# A Sad Monarch in a Happy Kingdom

*Lava and Kusha’s story began with a description of the kingdom of Kosala, which was by the Sarayu river. At the center of this kingdom was its capital city, Ayodhya, the abode of the great king, Dasaratha. King Dasaratha was the crowning glory of the luminous Solar dynasty. Manu, the first king of the Ikshvaku dynasty, had laid the foundation of this massive city [[1]](#footnote-1).*

*Ayodhya means unconquerable, and it was impenetrable to both external and internal enemies. While other kings and kingdoms were the external enemies, vices such as lust, anger, pride, illusion, greed and envy formed the internal enemies. Most cities are equipped to fend off only external enemies, but Ayodhya could counter internal enemies too. In the perfect city of Ayodhya, whose citizens had flawless character and strong values, internal attacks were unheard of. A deep, wide moat ran alongside the walls surrounding the city, making the security system of Ayodhya impossible to breach. The moat was so deep and wide that clouds would mistake it for the ocean and absorb water from it; but then when they tried to float up, these water-heavy clouds would fail to cross over the high boundary walls of the city. Drained and weary, they would drop the rain back into the moat.*

*Powerful weapons like daggers, swords, bows, battle-axes, rods, chakras, tomaras, musalas and vajras were embedded in the walls. These could kill mosquitoes (the smallest of creatures) and garudas (the largest of creatures) with equal ease. Some of the embedded weapons were unique to Ayodhya in that these had as much power to stave off wild catastrophic winds as to strike at the vile minds of those who dared harbor evil thoughts against the people of the city. The highly secure city of Ayodhya was also picturesque. Under King Dasaratha’s rule, the city became as beautiful and opulent as Amaravati, the heavenly abode of Indra. Beautiful gateways and arches speckled the city and most homes had well laid-out front yards. The outskirts were teeming with orchards and gardens.*

*Ayodhya’s layout resembled the board game Astapadi, which meant that the city was designed like a dice table, with wide streets running in eight directions from centrally located palaces. The densely populated city was filled with houses; no place was left unutilized. Buildings were constructed on leveled lands. The city was so vast that nobody could claim to have seen its boundaries! Even the Sarayu river could not define the boundaries of Ayodhya despite several rivulets flowing into it. The palaces in Ayodhya were whiter than the moon. Some had floors studded with chandrakanta stones (a special precious stone, lesser known today), some had pillars made of sandalwood, rafters made of red gold and walls of emerald. There were twenty million such palaces! Ayodhya’s skyscrapers were studded with precious jewels. Ayodhya was also a trade center, and people from across the world flocked to the city for business.*

***[Source: Folio – Untold Stories from the Ramayana]*** *- The kingdom of Kosala started all the way from what they now call the Dalai lama’s line. From up in the north, in Tibet, all the way down to the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh. So this was Kosala, practically it was the whole of India, not the democratic India but the Vedic India.*

***[Source: Folio – Ramayana – Retold by Krishna Dharma Das]*** *From his seventh-story terrace Daçaratha could see much of his city, which stretched to the horizon in all directions. Crowds of citizens moved along the well-planned roads, which were interspersed with mango groves and orchards. The broad central highway, built entirely of red stone, ran the full hundred-mile length of the city. Large white mansions lined that road, with many-colored pennants waving in the breeze on their roofs. The road was sprinkled with perfumed water and strewn with flowers. Above the city the king could see the golden airplanes of Apsaräs, the consorts of the gods.*

***[Source: Folio – Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 5]***

***[Verses 5-8]*** *Extending along the banks of the Sarayü River, was the great tract of land known as Kosala. This land was verdant, prosperous and rich in grain. Within this vast territory was the renowned city of Ayodhyä, built by the desire of Vaivasvata Manu, the ruler of mankind. This glorious city was ninety-six miles long and twenty-four miles wide. It was well laid out, and its beautiful, straight roads were perfumed with scented water sprayed from the trunks of intoxicated elephants. Every day, the damsels of the celestial planets hovered above it in their beautifully decorated airplanes and showered it with flowers.*

***[Verses 9-15]*** *The arched gateways of Ayodhyä were made of marble, and the gates were wrought with gold and silver and embedded with precious jewels. Cannons and catapults, capable of repulsing any enemy, protected the city walls. The marketplaces were well planned, and seven-story houses symmetrically lined the streets. Adorned with multi-storied palaces and surrounded with exquisite gardens, Ayodhyä resounded with the vibrations of musical instruments, rivaling Amarävaté, the abode of the heavenly King, Indra. Throughout the city, bards and singers recited the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and dancers acted out the Lord’s pastimes for everyone’s benefit.*

*Within Ayodhyä were many beautiful gardens abounding with flowers and shaded by fruit trees. Blue, red, and golden lotuses filled the ponds, and fountains shot water high into the air. Gentle breezes carried the aromatic spray from the fountains, cooling the citizens by their touch, and making even a hot summer day seem like spring. The sounds of cranes and peacocks could be heard everywhere. The water flowing through Ayodhyä’s streams and rivulets tasted as sweet as sugarcane sap, and it was used not only for drinking but for irrigating numerous mango orchards. Many houses and palaces, perfectly designed, were built of precious stones and decorated with flags and festoons. In beauty, they compared to the palaces of Vaikuëöha.*

## **Ayodhya’s body**

*Music was an intrinsic part of Ayodhya, so much so that the king sponsored musicians to play continuous soul-stirring music across different districts of the capital[[2]](#footnote-2). King Dasaratha’s brilliance and foresight could be gauged from the way he made systematic arrangements to make the kingdom self-sufficient. Rice grain was always in surplus and drinking water was as sweet as sugarcane juice. That Dasaratha had immense foresight could be seen in Ayodhya’s ground-breaking irrigation system. Ayodhya had two types of water-storage systems – the first devamatraka (entirely dependent on rains sent by demigods or devas) and the other nadimatraka (dependent on effective water storage systems)[[3]](#footnote-3).*

*Ayodhya depended on the nadimatraka system of irrigation, which facilitated rainwater harvesting to ensure abundant water supply through years and years of drought. In fact, Ayodhya once faced an eleven-year drought and no one even noticed that it hadn’t rained through all those years! There was abundant water for everything. It was only in the twelfth year that everyone began taking notice and started worrying. Word reached the king, and Dasaratha then consulted astrologers to find out the exact reason for the drought. When told that the Shani graha's (Saturn) fiery gaze had left his kingdom parched, Dasaratha decided to set things right immediately[[4]](#footnote-4). An enraged Dasaratha mounted his chariot and headed toward Shani [[5]](#footnote-5). As the king came close to the planet, Shani glared at him. His stern gaze alone was enough to topple Dasaratha’s chariot. From then on it was a hopeless free fall. Dasaratha had totally lost control. A giant vulture named Jatayu who was flying by saw Dasaratha’s plight and flew downward to grab him. He spread out his wings like a safety net and Dasaratha, along with his chariot, fell on it. So colossal was Jatayu that only one of his wings was enough to catch Dasaratha, his chariot and all his horses! Jatayu decided to help Dasaratha counter Shani. With Jatayu by his side, Dasaratha set off to take on Shani, yet again. Dasaratha’s dogged determination pleased Shani, and he agreed to shift his gaze away from Ayodhya. Joy at last! The rains had returned to Ayodhya. Dasaratha could not thank Jatayu enough for having saved his life and helped him. So, he asked Jatayu to take the liberty of seeking any benediction of his choice [[6]](#footnote-6). Dasaratha was least expecting what was to come. Jatayu requested that when Dasaratha begot a son, he should become the son of Jatayu. Although he was yearning for a son, at this point, Dasaratha had none. So, he had no hesitation in agreeing to what, at the time, seemed a non-possibility [[7]](#footnote-7).*

*I couldn’t find any reference to Dasaratha’s fight with Shani (or Saturn) and Jatayu’s appearance to protect Dasaratha in Valmiki Ramayana. However, in Aranya Kanda in Valmiki Ramayana Jataya introduces himself to Lord Rama as Dasaratha’s friend. Google search reveals that this story of Dasaratha’s fight with Shani is from Amar Chitra Katha comic “Divine Beings” (*[https://doc-14-bc-docs.googleusercontent.com/docs/securesc/ha0ro937gcuc7l7deffksulhg5h7mbp1/2cmkhpb58mrtiuo9kanqjk5991sq6aju/1491220800000/02058467015715614041/\*/0ByTrbPQHgxJdQkcyLTh2Zi0wczQ](https://doc-14-bc-docs.googleusercontent.com/docs/securesc/ha0ro937gcuc7l7deffksulhg5h7mbp1/2cmkhpb58mrtiuo9kanqjk5991sq6aju/1491220800000/02058467015715614041/*/0ByTrbPQHgxJdQkcyLTh2Zi0wczQ)*)*

## **Ayodhya’s soul**

*Ayodhya was glorified as a place with no lock shops and people who did not donate for charity. This seems like a skewed glorification of the city; in fact, these appear more likes flaws. But what it does is glorify the city, in that a highly secure Ayodhya was bereft of lock shops because nothing needed locking! No one had a wrong motive or felt the need to rob because everyone was prosperous and self-sufficient. As for no one being charitable, whom would people donate to if there were no needy souls? Dasaratha’s ocean of charities engulfed Ayodhya’s poverty, so no beggars walked the streets. Dasaratha crossed the ocean of knowledge by plunging deep into the scriptures, he crossed the ocean of enemies by cutting across them through deft use of his sword and he crossed the ocean of vices by immersing himself in spiritual practices [[8]](#footnote-8).*

*The physical strength of Ayodhya came not just from brute force, but from years of discipline. Ayodhya’s soldiers were skilled in all kinds of weapons and military tactics. Ayodhya was compared to a cave teeming with countless lions. On principle, the skilled archers of Ayodhya neither killed a lone, helpless person nor a fleeing one. They were experts in sonic archery, yet they did not practice it. The soldiers were deeply loyal to their king and were ever ready to make any sacrifice for him because they loved him and did not fear him. The strong-willed soldiers of Ayodhya were so courageous that they would rather face death than run away from a battle.*

***[Source: Folio – Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 6]***

***[Verses 1-5]*** *King Dasharatha, who was well-versed in the Vedas, collected all sorts of useful things for the kingdom such as scholars, riches and forces. He was farsighted and immensely powerful, and very dear to both the residents of the city as well as to those of the countryside. He was one of the outstanding charioteers of the Ikshvaku dynasty and a patron of sacrifices. He was devoted to righteousness and had his senses fully under control. He was a royal sage among royals and was famous throughout the three worlds. He was strong, devoid of enemies, surrounded by allies and was the conqueror of the senses. In the matter of accumulating wealth and other things, he was equal to Indra and Kuvera. Just as the powerful Manu protected the world, so also did King Dasharatha. The city was protected by the king, who was true to his word, as Amaravati was protected by Indra.*

***[Verse 6-12]*** *In that best of cities, the citizens were content, virtuous, highly learned, satisfied with their own wealth, free from greed and truthful. There was no family man in that city who had not accumulated the necessities, nor was there one who had not achieved the goals of human pursuit in the shape of cows, horses, wealth and food. There could not be seen in Ayodhya a person who was lusty, miserly, cruel, uneducated, atheistic or agnostic. All the men and women were virtuous, well-regulated, cheerful and in character as faultless as great sages. There was no one without gold earrings, crowns or flower garlands, nor was anyone short in enjoyment. Everyone was properly bathed, with their bodies smeared with sandalwood paste and anointed with sweet fragrances. No one ate impure food, nor did they neglect giving in charity. No one was without gold bracelets and armlets, nor was anyone unable to control his mind. There was no one in Ayodhya who did not maintain the sacred fire and who did not perform sacrifices. Neither was there anyone who was petty-minded or a thief, immoral or of disreputable origin.*

