

proper place of the axle and thus averted the mishap. When Daśaratha knew about this timely action of Kaikeyī he was so very pleased that he asked her to choose any two boons she desired, and she asked him to keep the boons with him to be granted whenever she requested for them. Daśaratha and Kaikeyī took leave of Indra and returned to Ayodhyā. (Kamba Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa).

5) *In the company of Viśvāmitra.* The four sons of Daśaratha grew up in Ayodhyā. Though they were equally friendly to one another, intimacy between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and also between Bharata and Śatrughna came to be thicker. Once Viśvāmitra decided to conduct a yajña for the happiness and contentment of all people. At the very commencement of the yajña, Rākṣasas, in batches, tried to spoil it, and Mārīca and Subāhu, sons of Tātakā were the leaders of the obstructionists. Viśvāmitra knew that Rāma was the most effective weapon against the Rākṣasas and requested Daśaratha to lend him Rāma's help. Daśaratha felt sad about it and Viśvāmitra was getting excited over the former's attitude when Vasiṣṭha advised Daśaratha to send Rāma along with Viśvāmitra. Accordingly Daśaratha sent Rāma to the forest in the company of Viśvāmitra. Lakṣmaṇa too followed his brother.

While walking in the forest Viśvāmitra related many old stories to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. They crossed river Sarayū, passed by many āśramas of munis and reached the Pāla forest. Here Viśvāmitra imparted to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who felt too weak on account of hunger and thirst the two mantras Balā and Atibalā, which would ward off hunger and thirst. He also taught them the use of certain rare arrows. Śrī Rāma was specially taught the use of a divine arrow called Jṛmbhakāstra.

6) *Tātakā killed.* While Viśvāmitra was relating to them the story of Tātakā, who dwelt in the forest, they saw the fierce Rākṣasi coming fast with a long spear in her hand. She threw a big rock at Viśvāmitra. Rāma shattered the rock with an arrow. Next, Tātakā dashed forward against Rāma roaring furiously, and Rāma, with another arrow killed her. The soul of the dead Tātakā assumed the form of a Gandharva woman and ascended to heaven.

7) *Salvation to Ahalyā.* Rākṣasas like Subāhu lined up to obstruct the yajña, which Viśvāmitra began after the killing of Tātakā. Rāma killed Subāhu; Mārīca ran away in fright and hid himself in the sea. Rāma drove away the other Rākṣasas.

Next, Viśvāmitra, hearing about the Svayamvara of Sītā, daughter of King Janaka started for his palace with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and on the way he told the boys many Purāṇic stories. They bathed in the river Gaṅgā and a short walk took them to the vacant āśrama of Gautama. The great muni called Gautama had once lived in this āśrama with his dutiful wife Ahalyā and their son Śātānanda, an erudite scholar in all sciences. Indra, who lost his head over the great beauty of Ahalyā went to the āśrama one midnight in the form of a cock and crew. Thinking it was already dawn Gautama went to the river for bath when Indra assumed the form of the muni, entered his bed room and slept with Ahalyā. When Gautama understood the fraud thus played upon him, he cursed her into a stone. She was to resume her old form when, during Tretāyuga, Śrī

Rāma trod upon the stone. Accordingly, as soon as Rāma trod on the stone Ahalyā cast off her form as stone and resumed her old form as Ahalyā. Immediately Gautama and Śātānanda also appeared on the scene. Ahalyā ascended to the sky as a devi.

8) *Marriage.* Viśvāmitra came to king Janaka's palace with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Janaka's daughter Sītā and his younger brothers' daughters Māṇḍavī, Ūrmilā and Śrutakīrti were living in the palace as sisters and very good friends. One day the princesses who were playing in the garden could not pluck jasmine flowers from a height. Sītā then brought the Śaivacāpa (Śiva's bow) from the weapon-room and shot down Jasmine flowers with it. As Janaka watched Sītā's action of shooting with the Śaivacāpa an idea came into his head. He announced that the hero, who succeeded in shooting with Śaivacāpa, would be given Sītā in marriage.

Just as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were inseparable companions Sītā and Ūrmilā were always to be found together and Māṇḍavī and Śrutakīrti were particular friends. Śrī Rāma shot an arrow from Śiva's bow and he was selected as Sītā's husband. Janaka informed Daśaratha of the marriage and he came with his attendants. Bharata married Māṇḍavī, Lakṣmaṇa, Ūrmilā and Śatrughna, Śrutakīrti. After living in Mithilā for sometime Daśaratha and others returned to Ayodhyā. Viśvāmitra went to the Himālayas for rest.

9) *Paraśurāma's threat.* Daśaratha and others on their way back to Ayodhyā passed the Videha kingdom and reached the suburbs of Bhārgavāśrama. All of a sudden a shining form of a brahmin with Kṣatriya effulgence appeared in front of the procession. Vasiṣṭha understood that it was Paraśurāma and Daśaratha and others were alarmed. Paraśurāma approached Śrī Rāma who was viewing the former with quiet serenity. Paraśurāma was very angry that Rāma broke the bow of Śiva who was his (Paraśurāma's) preceptor. All Rāma's conciliatory talk failed to pacify Paraśurāma, who spoke thus to Rāma: "You, impudent fellow! you insulted me and my preceptor. All right, let me see your power. Take this my bow, and shoot with it."

Śrī Rāma took hold of the bow and bent it easily and fixing an arrow on it asked Paraśurāma to point out the target for it. As Paraśurāma feared that if the arrow was sent, it might crush the whole universe, he asked Rāma to choose the result of his (Paraśurāma's) tapas as target for the arrow. Both the bow and the arrow were of Viṣṇu's power. That power as well as his own Vaiṣṇava power, Paraśurāma transferred to Śrī Rāma and having thus fulfilled the object of his incarnation Paraśurāma went to Puṇyāśrama for permanent tapas.

10) *Ruin of the country.* Daśaratha decided to install Śrī Rāma as crown prince. The people whole-heartedly welcomed it. During the night previous to the coronation, while the wives of Daśaratha were gladly discussing the happy incident, Mantharā, the tale-bearing maid of Kaikeyī advised her mistress to prevail upon Daśaratha to exile Rāma into the forest and install Bharata as crown prince. Mantharā also reminded Kaikeyī about the boons, which had been promised to her by Daśaratha during the devāsura war. Kaikeyī fell into the trap thus set by Mantharā. Kaikeyī put on a wrathful face and shut herself up in a room. When Daśaratha enquired of her the reason for her anger she asked him to make her son Bharata, the crown prince and exile Rāma for