

30). *Return.* Rāma and others, who were pleased with the turn of events, crowned Vibhīṣaṇa King of Laṅkā. Trijaṭa was put in charge of dressing Sītā in new clothes. Apsarās appeared on the scene. Śacidevī presented to Sītā a chain, Urvaśī an ornament for the head, Menakā, two bangles, Rambhā a waist-let, Tilottamā a set of chains for the feet, and Anasūyā, wife of Atri, a Cūḍāmaṇi. When she wore all these ornaments Sītā appeared to be equal to Lakṣmidevī in grandeur and charm. She was brought in a palanquin to Śrī Rāma by Vibhīṣaṇa and others. Rāma was taken aback by the glamorous dress, ornaments etc. of Sītā, and immediately a suspicion arose in his mind, and he kept mum after asking Lakṣmaṇa to do whatever Sītā wanted. As soon as she heard those words of Rāma, Sītā asked Lakṣmaṇa to light a funeral pyre saying that the woman suspected by her husband should not live and so she (Sītā) would quit her life in the very presence of Rāma.

Lakṣmaṇa cast a pathetic look at Rāma; but his face exhibited no change of feeling. He granted Sītā's request by his silence. Those present there awaited developments with bated breath. Lakṣmaṇa, with the help of the monkeys got a pyre ready. After going round Rāma with folded hands Sītā leapt into the glowing fire. Within a very short time three divine forms emerged from the fire, Svāhādevī, Sītādevī and God Agni.

His suspicions having thus vanished Rāma welcomed Sītā back and the next day they left for Ayodhyā in the Puṣpaka Vimāna. Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva, Hanūmān and others followed them. After reaching Ayodhyā Rāma returned the Puṣpaka to Kubera. Bharata came back from Nandigrāma. In the presence of all relations and others concerned the coronation of Rāma as king took place. Bharata was appointed crown Prince, Lakṣmaṇa Commander-in-chief of armies and Śatrughna, Finance minister.

31) *Sītā abandoned.* Under Rāma's rule the country overflowed with milk and honey. Nobody had to fear anything from enemies. He made Sītā kill Sahasramukha Rāvaṇa. (For details see under Sahasramukharāvaṇa). Śrī Rāma used to go about the country in disguise to enquire about the welfare of his subjects. On a particular dawn he happened to be standing outside the house of a washerman. The washerman scolded his wife, who had gone out of the house that night for something. He suspected that she had gone to meet her paramour. He bluntly told his wife that he was not prepared to act like Rāma, who had accepted Sītā, though she had lived with another person. Śrī Rāma, who heard the above talk, returned to his palace very sad. After thinking about for a long time he decided that it was his duty to abandon Sītā in the interests of his subjects. Then Sītā was in the seventh month of her pregnancy. She had on the previous day, expressed a desire to go to the forest areas once again. Rāma considered this as the most suitable opportunity to abandon Sītā in the forest and Lakṣmaṇa was entrusted with the matter. That day at Sun-rise Lakṣmaṇa took Sītā in a chariot to the suburbs of Vālmiki's āśrama, abandoned her there and returned to the palace. (According to the Rāmāyaṇa written by Kamba, a Tamil author, it is said that Sītā was left in the suburbs of Gautama's hut. There, Sītā who was pregnant was looked after by Ahalyā, the wife of Gautama.) Weeping aloud Sītā fell down. Young

munis—Vālmiki's disciples—saw her and took her to the āśrama. At the āśrama she delivered two sons, Kuśa and Lava.

32) *Aśvamedha.* After abandoning Sītā in the forests Rāma led a sad life for five years. Yet, he decided to perform an Aśvamedha yajña. As soon as Rāma thought of him, Hanūmān appeared and he was deputed to invite Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva and others from Laṅkā and Kiṣkindhā and the feudatory princes and armies from other countries.

Sugrīva was put in charge of the armies, Vibhīṣaṇa in charge of finance, and central authority was vested in Lakṣmaṇa. Then the yājñic horse, accompanied by the army, was let loose to travel all over the country. Accompanied by cavalry, the elephant division, infantry and the chariot-force the horse went about the various kingdoms. The army, on its way back to Ayodhyā with presents collected from many kingdoms, encamped for rest near Vālmiki's āśrama when Kuśa and Lava tied the yājñic horse, which was strolling there unfettered. Consequent upon this action of Kuśa and Lava a fight broke out between them and the king's army in which the latter got defeated. Even the arrows of Lakṣmaṇa failed to have any effect on the boys. The boys having not returned even though it had become very late in the evening, the āśramites went in search of them and it was only when they came to the scene of fighting did Lakṣmaṇa and others know who the boys really were.

During this period of time infants' death was very much on the increase in Ayodhyā. It was believed that such deaths increased when Śūdras did tapas, and to find out if any Śūdra was engaged in tapas Rāma flew over the Daṇḍaka forest where he found a Śūdra called Śambūka performing tapas hanging down from the branch of a tree with his head down. Rāma killed him and his spirit got salvation. Afterwards, appreciating the beauties of the forest Rāma came near Vālmiki's āśrama where he and Sītā met face to face. Kuśa and Lava also came there and they noticed with surprise the change in appearance brought about in their mother and Rāma on their meeting each other. When they heard from Hanūmān the real facts about Rāma they withdrew their arrows and prostrated at the feet of Rāma.

Śrī Rāma then, with the consent of all and in accordance with his own desire, took back Sītā and returned with her to Ayodhyā. Lakṣmaṇa and others followed him. Kausalyā and others received Sītā most heartily. Śrī Rāma, who till then was having no wife, had made a golden image of Sītā for the purposes of the aśvamedha. Now, since the real Sītā was with him the idol was an unnecessary thing. The Aśvamedhayajña went off very well.

33) *The end.* Śrī Rāma's reign became all the more prosperous. It was during this period that Rāma, as desired by the munis in the Yamunā plain, killed Lavaṇāsura, son of Madhu in the great city called Durgā in the centre of the Madhu forest. (For details see under Lavaṇa). After Lavaṇa's death, a sect of Gandharvas called Śailūṣas, who lived on the shores of the eastern sea, proved to be enemies of Ayodhyā. Śrī Rāma annihilated them also. Kaikeyī began getting jealous of the prosperity and happiness of Sītā. One day when Rāma had gone to hunt in the forest, Kaikeyī closely questioned Sītā over particulars in Laṅkā and prevailed upon her, overruling her unwillingness, to