***[Verse 13-19]*** *The brahmanas, whose senses were fully conquered, were always engaged in their prescribed duties. They were charitable, propagated the scriptural teachings as it is while following those teachings themselves and were very principled in accepting gifts [[9]](#footnote-9). None of them was agnostic, atheistic, unrighteous, unstudied, envious, attached to material things or unlearned. There was none who was not conversant in the six branches of learning (astrology, prosody, grammar etc*)*, who did not observe vows, or who was not profusely generous. No one was miserable, mentally disturbed or distressed. There could not be found a man or woman in Ayodhya who was not prosperous and good-looking, or who was not loyal to the king. The four castes headed by the brahmanas worshiped the deities and honored their guests. They were grateful, magnanimous, heroic and powerful. Everyone in that great city was long-lived, dedicated to truth, as such, they were always able to enjoy the company of their wives, children and grandchildren. The kshatriya (warrior) caste followed the advice of the brahmanas; the vaishyas followed the orders of the kshatriyas, and the sudras engaged in their own duties served the other three castes.*

***[Verses 20-28]*** *King Dasharatha, the lord of the Iksvaku Dynasty, completely protected the city of Ayodhya as did the wise Manu, the lord of humankind, in former times. Like a den full of lions, the city was full of warriors who were as dangerous as fire, learned in the art of war, expert in combat and intolerant of insult. The city was full of best of horses from countries like Kamboja, Bahlika, Vanayu and the Indus Valley. They were equal to Indra's horse, Ucchaishrava. The city was also always full of strong elephants in rut that were as big as mountains. They were of the following varieties: Airavata (breed belonging to elephant of Lord Indra), Mahapadma, Anjana and Vamana. There were also elephants of the Bhadra, Mandra and Mriga species, and interbreeds of these [[10]](#footnote-10). The main part of Ayodhya encompassed sixteen miles. Residing there, King Dasharatha protected the world. As the moon dominates the starry sky, the great and powerful King Dasharatha, who had subdued all his enemies, ruled over that city. Thus the king ruled that fortunate city whose good name was Ayodhya (the unconquerable), which was fortified with strong gates and bars, and which had a large variety of buildings and thousands of inhabitants.*

## **Ripple effect**

*There is a story behind why Ayodhya’s army did not practice sonic archery. In his youth, Dasaratha used to venture out on hunting expeditions, where he loved using the powerful method of sonic archery as often as possible. He was in fact looking for one such opportunity when he heard a sound, much like the rumbling of a tiger or like an elephant drinking water from a river. He shot an eager arrow in that direction [[11]](#footnote-11). Little did he realize that the sound was that of a pot being dunked into the river; an eager-to-serve son was filling water for his thirsty parents. The arrow hit its mark. A blood-curdling, agonizing scream followed. It was the dying boy’s cry of despair and misery. Almost simultaneously, reverberating through the forest was Dasaratha’s scream of guilt [[12]](#footnote-12). He realized that his skill had inexorably destroyed him. Dasaratha ran to meet his dying destiny, to offer whatever little help he could, to prove his sincerity and to secure some pardon for his arrogance. Before him was a young boy writhing in pain, an arrow pierced right through his chest. The boy implored Dasaratha, begging to know what could possibly have been his fault to have been fatally attacked this way. Dasaratha tried to offer an explanation only to know of the boy’s predicament [[13]](#footnote-13). The boy was the only child of his old, blind and invalid parents. His life was dedicated to serving them, and they lived a life of gratitude, dependent on their only son. Even as he was dying this very moment, further down the banks, the old couple was waiting with parched throats for their son to bring them some water. As the boy began to inch closer to death, his pain became more excruciating at the thought of who would look after his parents after he was no more. No sooner than he told Dasaratha about his concern, he passed away.*

*A heavy-hearted Dasaratha carried water in that pot to the eagerly waiting ill-fated parents. When the old couple heard the rustle of the footsteps of a stranger and not their son’s approach them, inexplicable fear gripped them [[14]](#footnote-14). When Dasaratha told the couple of his dreadful mistake, their wounded hearts let out a curse: Dasaratha, too, would die of the pain of separation from his son. Dasaratha fell at their feet, begging for forgiveness [[15]](#footnote-15). Alas, those were the old parents’ last words before they joined their son in his pyre. A despondent Dasaratha returned to Ayodhya. He had learnt a very important lesson: Never to let passion prevail over reason. He vowed that from that day onwards never to practice sonic archery, lest it bring upon another painful curse and even more painful memories [[16]](#footnote-16). Ayodhya’s intellectual prowess consisted of Brahmanas or Vedic scholars who had immense control over their senses. They lived a life governed by strict spiritual discipline. Everything they asked of others, they demonstrated in person. They were strict with themselves and accommodated others’ shortcomings, even as they encouraged them to perfection. They did not beg for survival, instead they survived on donations they received as tokens of gratitude from their students for imparting knowledge to them. In fact, before accepting any donation, they verified that the money was earned through righteous means. Because of their wisdom and knowledge, their behavior and their purity, they commanded absolute respect [[17]](#footnote-17). Dasaratha’s in-depth knowledge of the Vedas, expertise in military sciences, far-sightedness in administration, purity of mindset and kindness and empathy were qualities that made his kingdom flawless. Consequently, the citizens were content, happy, pure, always truth-abiding and affluent. Jealous, unscholarly, ugly men, thieves, liars, atheists and the sick had no place in the kingdom [[18]](#footnote-18).*

## **Dasaratha’s leadership model**

*Of all the assets Dasaratha possessed, the one he valued most and depended on always was the Big M – the brains behind his success [[19]](#footnote-19). Dasaratha’s strength was in fact this Big M – a council of ministers (mantris or mentors) carefully chosen by him. He had eight ministers – Dristi, Jayantha, Vijaya, Suraashtra, Raashtravardhana, Akopa, Dharmapaala and Sumantra. These eight ministers were men of pure mind and great integrity. Their love for the country and its people, along with their loyalty to the king, encouraged them to use their foresight in devising policies and plans to help their country progress. They were learned, affluent, modest and unpretentious men with exemplary skills. Their words complemented their actions. Their self-control was such that when provoked, angered, or even tempted with wealth or sex, they did not yield. Not only did they embrace truth, they also inspired others to value it at all times. They appreciated virtues in the elders and showed them respect, overlooking their lapses. They were resourceful and assessed people and situations very quickly, and at the first whiff of trouble, they took immediate action [[20]](#footnote-20). Their intelligence was so keen that they never failed to live up to the expectations of doing the right thing at the right time. They were equipoised in war and in peace. In addition to these common qualities, each of Dasaratha’s ministers had a specialty. Surprisingly, their names were metaphors for the special qualities they possessed. Dristi means vision; he was farsighted. Since he had the wisdom to see ahead of time, he was the architect of Ayodhya’s fortune. Vijaya means victory; he always led Ayodhya’s army to victory. Jayantha literally means the one who ensures that victory remains. He ensured proper jurisdiction and control over the vast dominions that Vijaya expanded [[21]](#footnote-21). Suraashtra’s (also known as Arthasadaka) responsibility was to keep the royal treasury full by collecting taxes from the citizens on time, thus ensuring financial stability in the state [[22]](#footnote-22). Siddhartha (also known as Raashtravardhana) was responsible for fulfilling all the needs of the citizens and the king. He knew the art of resources management. He kept everyone happy and at the same time ensured that the state’s resources were not depleted [[23]](#footnote-23). Akopa (also known as Asoka) means one who does not allow grief or lamentation. His role was to ensure that no citizen was remorseful or disgruntled. He made himself available to the people always, allowing them to speak their hearts out without the fear of being misjudged or mistreated [[24]](#footnote-24). Dharmapaala (also known as Mantrapala) means one who guides according to dharma or truth. He was the policy maker in Ayodhya, adept in statecraft. In fact, he recommended policies for all departments and personally supervised their implementation. He promoted a strong and stable government at home and a policy of friendship and goodwill with other states. Sumantra was the oldest and wisest; he headed the cabinet. He was Dasaratha’s confidant. A natural leader and the simplest of all the ministers, he commanded great respect and his words were considered the absolute truth. In addition to the eight ministers, the Big M consisted of two venerable saints named Vasistha and Vamadeva who were experts in everything religious. The combination of tangible and intangible assets and the support of the Big M made Dasaratha the perfect, invincible leader [[25]](#footnote-25).*

***[Source: Folio – Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 7]***

***[Verse 1-5]*** *The exceptionally high-souled king of the Ikshvaku Dynasty had ministers who were endowed with good qualities. They were also versed in the recitation of incantations and in physiognomy. They were always engaged in the welfare of their dear master. The valiant king had eight ministers. They were glorious, pure and ever-devoted to the affairs of the state. Their names were: Dhrishti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Surashtra, Rashtravardhana, Akopa, Dharmapala, and as the eighth, Sumantra, who could discern the motive of any action. Vasishtha and Vamadeva were the two beloved family priests. There were also other ministers, such as Suyajna, Jabali, Kashyapa, Gautama, Markandeya, Dirghayus and the brahmana Katyayana. Along with the great brahmarshis, his two family priests always acted as his advisors.*

***[Verse 6-15]*** *The ministers were humble because of their wisdom. They were well-versed in scriptures, bashful, clever, in control of their senses, wealthy, great-souled, learned in the use of weapons, perpetually powerful, glorious, vigilant, and always did what they promised. They were strong, forgiving and famous, and smiled sweetly when they spoke. They never spoke a lie, even out of anger or for sense enjoyment. There was nothing of their own people or of others that was not known to them. Whatever was done or intended to be done was known to them through spies. They were tactful in their dealings and had been tested in their loyalty: they had punished their own sons according to law when the occasion demanded it. They were always busy increasing the kingdom's treasury and the strength of the army, and they never harmed an enemy if he was guiltless. They were heroes with perpetual enthusiasm for combat and carefully followed the principles of political science. They always protected those citizens of the kingdom who were good. They filled the treasure house without harassing the brahmanas and kshatriyas. They meted out heavy punishment only after taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the person. Because of the purity and single-mindedness of these ministers, there was not one person who would speak a lie in the city or the country. There was never anyone there who was wicked or who would have an affair with another man's wife. Indeed, the excellent city and the entire kingdom were perfectly tranquil.*

***[Verse 16-19]*** *All the ministers were well dressed and adorned and were observing holy vows. They were dedicated to the well-being of the king and vigilant, seeing with eyes of prudence. They had acquired all the good qualities of their preceptors and were famous for their prowess. They enjoyed universal recognition, even in foreign lands, for their intelligent decisions. They were completely qualified and were never devoid of virtue. They were conversant in the matter of peace and war and were naturally endowed with good fortune. They can keep secrets and capable of managing micro affairs. They were especially conversant with political science and always spoke pleasantly.*

