then falls asleep and has a series of dreams suggested by the life he had been leading. After he awoke, his wife came to the cemetary to perform the obsequies of their son, who had died from the bite of a serpent. At first the husband and wife did not recognize each other, from the change in appearance which had been brought upon them by their miseries. Harishchandra however, soon discovered from the tenor of her lamentations that it is his wife, and falls into a swoon; as the queen does also when she recognizes her husband. When consciousness returns, they both break out into lamentations, the father

bewailing in a touching strain the loss of his son, and the wife the degradation of the King. She then falls on his neck, embraces him, and asks "whether all this is a dream, or a reality, as she is utterly bewildered ", and adds, that "if it be a reality, then righteousness is unavailing to those who practise it." After hesitating to devote himself to death on his son's funeral pyre without receiving his master's leave, Harishchandra. resolves to do so, braving all the consequences, and consoling himself with the hopeful anticipation: "If I have given gifts, and offered sacrifices an gratified my religious teachers, then may I be reunited with my son and with thee (my wife) in another world."The queen determines to die in the same manner. When Harishchandra., after placing his son's body on the funeral pile, is meditating on the Lord Shri Narayan krishna, the supreme spirit, all the gods arrive, headed by Dharma (righteousness), and accompanied by Vishvamisra. Dharma entreats the king to desist from his rash intention; and Indra announces to him that he, his wife, and son have conquered heaven by their good works. Amrosia, the antidote of death, and flowers are rained by the god from the sky ; and the king's son is restored to life and the bloom of youth. The king, adorned with celestial clothing and garlands, and the queen, embrace their son. Harishchandra, however declares that he cannot go to heaven till he has received his master the Chandala's permission, and has paid him a ransom. Dharma then reveals to the king that it was he himself who had miraculously assumed the form of a Chandala. The king next objects that he cannot depart unless his faithful subjects, who are shares in his merits, are allowed to accompany him to heaven, at least for one day. This request is granted by Indra; and after Vishvamisra has inaugurated Rohitasva the king's son to be his successor, Harishchandra, his friends and followers, all ascend in company to heaven