***[Verse 20-24]*** *Assisted by such qualified ministers, the sinless King Dasharatha ruled over the earth. Seeing everything through the eyes of spies, he protected the citizens through righteousness, maintained them and thus abstained from unrighteousness. The tiger among men, who was famous throughout the three worlds for his magnanimity and for being an ocean of truthfulness, ruled over the earth from his capital. He never encountered an enemy who could surpass him or match him. He possessed numerous friends, he was honored by neighboring states, and his glory diminished his enemies. Thus the king ruled the world as Indra, the lord of the gods, rules the heavens. Surrounded by counselors who were intent upon deliberation, who were concerned with the welfare of the state and who were clever and capable, the king shone like the rising sun enveloped with its shining rays of light.*

## **Dasaratha’s void**

*Dasaratha seemed to be a complete man. He had everything a man could aspire for and probably more. Physical strength, beautiful wives, opulence beyond imagination, magnificent palaces, followers who would do anything for him, and a kingdom that extended across the globe [[26]](#footnote-26). Yes, Dasaratha had everything indeed; yet, he was dissatisfied. The presence of everything in his life was overshadowed by the absence of a son. Just as a small coin that can cover the eye to block out the brightness of the majestic sun, the absence of a son eclipsed the grandeur of Dasaratha’s limitless fortune and blessings. Dasaratha had 353 wives, but no son! Kausalya, Sumitra and Keikeyi were the principal wives of Dasaratha. The king married the remaining 350 princesses under harsh circumstances. A powerful incarnation of Lord Vishnu named Parashuram once went on a rampage, destroying all Kshatriyas with vengeance, because of mistakes committed by some of them. Parashuram traveled across the world eliminating Kshatriyas who crossed his path; however, he did not touch a kshatriya surrounded by women or one in the midst of a wedding. A king was called Nari Kavaca because he saved himself by surrounding himself with naked women that nauseated Parashuram enough to spare the king. Dasaratha, on the other hand, took refuge in weddings. Whenever he was informed about Parashuram’s imminent arrival, he would initiate a wedding ceremony with the princess of the land he was in. Parashuram could not fight or kill Dasaratha because he was in the midst of a wedding. Parashuram passed by Ayodhya 350 times during his rampage, and Dasaratha evaded death as many times and ended up with 350 wives in addition to his three queens! The pangs of agony at not having a son far surpassed the tremors of anguish that Dasaratha felt every time Parashuram came by to attack him.* ***[I Could not verify it from any other source]***

***References from Valmiki Ramayana indicating Dasaratha Maharaj had other 350 wives:***

*Ayodhya Kanda – Chapter 34- verse 11-13*

*“Sumantra, after entering the gynaecium, spoke these words to those women as follows: "Oh, the venerable ladies! The king is calling you. Go there without delay.”*

*“All those women, asked thus by Sumantra as per the king's orders, went to his palace, after knowing the instructions of their husband.”*

*“Encircling Kausalya, three hundred fifty women, steadfast in their vow (of devotion to their husband), with their eyes reddened, went there slowly.”*

*Ayodhya Kanda – Chapter 39- verse 34-36*

*“Oh, mother! You do not grieve. You look after my father. The end of exile will come rather soon.”*

*"Fourteen years will elapse, while you are asleep. you as such, will see me, duly arrived here in my entire being, surrounded by my well-wishers."*

*“Uttering the aforesaid words of such quality and appropriate meaning to his mother, Rama thought once again and gazed at his three hundred and fifty step-mothers.”*

*Dasaratha called his Big M for a conference to find a way to overcome his grief. He thought an ashwamedha yajna (a horse sacrifice) would please the Lord enough to award him a son; however, before making a decision, he wanted the advice and blessings of all the great sages and wise men in his council [[27]](#footnote-27). The great sages led by Vasistha seconded Dasaratha’s idea and agreed to assist him in fulfilling his desire. The sages also warned him of the dire consequences of any errors made when conducting this sacrifice. They agreed to protect the sacrifice against such lapses by keeping strict vigil on the performance and the purity of every individual and ritual involved [[28]](#footnote-28).*

***[Source: Folio – Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 8]***

***[Verse 1-9]*** *The great-souled and religious-minded King Dasharatha, whose glory has been described previously, had no son to perpetuate his dynasty, although he had been anxious for one. While thinking about this, it occurred to the highly intelligent king that he should perform a horse sacrifice11 to achieve a son. Having made up his mind to perform the sacrifice, the wise king consulted with all his capable ministers. Thereupon, the mighty monarch said to Sumantra, “O best of ministers, quickly bring all my family preceptors.” Thereafter the swift Sumantra hurriedly went and assembled all those souls who had completely mastered the Vedas. Having honored Suyajna, Vamadeva, Jabali, Kashyapa, his family priest Vasishtha and other exalted brahmanas, the righteous King Dasharatha spoke the following sweet words conducive to virtue:*

*“There is indeed no happiness for me, because I have been desiring a son for some time. For that purpose I shall perform a horse sacrifice. That is my idea. I therefore wish to perform the sacrifice according to rites prescribed in the scriptures. How can I accomplish my desire? Please deliberate on this.”*

***[Verse 10-19]*** *Then all the brahmanas headed by Vasishtha praised the words spoken from the mouth of the king, saying, “Very good!” Highly pleased, they all told Dasharatha, “Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be gathered and the horse released! Let the sacrificial ground be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. By all means, you will have the son you desire, O king, for this plan of yours to get a son is virtuous.” The king was pleased to hear the remarks of the brahmanas. With his eyes rolling with delight, the king said to his ministers, “By the order of my preceptors, immediately prepare the ingredients for the sacrifice. Let the sacrificial horse be released under the supervision of capable men accompanied by the priest. And let the sacrificial ground be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. Also let the propitiatory rites be elaborately performed as ordained in the scriptures. This most excellent sacrifice would have been performed by all monarchs, provided if it can be done without transgressing any prescribed rules. However, the astute brahma-rakshasas [[29]](#footnote-29) (brahmanas born as rakshasas) are always looking for some fault in sacrificial performances to seize the share of the gods thus ruining the sacrifice and as well as the performer. Therefore, this sacrifice undertaken by me should be executed as per procedure. Let it be thus performed, for you are all capable in these affairs.”*

***[Verse 20-24]*** *“So be it,” said all the counselors, who had been properly honored by the king. Having heard the words previously spoken by the king, the brahmanas who were conversant with religion also encouraged the king. Then, with his permission, they all departed as they had come. Having sent away the brahmanas, he spoke the following to his ministers: “Let the sacrifice be executed as the priests have recommended.” Having spoken, the lion among kings sent away the assembled ministers. Then the highly intelligent king entered the quarters of his harem. There the king sought out his favorite consorts and told them of his intention to perform a sacrifice for having a son. By that pleasant utterance of the king, the lotus faces of those beautiful women shone like lotus flowers at the end of winter.*

## **Rishyasringa — a sage with a horn**

*After all the advisors left, Sumantra approached Dasaratha and told him a hitherto unknown story. He narrated that long ago he had heard the great sage Sanat Kumar predicting that Dasaratha would perform this very yajna. Sanat Kumar had spoken about a unique and powerful sage named Rishyasringa as being the chief director of the sacrifice. The wise Sanat Kumar had predicted that under the guidance of Rishyasringa, the sacrifice would be a success and that Dasaratha would father illustrious sons [[30]](#footnote-30).*

*Sumantra went on to narrate the history behind Rishyasringa’s greatness. Romapada, the great king of Anga, was a very a dear friend of King Dasaratha so much so that Dasaratha had given up his own daughter Santa for adoption to King Romapada, assuming that he would father sons in the future. Once, Romapada’s kingdom was crippled by drought. Great sages advised that if Rishyasringa stepped into his kingdom, there would be bountiful rains immediately. Rishyasringa was so named because of this peculiar birth feature. Shringa means a horn. Rishyasringa means a sage with a horn. Indeed, Rishyasringa was born with a horn on his forehead! But to get Rishyasringa to step into the kingdom was not an easy task because his father Vibandaka kept him cocooned from the material world. He forbade Rishyasringa from entering any city or leaving behind the austere forest life of an ascetic. To make Rishyasringa a great sage, Vibandaka kept him off all luxuries, comforts, women and even rich food.*

*So Romapada asked his ministers to devise a clever plan to trick Rishyasringa into entering his kingdom. The ministers waited until Rishyasringa’s father was away. They then sent a group of female courtesans dressed as male sages to lure the hermit. The female courtesans began surrounding the hermitage with sweet melodious music. The innocent Rishyasringa had no idea these sages were women and treated them as compatriots who had come to the forest. In return for respect and hospitality, the sages offered Rishyasringa exquisite sweets and words of affection. The naive Rishyasringa thought the sweets were some kind of fruit. When it was time for his father to return, each courtesan embraced him and left the hermitage [[31]](#footnote-31). After their departure, Rishyasringa was like a lost man. He was emotionally disturbed and overcome with sadness and was always absorbed in the thoughts of these women. He had never ever experienced such turbulence before [[32]](#footnote-32). The next day, the women returned and told him to accompany them to their hermitage. They promised to introduce Rishyasringa to many other exalted sages. Rishyasringa willingly accompanied them. Their hermitage was actually a moving boat, which quickly brought the unsuspecting Rishyasringa into the kingdom of Romapada. The moment Rishyasringa stepped on the soil of Anga, the clouds burst and began pouring incessant rain. The downpour swelled Anga’s parched hearts with the kind of joy a chataka bird feels when after waiting for long, the first drops of rain quenches its thirst. A much-relieved and grateful Romapada fell at the feet of the great sage and offered his daughter Santa’s hand in marriage to him. It was then that Rishyasringa figured what had actually transpired: He would now be a married man and that he was instrumental in serving a greater purpose, although he was tricked into it. Rishyasringa wisely decided not to take offense. King Romapada requested Rishyasringa to stay in his kingdom. Sumantra reminded Dasaratha that Santa was after all his own daughter and that made Rishyasringa his son-in-law. So, if Dasaratha were to request Rishyasringa, he would not be able refuse because they were so closely related [[33]](#footnote-33). Dasaratha wasted no time and set forth for Anga to request Romapada to allow Rishyasringa to perform the sacrifice in Ayodhya. The citizens of Ayodhya welcomed Rishyasringa with much pomp and glory. Here was a sage who could usher into Ayodhya the rain of good fortune by facilitating Dasaratha’s desire for sons.*

***[Source: Folio – Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 9]***

***[Verse 1-8]*** *Hearing this, the king's charioteer, Sumantra (who was also one of his ministers) spoke to him privately. “Hear from me what I heard during the recitation of a Puranic legend. This sacrifice recommended by the priests was heard by me in an old legend. In an assembly of sages, the wise Sanatkumara narrated this story regarding the birth of your sons:*

*There is a son of Kashyapa known as Vibhandaka who will have a son known as Rishyashringa, who will be growing up in the forest. This chief of the brahmanas will know nothing except service to his father. The great soul will practice celibacy extolled in the world and spoken of by learned brahmanas. In this way, he will pass his time in worship of the sacred fire and his father. At that time, there will be a strong and powerful king named Romapada in the country of Anga. Because of the king's transgressions, there will be a drought so terrible and frightful that it will inflict the whole country with fear.*

***[Verse 9-13]*** *Saddened by the news of the drought, the king will summon the brahmanas who are Vedic scholars and say: “You are all engaged in the duties prescribed by the scriptures and are conversant with the customs and practices of the common people. Please, therefore, teach me the means of atonement for my sins.” Those outstanding brahmanas will be entreated in this way by the king. Then they will reply to the king: “O king, please bring here the son of Vibhandaka by whatever means. After bringing Rishyashringa, the son of Vibhandaka, O protector of the earth, properly honor him and give your daughter Shanta in marriage to him, for he is a brahmana and an accomplished scholar of the Vedas.”*

***[Verse 14-18]*** *Hearing their words, the king began to think of how he will be able to bring that powerful sage to his city. Having arrived at a decision with his counselors, the king decided to send his family priest accompanied by his respectable ministers. However, on hearing the king's words, they became pained and with downcast faces, they replied to the king, “We will not go, for we are afraid of his father, the sage Vibhandaka.” After duly considering the feasible means of bringing Rishyashringa, they will say to the king, “We shall bring the brahmana. There will be no fault in it.” Thus the king of the Angas will cause the son of the sage to be brought by courtesans, Lord Indra will cause the rains to fall and Shanta will be given in marriage to the sage Rishyashringa.*

***[Verse 19-20]*** *Sumantra continued: “Rishyashringa, being your son-in-law[[34]](#footnote-34) as well will arrange for you to have sons. This was prophesized by Sanatkumara in the assembly of other sages which has been now retold by me.” Being greatly pleased, Dasharatha said to Sumantra, “Inform me about the means by which Rishyashringa was brought to the capital of Romapada.”*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 10]***

***[Verse 1- 5]*** *Being ordered by the king, Sumantra spoke the following words. “Accompanied by your ministers, listen to me narrate everything regarding how King Romapada brought Rishyashringa and what means he used to do so.”*

*The family priest along with the counselors said to King Romapada: “We have devised a sure plan. Rishyashringa has always lived in the forest where he practices austerities and studies scripture. As such, he is unfamiliar with the happiness of women or the happiness from sense enjoyment. By agreeable objects which agitate the senses, we shall bring him here to the city. Now quickly do the needful. Let the beautiful and well-groomed courtesans go there. After he receives them, they will entice him by various means and bring him here.”*

***[Verse 6-15]*** *Hearing this, the king replied to his family priest: “Very well, let it be so.” Then the priest and the ministers did just that. After receiving this order from the king, the best of the courtesans entered that great forest. Staying not far from Vibhandaka's hermitage, they tried to meet Rishyashringa in some way. The son of the sage was very grave and had always lived in the hermitage. He was always happy to be with his father, and so he had never left the hermitage. Since his birth, the ascetic had never seen a woman or man or any other creature from the cities or towns of the country. One day, by chance, the son of Vibhandaka wandered from the hermitage to the place where the courtesans were staying and saw them there. The women's garments were of different colors and they were singing with sweet voices. Gathering around the sage's son, they all spoke the following words. “O brahmana, who are you? What are you doing? We wish to know. You frequent this distant and uninhabited forest by your self. Please tell us.” He had never before seen in the forest women who were of beautiful form and desirable. In his heart arose the desire to tell them about his father. He said: “My father is Vibhandaka. I am his son, his own flesh and blood. I am known as Rishyashringa and in this world I am engaged in the practice of austerities. Nearby is my hermitage which is delightful to see. There I shall honor all of you per the rules of scripture.”*

***[Verse 16-23]*** *Hearing the words of the sage's son, they all agreed. Thereafter all the beautiful women went to see the hermitage. Saying “here is water for washing the hands, here is water for washing the feet, and here are roots and fruits for us to eat,” the sage's son received his female guests. After accepting this reception ceremony, they all became anxious to leave soon out of fear of Vibhandaka's anger. They said, “O brahmana, we have fruits that are even better than these. Bless you, O brahmana. Please accept them and eat them. Do not delay.” Then they all embraced him joyfully and gave him best of sweetmeats and other tasty things to eat. After tasting the sweets and fruits, the powerful ascetic began thinking, “Such things have never been tasted by any forest dweller before.” Taking leave of the brahmana on the pretext of a religious observance, the women left for their own place out of fear of his father. After they had all left, the brahmana Rishyashringa became ill at heart and restless due to sadness.*

***[Verse 24-28]*** *The next day, after thinking it over in his mind, the powerful and handsome son of Vibhandaka went to the place where he had met the beautifully adorned and mind-captivating courtesans. Seeing the brahmana coming, the women's minds were overcome with delight. They all approached him and spoke to him the following words. “Please come to our hermitage, O gentle one. Although there are many varieties of roots and fruits here, these things can be done in a special way there.” Hearing their heart-moving words, he decided to go with them. Thus the women carried him off to the land of Anga.*

***[Verse 29-33]*** *As they brought the great soul there, the demigod Indra began pouring down showers of rain and the whole world became joyful. By the arrival of the rains, the king could understand that the ascetic brahmana was on his way. Going out to meet the sage, the king humbly bowed his head and prostrated himself on the ground. With his mind composed, he offered him the customary water for washing the hands. Then he requested a boon to protect him and his country from the fury of the best of Brahmana, his father Vibhandaka if he later comes to know about his plan in bringing him to his country. After they entered the city, the king, with a peaceful mind, gave his daughter Shanta to him in marriage in accordance with scriptural rule. Thereafter the king was greatly pleased. In this way, being honored by the king, the powerful Rishyashringa lived there with his wife Shanta with all his desires fulfilled and well worshipped.*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 11]***

***[Verse 1-12]*** *Then Sumantra again spoke, “O king, please hear from me these beneficial words as they were spoken by the wise and best of gods Sanatkumara:*

*In the dynasty of Ikshvaku will be born a righteous and fortunate king named Dasharatha who will be true to his promise. He will strike up a friendship with the king of Anga. The king of Anga will have a highly fortunate daughter named Shanta. The name of the king of Anga will be Romapada also know as Chitraratha. The famous King Dasharatha will go to him: “O righteous one, I am most unfortunate. By your order, let Shanta's husband, Rishyashringa, attend the sacrifice which is being performed for the continuation of my dynasty.” Thinking about what King Dasharatha had said, King Romapada will hand over his son, the husband of Shanta. On getting the brahmana, King Dasharatha will become rid of his anxiety. His mind will be joyful as he takes the brahmana to the sacrifice. Being desirous of glory, the virtuous King Dasharatha will join his hands and request three boons from the best of brahmanas, Rishyashringa: the successful execution of the sacrifice, a son, and ascension to heaven. The protector of the people will achieve his desired goals by the words sprung from the mouth of the brahmana. The king will have four sons of immeasurable prowess. They will firmly establish the dynasty and will be famous throughout the world. Thus was this topic narrated in the previous Satya-yuga by the foremost and blessed sage Sanatkumara. O Maharaja, O tiger among men, going yourself with your army and retinue, properly honor the sage Rishyashringa and bring him here.”*

***[Verse 13-17]*** *Upon hearing Sumantra's words, Dasharatha was very pleased. Informing Vasishtha of Sumantra's words, he requested permission to carry them out. Accompanied by his wives and counselors, he proceeded to where the brahmana was residing. Gradually crossing many forests and rivers, they arrived at the land where that great sage lived. They saw Rishyashringa, who was shining like fire, seated beside King Romapada. Then, due to feelings of friendship with King Dasharatha, King Romapada, with great elation, performed as best he could the ceremonial reception. King Romapada informed the intelligent Rishyashringa about his friendship with King Dasharatha, then Rishyashringa also offered his respects to King Dasharatha.*

***[Verse 18-22]*** *Being thus honored, King Dasharatha remained there for seven or eight days, after which he said to King Romapada: “O king and protector of the people, please allow your daughter Shanta and her husband to visit my capital where a great sacrifice is being arranged.” Conceding to the wise man's departure, King Romapada replied, “So be it!” Then King Romapada told the brahmana, “Go with your wife to King Dasharatha's capital.” Hearing this, the son of the sage replied, “All right.” With the consent of King Romapada, he departed with his wife. The two kings shook hands, then embraced each other affectionately and rejoiced. Then, taking leave from his friend, King Dasharatha, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, departed.*

***[Verse 23-30]*** *Swift messengers were sent to inform the people of the king's arrival: “Immediately decorate the entire city. Fill the air with incense and sprinkle the streets with sweet-smelling perfumes. Decorate the city with flags.” The citizens were glad to hear of the return of the king, thus they did everything that the king had requested through the messengers. The king then entered the beautifully decorated city to the accompaniment of drums and conchshells, with the foremost brahmana proceeding in front. All the towns people were overjoyed to see the brahmana. The king, who was equal to Lord Indra in prowess, honored the brahmana upon his entrance into the city, just as Indra, the lord of the gods, received Vamana, the son of Kashyapa, in his heavenly realm. Entering into the inner chambers of the palace, the king thereupon received the brahmana in accordance with scriptural rule. Due to the presence of the brahmana, the king now considered himself successful. Seeing the broad-eyed Shanta in the company of her husband, all the ladies of the palace were overcome with affection. After being honorably received by the ladies, and especially by the king, she lived there happily for some time with her husband Rishyashringa.*

*[Source: Folio – Untold Stories from the Ramayana] - Vasistha told the story of Rsayasrnga. Srnga means “horns” or “a person possessing horns.” Rsa means “deer,” so Rsayasrnga means “a human possessing horns.” He is a human being with deer horns who performs yajna and speaks Sanskrit. Vasistha said, “I will tell you the story of Rsayasrnga. Long ago, Kashyapa Muni produced a son while meditating on the sunlight. While he was meditating on the sunlight, suddenly he thought of a personality. When he thought of a personality, that person would come into existence. And he would come out of his mind. Kashyapa was Prajapati, “progenitor.” And this person was known as Vibondaka. As soon as Vibondaka came out of Kashyapa’s mind, he went to the deepest forests in Madhya Pradesh which is now very famous as Chandal Valley. All the dacoits are there. That is where Vibondaka went, and he performed ugra-tapasa, very severe austerities. He was only performing tapasa for self-realization, but Indra was worried. Indra has a special secretary for this department. He gives him a list of people who are performing austerities, because he is so worried that they may become the opposition and may even try to usurp his own seat. So when he heard the name Vibondaka he asked, “What kind of tapasa is he doing?” The secretary mentioned to him, “He is performing such huge austerities that if he were to ever get angry, this whole universe would be burnt to ashes. And if he ever thinks of anything, it will automatically come to him without his having to perform any sacrifice. This is the potency of his tapovalam.” Indra said, “Then he is my candidate. I will have to work on him.” He thought of all the damsels on his planet, and he decided, “These are no good.” So then he went to Satyaloka, Brahma’s planet. In Satyaloka there are damsels who are self-realized souls. They dance only for the pleasure of the deity that Brahma keeps for worship. Indra, for his political purpose, wanted to pollute these damsels. So he went to Brahma, but he couldn’t spend much time there because if you are too long in Brahma’s planet by the time you return your time will be over, So Indra said, “Give me the best damsel, quickly! I have to go!” So Brahma said, “All right, take this one.” There was one lady called Harsha, because she was always smiling. Harsha came with Indra, and even while flying with Harsha, Indra could understand that he was so greedy and lusty, and this woman was so saintly and serene, always meditating on the Absolute Truth. He was thinking, “What happens if I send her and they both become self-realized?” Indra wanted something wrong to happen. So he fell at the feet of Harsha, and said, “Please, protect my seat.” Harsha said, “I don’t think that this Vibondaka desires to enjoy anything.” Because she was sitting in Satyaloka she could see Vibondaka and what type of austerity he was doing. So she said, “You are unnecessarily sending me there, and I may even get burnt by his anger. But because Brahma has told then I am coming with you. Vibondaka has no such material desires. He won’t even look at me. I don’t know how I’m going to attract him and make him fall.” Indra said, “I don’t know what you will do, but at least get it confirmed from him that he has no desire to become Indra. Then my position is safe.” So Harsha said, “All right, I will do it. Whatever is given to me as a mission I will accomplish.” So Harsha came to that valley, and Vibondaka was coming from the Ganges and going to his ashrama. So she came and sat there, and chanted mantras. There are different ways of making people fall down. Whatever is your weak spot, that can be used. Vibondaka’s weak spot was mantras and meditation, so she started chanting mantras. Vibondaka was so absorbed, and then suddenly he heard this clear pronunciation of Vedic mantras, clearer than anything else he had ever heard anywhere in the three planets. He turned back and looked at her, and immediately she fell at his feet. She said, “Only for the prayer of getting a son from you have I chanted these mantras. Vedic mantras which are chanted should not go in vain. Somebody must give a benediction, and I don’t want this benediction from anyone else, not even from Brahma. I only want It from you. If you don’t accept this request, then I will perform austerities and I will leave my body. And brahma-hatya will come to you.” In this way she blackmailed him. So Vibondaka said, “What is this? I am just trying to peacefully think of God. Why is this trouble coming?” So he looked at her and said, “I am Vibondaka, and I have no interest in this world. I don’t know why I was even sent here, but Kashyapa produced me. I am just trying to go away from here. What is this, giving you a son? You can’t get a son from anywhere else? You mention any other person, and I will command him to give you a son. If you want a son from Brahma, I will request him. If you want a son from my father Kashyapa, I will request him. Why me, in the whole creation?” So she said, “No, only you. You are the only person who should give me a son.” And then he said, “No this is not possible. I am not going to do it. If you have been even been thinking about me like that, that is bad for me.” And then he said, “Here is the potency from my body. You can arrange for getting a son.” And he dropped some semen and left. Harsha then understood that Indra had nothing to fear, so her mission was fulfilled. But this shukla coming out of the body of Vibondaka, was there burning the whole world. She was now responsible for it, she had to direct it somewhere. She did not want to hold it and produce a son, because that was only a trick she was using. But when she looked up she saw a very transcendental deer moving around there. So immediately by her potency, she put the semen in the body of the deer, and the deer conceived a child. Since it was the conception of a rishi, it did not stay for more than a night. The next morning, the deer delivered a baby. It had a human form, but with deer horns. This was Rsayasrnga. So this deer ran to the ashrama of Vibondaka and started crying. Vibondaka saw this and thought, “Why are these things happening to me? Some lady wants a son, and now a deer is crying in my ashrama.” So Vibondaka asked the deer, “What is wrong? Who is giving you trouble?” The deer started walking away and Vibondaka followed. The deer brought him to where Rsayasrnga was, and Vibondaka saw this shining young baby with deer horns. He thought, “Oh, this is my son. If nobody wants him, then I will take care of him.” Then Vibondaka thought, “Now I know why I was sent here, for some reason. Kashyapa did not conceive me for nothing. I am supposed to conceive this son, and God knows what he is going to conceive.” So Vibondaka brought him to the ashrama and gave him milk. He taught him Vedas and Upanishads and philosophy. There was no woman in that forest, which was yojanas wide. There was not even any tigresses, only tigers. So Rsayasrnga had no idea of women. He grew up, and for everything he was depending on his father. He would ask his father, “Father, can I take this book and read?” And if his father said yes, then he would do it. He would ask, “Father, should I brush my teeth?” And if the father said yes, he would brush his teeth. He was so dependent on his father. He would always walk everywhere holding his father’s hand. In this way Rsayasrnga grew up to be the most innocent person in the creation. Lord Ramacandra had to appear, and if he was to appear then the yajna-purusha has to give the khir, and if that khir is to come, then the yajna has to be performed by someone who has never seen a woman. Lord Ramacandra’s advent was not that easy. This whole story is already in Visnu Purana. In this way Rsayasrnga was growing up, never hearing of any woman. Dasaratha, when his daughter was born to Kausalya, he was thinking, “What shall I do with this daughter?” Then one day, from Angadesha, the country of Anga, Dasaratha’s friend Romapada (which means “hairy feet”) was hankering for a child too. He had some sons, but he had no daughter. This is the material world. He who has daughters, he is hankering for a son. And he who has sons is hankering for a daughter. And he who has no children, they are hoping for children, and those who have children are thinking “How to get rid of them,” and they send them to Gurukula. So Romapada came to Dasaratha and said, “You are my very good friend, and you have no sons. You always think, ‘What is the use of a daughter?’ And I want a daughter, so why don’t you give her to me?” And Dasaratha said, “All right, you can have her.” So he gave Shanti in adoption to the king of Angadesha known as Romapada. Romapada brought Shanti to his kingdom. And whether it way the girl’s misfortune or the king’s misfortune, the second day was the day the rainy season was supposed to start but there was no rain. The whole rainy season went by and there was no rain. The second rainy season also went by with no rain. A big famine came about. So the king went to the astrologer and asked him, “Why is there famine in my kingdom? Is it due to this daughter? Everyone is saying it is due to her.” They found out that during some yajna that had been performed by Romapada he had cheated a Brahmin. He first promised him, “I will give you this much amount of diamonds,” but while he was counting the diamonds to be given as dakshina, he found one diamond which was very valuable, and he thought, “What is the Brahmin going to do with this?” So he took it out, and put a bigger diamond in its place, which was less valuable. When he gave the bag of diamonds to the Brahmin, the Brahmin touched the bag and said, “You cheated me! You removed one of these diamonds and put a bigger diamond to cheat me.” It was inside the bag, and the king was thinking, “How does he know this?” The Brahmin said, “I am a Brahmin, so I know this. You are cheating, so all the Brahmins will leave this country.” So he formed a big union and all the Brahmins walked out of the country. No more Brahmins means no more yajna, and it was Treta-yuga, so no yajna means no food. The king was wondering what to do, so slowly from here and there he collected some Brahmins from other countries, and he brought them on immigration, so they couldn’t stay long. These Brahmins were coming and going, and in this way he was running his kingdom. Now famine had come due to this curse, and the fact that all the Brahmins had left his country. So the astrologer said, “So to solve this problem, you have to bring all the Brahmins back.” Romapada said, “But these Brahmins have formed a union. They won’t come back.” “They will come back if you bring one person here.” Romapada asked, “Who is that?” “There is one rishi. He has never seen a woman. And he doesn’t even know what is a woman. That person must come, and he must marry your daughter. If that rishi stays in your kingdom, then the Brahmins will not stay anywhere else. They will come here, because he is such a learned person. To see him, they will come. And after they come, they will stay.” So now he had to get this Rsayasrnga, and he was thinking “How to get him?” So he asked this to his ministers, and they said, “Rsayasrnga is not an easy object, his father is Vibondaka. If Vibondaka gets angry he will burn the universe to ashes. If you try to get his son he will get angry, and then there is no necessity of yajna or rain, because the whole universe will be burnt, and you will also be burnt.” “So what to do?” Romapada asked. “You have to use some trick,” his ministers replied. Then they advised him, “You must go and consult the society girls, the famous prostitutes of the country.” So then Romapada made an announcement, “Special interview with the prostitutes of the country.” They all came, and they were thinking it had something to do with dance or music, or something like that. But when they heard that they had to bring Rsayasrnga, then they ran away because everybody knew this person. However, one lady came up, and she said, “For the benefit of my country, I will sacrifice myself. I will try; if he comes, that’s good. Then the kingdom will be happy. If he doesn’t come, only a prostitute will be killed. What’s the problem? I don’t care, I will go.” Romapada asked, “What do want in return?” “I don’t want anything, let the country be happy.” “What help do you need?” Romapada asked. “Your treasury, whenever I go, must open. And if I want anything from any department, they must say yes, because you must know I am sacrificing my life.” So the king gave her a special green card. Anywhere she goes, anything she wants she would get. She made a boat which was four miles long and two miles wide. On top of the boat she made an ashrama. This boat was totally covered with trees and bushes, flower gardens, lakes and deer. All kinds of things she put in there. And thousands of people were rowing the boat, but you couldn’t see anything, it was all covered by bushes. There were pathways, small mountains, waterfalls, everything was created. It looked like a island, but it was moving. No-one knew what it was. They all though it was the gandharvas who have come. It was a special ashrama, no men. Only women were there. No tigers, only tigresses. It was filled up with women. They all had rudrakshas, tulasi-malas, jasmine flowers tied up in their hair, and they were all praying, doing meditation and chanting mantras. This boat was floating so nicely down the river, and somehow or other they got it into Madhya Pradesh. So as they reached Vibondaka’s ashrama, Vibondaka went out to help a sage who had gotten stuck in the mouth of an elephant. He was calling, “Save me! Save me!” And no-one heard him, only Vibondaka. So he told Rsayasrnga, “You must perform the yajna three times daily. Don’t worry about cleaning the ashrama, because it’s too big for you. Just perform the yajna till I get back.” When Vibondaka left, the demigods made arrangements and got him involved in so many other things so that Rsayasrnga was left by himself. Rsayasrnga went to the river to take water for the yajna, and he saw this moving ashrama. He’d never been anywhere, but he’d studied a lot of shastra, and he’d never heard of anything like this before. And whenever the description came of women, Vibondaka would never explain it. He would never read such parts. In this way he was kept brainwashed to be a brahmacari. He looked at this ashrama, “This is so nice.” And then he saw some figures in there. “What kind of rishis are these? This is a different type of rishi.” He became very eager. “Anyway, if they are in the area, they must visit my father’s ashrama.” And they did come. They just made sure that Vibondaka was not around, and then three of the great saintly people walked out of the boat. And then they came, raising their hands and calling “Rsayasrnga! Rsayasrnga!” Usually when the rishis came they called for Vibondaka. So he saw these rishis coming, and he went and addressed them. And after addressing them he was asking, “Where are you coming from? Which planet? What mantras do you chant? How come by the touch of your bodies all my hairs are standing on end? Why am I having such romancha?” They were smiling at each other, and they said, “We are rishis from another place, it is eight yojanas from here. It is an island, and no human beings come there. We are born with perfection. We came to see your father. We know that you are very learned, so in our moving ashrama, we want you to come and stay for a few days.” Rsayasrnga said, “I would be very happy to do that, but my father is not here. I don’t even brush my teeth unless my father tells me to. So how will I go away from here, and who will perform the yajna three times daily?” One lady said, “I will do it, I am expert in this line.” And she sat down. Somehow Rsayasrnga fell pray for this. These were saintly people, so why shouldn’t they do yajna? And they looked different, very attractive. He couldn’t understand what the tejas was that was coming from that body and attracting him. He didn’t know it was lust. This was never explained to him. So he left that lady there doing yajna, and they had a flower ladder from the ashrama up to the bank of the river. This ashrama was filled with saintly people, so somehow they engaged him in listening to music, and dancing and so many other things, and slowly they came to Angadesha. In Angadesha there was big reception arranged for Rsayasrnga, brahmacari incarnate. There was purna-kumbha and there was mantras and Brahmins. The Brahmins all came to know that Rsayasrnga was coming, and they came and waited there. He was worshipped like anything. He saw more saintly people were sitting there in that country, and they were sitting with other saintly people. Then he started realizing that something was wrong in his understanding. He asked the king, “Why have you brought me here?” But as soon as he stepped off the boat, rain came. And people were all happy, they were showering akshada and touching his feet. All the people came and told him, “You must never leave our country. You must become the son-in-law of our king.” He didn’t know what son-in-law meant. So then they had to have special classes for him to explain how to become a son-in-law. Then he understood everything and finally he blessed the king by marrying Shanti, Dasaratha’s daughter. In the meantime Vibondaka had returned to his ashrama, and saw this lady sitting there offering ghee into the fire. He grabbed her by the hair and said, “Who are you? What are you doing with my fire? It’s been here for six thousand years. You came and contaminated it. What are you doing?” She said, “I am not this body. I am spirit soul.” Vibondaka said, “That’s very nice, that you’re not this body, but you are not supposed to do this.” So then she said, “No no, Rsayasrnga told me to do this.” So he said, “So come on tell me, where is Rsayasrnga? What did you do to him? There was one man in this world who was pure, and you spoiled him too!” And then the lady said, “What could we do, this was a nationalistic service. We are serving the nation. In the service of our nation we have done something so we will go to heavenly planet.” So then Vibondaka said, “I’m going to curse that king, that Angadesha Raja! He’s getting rain, but I will see that he gets nothing any more.” The lady fell at his feet and said, “At least do the curse there. Then he will know you are cursing him. Don’t do the curse from here.” “All right,” he said. He was so angry, but Romapada was so clever, he was arranging for many Brahmins chanting mantras, glorifying Vibondaka, showing pictures of Kashyapa Muni just to attract him. But Vibondaka came and said, “Where is the king? Bring him here!” Romapada came and begged, “Please don’t curse me! Already there are enough curses! All that I have done is that I have made your son the king of this country.” So then something dawned on Vibondaka. “My son has become the king of this country. Now he has become the king, he has to protect the citizens. If I curse, then the blame is on him because he couldn’t protect his citizens.” So then he called his son, “Rsayasrnga, come here.” Rsayasrnga came, and Vibondaka said, “All right, as soon as one son is born, you must be back in the ashrama. You understand?” This was the time when Dasaratha was told, by Vasistha Muni, the story.*

*So Dasaratha started, with all his paraphernalia, his seven akshauhini-shainyas, and arrived in Angadesha. Romapada was thinking, “What is this? Suddenly Dasaratha is coming with his army. He is going to fight with me or what?” So he came with a white flag. “There is no question that your army can even stay in my country. Your army is so big that they can only just stand inside my country, not much more. Why are you coming with seven akshauhini-shainyas?” Dasaratha said, “No, I am just coming to request Rsayasrnga to come and perform a yajna for me.” Romapada said, “I don’t know. Already his wife is pregnant, and as soon as the son is delivered, he will go. I don’t know how long the yajna will be. I’m not going to play any more tricks, because already Vibondaka has told him, ‘One son and you are back in the ashrama’.” Dasaratha said, “I will fall at his feet. He has protected your kingdom, why will he not save my country too? Why will he not do it?” So Dasaratha went there, paid his pranams, and he cried and told Rsayasrnga, “I have no hope. I will jump in the fire of asvamedha instead of the horse, if you don’t come.” So then Rsayasrnga calculated, “How many days are left?” It was 28 days more before the delivery. “That’s all right. In 24 days I will come and do putra-kamesti.” So he came, and right next to the asvamedha-yajna he created another fire from that, and he quickly started putra-kamesti.*

*Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana] - Sumantra then took Mahäräja Daçaratha aside to narrate the following story which he had formerly heard from Sanat-kumära, who, had spoken it in an assembly of great sages.*

*“You will be very interested to hear this story, my dear King,” Sumantra said, “because it predicts that in the future you will become the father of four glorious sons.*

*“It so happened that Sanat-kumära previously related this same story in the Satya-yuga of the previous millennium. Thus, none of the events which were described by him had yet occurred, but were destined to take place in the far distant future.” Sumantra narrates the story of Rsyasrnga.*

## **The sacrifice**

*Rishyasringa suggested that Dasaratha perform the putrakamesti yajna (a sacrifice to the Lord to fulfill one’s desire for sons). Successful performance of the putrakamesti yajna required the king to be sinless. To ensure purity, Rishyasringa suggested that the ashwamedha yajna be performed [[35]](#footnote-35). Arrangements for the ashwamedha yajna had in fact begun from the time Rishyasringa arrived in Ayodhya. A powerful horse was selected and sent out to traverse the globe. The ashwamedha yajna was such that the king of every kingdom through which this horse passed had to either accept the sender of the horse as his master or fight to prove his supremacy. When the horse sent from Ayodhya passed through every kingdom of the world, no king dared challenge it, and everyone rightfully accepted Dasaratha as the unopposed monarch of the world. The ritual horse took a whole year to return to Ayodhya. Meanwhile, preparations for the sacrificial ceremony were on full swing. Every king of the world was invited to this sacrifice. Vasistha insisted that Sumantra personally go and invite Dasaratha’s close friends – Janaka the king of Mithila, Romapada the king of Anga, Kekeya the king of Kekeya (Keikeyi’s father, the third wife of Dasaratha) and many others. Elaborate lodging arrangements were made to host the royal guests and their entourage comfortably. Vasistha painstakingly monitored every aspect of the arrangement for the sacrifice [[36]](#footnote-36). He ensured that there were no lapses and that all those involved in the preparations did their best. His key instructions to all concerned were that nothing should be taken lightly; no invitee should feel neglected; none who came to participate in the sacrifice should go hungry or thirsty. Women, children, old and ailing were given special consideration and their needs were attended to immediately. The food served was so wholesome and pure that even those with poor appetites overate and still longed for more. All the visitors were thoroughly satisfied and showered their blessings wholeheartedly. The ashwamedha yajna was a double-edged sword, in that it could deliver great results and ensure an elevated life for the performer, but it could also prove disastrous if there were to be a single lapse. It was believed that brahma rakshasas attacked and destroyed the performer as soon as that single error was committed [[37]](#footnote-37). To avoid such mistakes, Vasistha appointed supervisors to keep strict vigil, to ensure that everyone executed their tasks sincerely, without neglecting their responsibilities.*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 12]***

***[Verse 1-3]*** *After a lapse of some time, when an exceptionally pleasant spring had arrived, it occurred to the king to begin the sacrifice. Bowing his head before the brahmana who was as effulgent as a god, the king requested him to perform the sacrifice for the continuation of the royal dynasty. Rishyashringa said to the king who was the protector of the earth: “So be it. Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be prepared, the sacrificial horse be set free.”*

***[Verse 4-9]*** *Then the king said: “Sumantra, immediately bring those brahmanas who have completely mastered the Vedas, as well as the priests who are knowers of the Absolute. Bring Suyajna, Vamadeva, Jabali, Kashyapa, Purohita, Vasishtha and other exalted brahmanas.” Then the swift Sumantra quickly went and summoned all those Vedic scholars. King Dasharatha duly received them with honor and spoke to them sweetly with proper words that were conducive to virtue: “I have been burning with the desire for a son. Without one there is no happiness for me. Now it is my intention to perform a horse sacrifice in order to get a son. It is for this purpose that I wish to execute the ritualistic ceremony of horse sacrifice. By the influence of the sage's son, I shall surely achieve my desires.”*

***[Verse 10-19]*** *The brahmanas headed by Vasishtha commended the words uttered from the mouth of the king by saying, “Very good!” Then Rishyashringa and the other brahmanas again said to the king: “Let the ingredients for the sacrifice be prepared, the sacrificial horse be set free and the sacrificial arena be set up on the northern shore of the Sarayu River.” Then they further added: “You will by all means get four sons whose prowess will be immeasurable, because your intelligence is absorbed in the virtuous purpose of obtaining a son. Hearing what the brahmanas said, the king was quite happy. With great pleasure, he spoke to his ministers the following auspicious syllables: “According to the order of my preceptors, immediately arrange for me the ingredients for the sacrifice. Let the sacrificial horse be released and let capable warriors and the officiating priest accompany it. Let the sacrificial arena be prepared on the northern bank of the Sarayu River. Let the initial propitiatory rites, such as the peace prayers, etc., be performed as is customary according to scriptural regulation. This sacrificial ceremony can be performed by all monarchs who are able to avoid committing any transgressions in its execution. The clever brahma-rakshasas are ever vigilant to find any omission. Therefore, one who performs a sacrifice without regard for the rules at once perishes. Therefore, this sacrifice of mine should be performed according to the rules. You are all quite capable of executing such activities.”*

***[Verse 20-22]*** *Thereafter all the ministers praised the king's order by saying “Let it be so.” Then they did as they were commanded. The brahmanas praised the glorious monarch who understood the principles of righteousness. Then, with his permission, they all departed as they had come. When the brahmanas had gone, the king sent away the ministers and entered his own palace.*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 13]***

***[Verse 1-5]*** *After one whole year had passed, it was spring again. For the purpose of obtaining progeny, the powerful king approached Vasishtha to initiate the horse sacrifice. Offering greetings to Vasishtha, he received him according to rule, then told that best of the brahmanas about his intention to procure offspring: “O brahmana, please perform my sacrifice as described in the scriptures. Perform all the different rituals in such a way that there is no obstruction in the completion of the sacrifice. You are very affectionate to me; you are my friend, guru and highly exalted. You are able to bear the burden of setting up the sacrifice. Vasishtha replied to the king, “So be it. I* *will see that all of them are materialized accordingly.”*

***[Verse 6-17]*** *Then Vasishtha addressed senior practitioners of sacrificial rites and their assistants, skilled architects, senior brahmanas fixed in the practice of the topmost religious duties, stone masons, carpenters, excavators, astrologers, artisans, as well as dancers, actors, scholars of the holy scriptures and highly learned persons: “By the order of the king, arrange for the sacrificial ceremony. Quickly bring thousands of bricks. Build palaces fit for royalty, along with all the subsequent requisite paraphernalia. Build hundreds of good, sturdy houses supplied with all kinds of palatable food and drink for the brahmanas. You must also construct comfortable houses for the townspeople and palatial residences for the royal guests who will come from many distant places. Construct stables for horses and elephants, hospices for the common people and spacious barracks for the foreign soldiers. Supply the residences with abundant amounts of food and other desirables. In the same way, let the townspeople and common folk be supplied good quality food in accordance with scriptural rule, not whimsically. Thus let all the castes be respectfully honored. Never do anything disrespectful out of lust or anger. Similarly, special respect should be offered to those who are busily engaged in the actual activities of the sacrifice. Let all of them be properly honored with wealth and food, that everything be properly done and nothing be overlooked.”*

***[Verse 18-29]*** *Then they all approached Vasishtha and said: “What you wish will be accomplished without any omission. We shall do as you have said without overlooking anything.”*

*Then Vasishtha said to Sumantra: “Please look after the righteous kings of the world, as well as the thousands of brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and sudras who will attend this sacrifice. Summon the gentlemen from all countries here, treating them respectfully. Janaka, the ruler of Mithila, is valiant and truthful. Personally bring him here with all due honor. Knowing his prior relation with King Dasharatha, I am telling you this first. In this way, personally bring the friendly and godlike lord of Kashi, who speaks sweetly and upholds truth, they say. Then bring here the aged king of Kekaya along with his son. He is most virtuous and a lion among kings and is the father-in-law of King Dasharatha. Also bring with great honor the lord of Anga, the great archer King Romapada, who is a dear friend of King Dasharatha, along with his son. Then bring the honorable Bhanuman, the king of Kosala. Bring the valiant lord of Magadha, King Praptijna, who is expert in all scriptures, most magnanimous and the best of men. Accepting the order of the king, invite the rulers of the eastern lands and the monarchs of Sindhusauvira and Saurashtra. Bring all the kings from the South and any other king on the face of the earth who are friendly. Bring them quickly along with their followers and relations. Also, by the order of the king, bring their distinguished ambassadors.”*

***[Verse 30-41]*** *Hearing these words of Vasishtha, Sumantra quickly instructed suitable persons to summon the different kings. The very intelligent and virtuous Sumantra hastily departed to personally summon those kings whom Vasishtha had mentioned in his instructions.*

*All the workers involved in the sacrifice informed the great sage Vasishtha about the preparations' being done. Pleased to hear this, Vasishtha said to those best of the brahmanas: “Do not give anything to anyone with disrespect or deceptively, because that which is done with disrespect destroys the giver, without any doubt.”*

*Some days later, the different kings of the world arrived bearing many valuable gifts for King Dasharatha, it is said. Vasishtha was very pleased by this and said to King Dasharatha, “O tiger among men, by your order the kings have arrived. O best of kings, they have all been received by me as well as per their status. Everything connected with the sacrifice has been prepared with care by different persons. Please go to the sacrificial arena which is nearby to begin the sacrifice. O lord of kings, you should see the arena which is furnished on every side with all desirable things that were assembled there by the workers. It looks as if it were constructed by your mere wish..”*

*As recommended by both Vasishtha and Rishyashringa, on a day with an auspicious constellation[[38]](#footnote-38), the king went to the sacrificial arena. After that, the elevated brahmanas headed by Vasishtha, went to the sacrificial arena, placing Rishyashringa before them. Then they began the sacrificial rites with due regard for the scriptural rules. The glorious king along with his wives underwent the initiation ceremony in order to be fit for participating in the sacrifice*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 14]***

***[Verse 1-7]*** *When the sacrificial horse had returned after one year, the king began the sacrifice on the northern shore of the Sarayu River. King Dasharatha undertook the great horse sacrifice placing Rishyashringa in front of the prominent brahmanas. Having thoroughly studied the Vedas, the brahmanas executed the rituals of the sacrifice according to scriptural injunction. The procedure and exact time sequence of the rituals were all carried out exactly per scripture. The brahmanas performed the pravargya[[39]](#footnote-39) rite according to scripture, then the upasad[[40]](#footnote-40) ceremony. In this way, all the activities were performed exactly as they should have been. After the brahmanas worshiped the appropriate demigods, they were very pleased and pressed the morning's soma juice [[41]](#footnote-41). They offered to Lord Indra his share of the sinless, freshly squeezed royal soma juice. At noon they again pressed soma juice according to regulation. At dusk the expert brahmanas, after consulting scripture, executed the king's third pressing of soma juice.*

***[Verse 8- 11]*** *The very intelligent brahmanas headed by Rishyashringa invoked the presence of Indra and other gods by the recitation of incantations whose syllables they had previously learned. With sweet songs of praise and pleasant incantations, the hota[[42]](#footnote-42) priests invoked the appropriate demigods who reside in the heavenly realm and offered them their due share of the oblations of clarified butter. There was not one wrongly performed oblation in that sacrifice, nor was there any omission, for every action was performed with the proper chant and with great care. For as many days as the sacrifice lasted no one appeared tired or hungry. Among the brahmanas who participated not a one was unlearned or had less than one hundred followers.*

***[Verse 12- 19]*** *Every day the brahmanas and kshatriyas were fed. Every day the ascetics and monks were fed. Food was served throughout the day. Similarly, the elderly, infirm, women and children were fed. The food was so tasty that those who ate it could never be satisfied. Being encouraged with the instructions, “let food be given, let clothes of different varieties be given,” people did as instructed. Every day, could be seen cooked food grains piled up in the traditional way in mounds that resembled mountains. In King Dasharatha's sacrifice all the men and women who had come from different countries were all fully satisfied with the food and drink. The good brahmanas praised the food, saying, “This delicious food has been properly prepared.” They all said to King Dasharatha, “We are so satisfied. All good fortune be upon you!” Well-dressed men served the brahmanas, then others, who were wearing beautiful jeweled earrings, served them. At the conclusion of each ceremony, the learned brahmanas who were skilled in rhetoric, urged by the desire to defeat the others, engaged in debate with each other during free time.*

***[Verse 20- 21]*** *Day after day, the brahmanas who were all expert in Vedic rituals, executed all the ceremonies according to scriptural injunction. Among the brahmana participants in the king's sacrifice, there was no one who had not studied the six branches of Vedic learning (pronunciation, prosody, grammar, etymology, astronomy and ritual), who was not vastly learned or who was not skilled in speaking.*

***[Verse 22- 27]*** *When the time arrived for erecting the sacrificial posts, they erected six posts of bilva wood and six of khadira wood. Six posts of palasha wood were erected next to the bilva. One post is also supposed to be of shleshmata wood and two more of cedar. The two cedar posts are supposed to be placed at a distance of two arms stretched out. All the posts were prepared under the supervision of brahmanas who were skilled in sacrificial performances and knowledgeable of the scriptures. They were decorated with gold for the auspiciousness of the sacrifice. The twenty-one posts were each twenty one cubits high. Each of them had also been decorated with cloth. The strong posts, well-fashioned by the craftsmen, were fixed in place according to rule. They were all octagonal in shape and had planed surfaces. They were covered with pieces of cloth and worshiped with flowers and sandalwood paste, they shone brightly like the stellar constellation known as the “Great Bear or sapta rishi.”*

***[Verse 28-34]*** *The bricks had been made to size according to scriptural regulation and were assembled into an altar for the sacrificial fire by those who were skilled in ceremonial structures. The sacred fire had been established by expert brahmanas. The sacrificial altar was shaped like an eagle with wings out-stretched. Its wings were golden-colored. Being thrice the size of ordinary altars, it had eighteen fire pits, instead of the usual six. As indicated in scripture, animals, serpents and birds were tied to the posts corresponding to particular demigods. The horse, aquatics and other creatures were all brought there to be sacrificed and were then bound by the sages in accordance with scripture. Three hundred animals were bound to the sacrificial posts, including the super-excellent horse belonging to King Dasharatha, it is said. Queen Kausalya then consecrated the horse by sprinkling it and its vicinity, then she touched it with great joy with three swords. Out of the desire to acquire virtue for bearing a son, Queen Kausalya, with a calm mind, passed one night beside the horse.*

***[Verse 35-37]*** *After that, the hota, adhvaryu[[43]](#footnote-43) and udgata[[44]](#footnote-44) priests took Kausalya and the other two wives of the king and made them touch the horse. Then the priest took the fleshy tuber of the ashvagandha plant (which smells like a horse) and boiled it according to scriptural directions.20 The king then smelled, at the proper time, the odor of the steam rising from that tuber, thus driving away his sins.*

***[Verse 38-42]*** *The sixteen priests offered into the fire everything that was intended for that purpose as parts of the horse sacrifice. In other sacrifices the offerings are to be placed on boughs of the plaksha tree, but in the horse sacrifice they are placed on stalks of sugar cane. According to the Kalpa-sutra and the Brahmana section of the Vedas, a horse sacrifice has three days dedicated to the pressing of soma juice. On the first day the pressing ceremony is called catushtoma, on the second day it is called ukthya and on the third it is called atiratra. Many other sacrifices were also performed according to scriptural recommendation. Eight sacrifices were performed on that occasion: jyotishtoma, ayushtoma, two atiratras, abhijit, vishvajit and two aptoryamas.*

*[Source: Folio – Untold Stories from the Ramayana] - Aswamedha Yajna - There are two kinds of offering oblations to the yajna. One is that Agni will take the oblations and offer it to the different destinations. Another is that the devas will personally come in the sacrificial arena. They will stand in the sky holding their hands open, and when you offer in their name in the fire then the harvest will get up from the fire and go into their hands. And they will eat it right there in front of everyone. These types of sacrifices are considered first-class, because the devas have come in person. So Dasaratha should perform asvamedha, and all the devas will come. And then Dasaratha will tell them, “You have your kingdom only because of my fighting. So why don’t you continue my dynasty and give me blessings that I can get some son?” That was the plan. There was a big arrangement for asvamedha-yajna, and wherever Dasaratha’s horse went, no-one objected. Asvamedha-yajna means that you have to select a horse with certain lakshanas or qualities. The ears have to be a certain way, the nose a certain way. There has to be a black part behind the tail. The hooves have to be a certain shape, 35 degrees bent. There is a whole description in karma-khanda. So you have to find out that horse, and after finding it you have to tie a golden leaf on his head. There it will be written, “This horse belongs to King Dasaratha. He will perform asvamedha-yajna, so everyone should donate liberally. And whoever stops this horse will have to meet the army of King Dasaratha.” So this horse will go around the whole world, and if any king dares to stop the horse there will be one army which is following about 100 metres behind the horse. They will have to meet that army. This army would consist of the best fighters in the army, all the generals, and if one can defeat that then more army would be sent. In this way the challenger would have to fight and prove that he is the emperor.*

## **Dasaratha’s benevolence**

*The ashwamedha yajna was thus successfully completed under Rishyasringa’s able guidance and Vasistha’s alert management. After the yajna, the joyous Dasaratha showered all his wealth on the priests as charity. In his ecstasy, he exhausted all his wealth. Dasaratha gave away everything he had because he was completely filled with joy[[45]](#footnote-45). When the priests received all his wealth, they addressed him as Raghunandana. Why did the priests call Dasaratha so? Dasaratha’s charitable disposition reminded them of his ancestor, a famous king named Raghu, also known for his extreme benevolence. A story from King Raghu’s life highlights this wonderful quality. Once King Raghu performed the Viswajit yajna [[46]](#footnote-46), in which he gave away all his possessions. The only possessions that remained were his clothes and some earthen pots and vessels. Hearing of his magnificence, a young scholar named Kautsa went to seek his help to discharge his obligation toward his spiritual master. Kautsa needed a princely amount of 140 million gold coins. Because Kautsa was a brahmana, King Raghu received him respectfully. When Kautsa learned that Raghu had given away everything and was reduced to poverty, he did not ask for anything. Raghu, however, insisted on serving Kautsa, not wanting the dishonor of dissatisfying a needy guest. After relentless persuasion, the young scholar told him what he wanted. Immediately, Raghu started praying to Kubera (the treasurer of demigods) for the wealth he needed. He also instructed his soldiers that if Kubera did not respond to his prayer, they should attack Kubera’s kingdom. That very night, a heavy shower of gold coins filled the king’s empty coffers. The scholar wanted only 140 million coins. Neither the scholar nor the king was willing to accept anything more because neither owned this wealth. Such was the magnanimity of the donor and the recipient. Pleased with Dasaratha’s attitude, the priests returned his riches to him saying that they were not competent enough to handle such opulence. They took only as much as they required for educational purposes and for sacrifices. Dasaratha took back the wealth and property and instead gave them millions of cows, gold coins and four times as many silver coins. The brahmanas in turn passed all this wealth on to Rishyasringa and Vasistha. The two detached souls promptly divided the wealth equally among all the brahmanas [[47]](#footnote-47), [[48]](#footnote-48). At the end of the ashwamedha yajna, Dasaratha became qualified to perform the putrakamesti yajna. Rishyasringa spearheaded the putrakamesti yajna rituals.*

***[Source: Folio - Valmiki Ramayana – Sarga 14 continued]***

***[Verse 43-49]*** *King Dasharatha, expander of his dynasty, gave in donation to the hota priest the eastern region, to the adhvaryu priest he gave the western region, to the brahma priest he gave the southern region and to the udgata priest he gave the northern region. Thus did King Dasharatha pay the sacrificial fee just as Lord Brahma had done previously when he performed the great horse sacrifice. Having concluded the sacrifice in accordance with scriptural rules, the king, who was the best of men, gave the entire earth to the priests. Having given away the earth, King Dasharatha, the glorious descendant of the Ikshvaku Dynasty, felt delighted. The priests all said to the sinless king: “You alone are capable of protecting the entire earth. It is not our duty to take care of the earth, nor are we able to. O king, as we are always engaged in studying, give us some other donation. O king, give us valuable gems, gold, cows or any other suitable things. We have no need of the earth.”*

***[Verse 50-56]*** *Being thus instructed by the brahmanas, the king presented them with 1,000,000 cows, 100,000,000 gold coins and four times that of silver coins. Thereafter the priests gave all the wealth to the sage Rishyashringa and to the wise Vasishtha. When the wealth had been equally divided, the topmost brahmanas were pleased in mind and declared, “We are very satisfied!” Then the king, with a composed mind, also gave to those brahmanas who had attended the sacrifice as observers 10,000,000 gold coins. King Dasharatha also gave his own exquisite gold bracelet to a poor brahmana who asked for a gift. Then the king, who was very fond of the brahmanas, offered the customary prostrations to the dear brahmanas, at which their senses were overcome with joy. As the king laid prostrate on the ground, the brahmanas conferred upon him many different blessings.*

***[Verse 57-60]*** *The king was thoroughly delighted to have completed the wonderful sacrifice, which destroys all sins, leads to heaven and is very difficult to be performed by even great kings. Then King Dasharatha said to Rishyashringa, “O powerful ascetic, you should now insure the prolongation of my dynasty.” “So be it,” said the best of brahmanas to the king. “In the future, O king, you will have four sons who will continue your dynasty.” Hearing the sage's sweet words, the poised king offered respects to him. The king became happy doing this and then reminded Rishyashringa to do whatever was necessary to secure him a son.*

1. *The city was 12 yojanas long and 3 yojanas broad. 1 yojana = approx 10 miles.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Music is a balm that supplies positive emotions, which calms agitation and inspires innovation.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Today's society adopts the devamatraka system of irrigation, which is heavily dependent on the rains* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Foresight is the hallmark of a leader; it enables a leader to build effective systems. The leader's quality lies not just in building such systems but also in ensuring effective functioning of those systems. An interesting type of leadership is "servant leadership", where the leader feels that being anointed leader is a gift to serve more people. Such a leader finds every opportunity to serve as god sent. Dasaratha had created a flawless system, but when it was not as effective as anticipated, he considered it his responsibility to rectify it at any cost, even at the cost of his life.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The name Dasaratha means one whose chariot can move in ten directions or could fight in ten directions simultaneously.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Promises should be made in accordance with one's capacity to keep them and not with overconfidence. Not knowing what Jatayu would ask, Dasaratha told him to ask for anything. Only God can grant all boons. A human with unlimited flaws can no doubt imitate God by making such a statement, but cannot substantiate it without experiencing great pain and personal loss. This results in a change of mood from gratitude to annoyance for the one who promises.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *At a later point in the Ramayana, however, this promise would hold a different meaning for both the giver and the taker. What was to prove very costly for Dasaratha would become a saving grace for Jatayu.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *For a leader, four things are essential – physical strength, intellectual strength, emotional strength and spiritual strength. Physical strength is acquired by having a powerful army; intellectual strength by studying the scriptures and being guided by a wise counsel; emotional strength by being kind, generous and sensitive toward those weaker; and spiritual strength by taking some time off from worldly pursuits to pursue one's goal in life and taking refuge in higher powers.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *The donations received by Vedic scholars are not alms to beggars or charities to the destitute. The Vedic scholars do not receive them from anybody or everybody. There are set rules to accept such donations like cows, gold coins, villages, temples etc., from a befitting hand. Otherwise, the recipient is destined to go to Hell for having received greedily. Thus, if ever somebody wants to donate to such a scholar he should first notify his bona fides, which are verifiable by the recipient. Another kind of donation is referred here as*daana adhyana*, meaning that these scholars while receiving donations from a righteous source, they also have to donate something to others. It is the education in Veda, which they have to impart to their students free of any charge and that too, to the befitting students only. Thus, the words,*daana *and*pratigrahaNa*mean all these rules to accept a donation or to accord it.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *The bhadra is the elephant class for King's ride, called bhadra gaja . It is a state elephant with high honors and for occasional or ceremonial use. mandra and mR^iga are classes of breed tamed and used in wars or for the ride of other nobility. These are the essential mammals used for other lifting and carrying works*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Acting without seeing the reality is a sign of overconfidence.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Dasaratha's pain was probably more excruciating than the pain the arrow caused the boy. The pain of guilt is the toughest to deal with.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *To justify one's actions is the easiest part of life. Acting responsibly and being accountable to others who may have to pay for your actions (foreseen or unforeseen) is very difficult. Being able to respect the predicament of each individual, not judge and shoot arrows of harsh words or unkind deeds is a sign of maturity.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Fearing the worst is incomparable to the trauma that one goes through when the truth is revealed.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *One begs forgiveness for a mistake one commits. It is extremely important to think before making that mistake. Passion makes reasoning difficult. Dasaratha's passion for hunting made him overconfident; before shooting the arrow, he did not use reason. Now that the consequences of his action were waiting for him, he resorted to reasoning. If we allow our passion to prevail over reasoning, we are in for a curse instead of a blessing* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *To lament for one's mistake is important, but far more important is to learn from that mistake. To make mistakes does not imply lack of intelligence but a lack of foresight. Not repeating mistakes is a sign of intelligence.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *A person worthy of respect is a person worthy of being followed. Respect is one of life's greatest jewels. Just as diamonds are given only to people who can understand and afford their value, the jewel of respect is handed over only to those worthy of it. Respect cannot be demanded, but only commanded. To command respect, an individual's words and actions have to be in alignment with the highest truths. Only then does a person become truly respectable.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *We often wonder if it is at all possible to have a competition-free society. Here is a role model in Ayodhya. When everyone, from the king to the common person, is striving to live a life of purity and service, it is definitely possible.* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Success is sure to follow a leader if he can create tangible as well as intangible assets. Tangible assets are essentially his abundant treasury and an unconquerable army. Intangible assets include the confidence of people in the leader's power and ability. It is this intangible asset that is the soul of leadership, which leads to loyalty and unquestioned cooperation. To capitalize on tangible and intangible assets effectively, the leader has to depend heavily on a third type of asset, known as the Big M. The Big M represented those people known as Ministers, Mentors or Mantris of the king. A strong temptation of a leader is to become autocratic or to act solely based on desires, aspirations and perceptions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Indecision is a deadly disease in leadership; however, the ministers kept themselves immune from this disease by timely action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Expansion is important but not at the cost of continuity. Equally if not more important than the team that expands is the team that ensures continuity.* [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *The state should collect taxes like a honeybee collects nectar in small portions from many, many flowers to make honey and not extracting so much from one flower that it dies* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Classifying needs and wants is the first step toward stability. The second is fulfilling those needs compulsively and wants selectively.* [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *The need to be heard runs very deep in all human beings. This need becomes most pressing when one is discontent. When one feels unheard or ignored, one emotionally links this discontent to feeling neglected and not wanted. Most people do not look for solutions, they only want empathy. The prime duty of a good leader is to make every subject feel heard. This creates stability and a sense of belongingness.* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *However great an individual may be, it is impossible to achieve any kind of success alone. The power of a team cannot be discounted. Those who do not believe in a team are afflicted by the disease of insecurity. Deep insecurity about working with those stronger than themselves stems from the fear of being overshadowed. Such people prefer to surround themselves with weaker people and sycophants. When one dreams of a big goal, the team one chooses must be bigger than the dreams envisioned. Else, it will only remain a dream.* [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Could a person who possessed so much, have any lacuna? The nature of this world is defined by limitations. There is always a pin pricking in some part of our life. The dimension of the prick is insignificant compared to the entire body. However, that small prick is capable of creating immense turmoil in the mind. Physical pain is much easier to tolerate than the mental pain of not having what you yearn the most. When the mind zooms in on a problem, it magnifies a small problem into gigantic proportions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *The mind is a connoisseur in converting trivial puddles into bottomless oceans. The boat of good advice is the hope that can help cross the ocean of grief. Undermining good advice is tantamount to disaster. Dasaratha was not just concerned with good advice, but also with the accompanying blessings.* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Dasaratha wanted to solve his material problem with a spiritual solution, by taking shelter in and worshipping the Lord. However, solutions to problems are not always as easy as they seem. Seeing the unseen is an art that requires maturity and wisdom. Everyone knows the laws, but few know the lapses. Treading on a path of spirituality requires systematic guidance or else a lone mistake can undo even the best intentions. Dasaratha, therefore, capitalized on the strength of his big M to see him through such tricky moments* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *When a brahmana is negligent in the execution of his duties, especially in the performance of sacrifice, he falls down from his elevated position and takes birth as a brahma-rakshasa. These, like the ordinary rakshasas, relish eating human flesh, but are much more powerful due to their brahminical knowledge.* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Why did Sumantra not speak about this sage and the yajna before? The reason was that Sumantra was a confidant; his job was to improve upon the ideas the king proposed, not take any initiatives regarding his personal affairs. A relationship is effective when both parties involved understand their limits and expectations. Though Sumantra knew what would be good for the king, it was inappropriate for him to make suggestions to him. Every king had a confidant like Sumantra; they were like treasure troves of information. On occasion, they would dig up required information for the king, or, they would keep their lips sealed and continue observing the affairs of the kingdom actively.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Rishi Shringa is compared to the mind of a living entity and the women disguised as ascetics are considered to be desirable objects. The nature of the mind is to interpret worldly temptation as good. His father represents intelligence. In the face of intelligence, desirable objects seem foolish, but when one is alone, the same desirable objects control and direct. If one's own intelligence is not strong enough to resist temptations, one should seek the company of one with stronger intelligence.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *From another perspective, Rishi Shringa teaches us that even if one is strong-willed, constant interaction with material objects can weaken the toughest of resolves. Without understanding the real nature of his son, Vibandaka forced him to follow an austere lifestyle. One has to be true to one's nature and not be hypocritical. If one is forced to do something one does not want to, it leads to hypocrisy. It is best to practice a lifestyle conducive to one's nature, keeping the higher principles in mind.* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *From Dasaratha's action, we learn how one act of kindness reaps fruit, eventually. Dasaratha giving away his daughter to a distressed Rompada was eventually the cause of Dasaratha's joy.* [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *The story of how Rishyashringa is son-in-law of Dasarath Maharaj can be found from the source “Untold Stories from the Ramayana”* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Asva means kala or time and medha means purified. The performer of this yajna gets purified of all sins ever committed in any past life.* [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Inattention and neglect creates demons. When we carry out our duties with a carefree attitude, we give the various demons an opportunity to enter our life and harass us. Being focused is a sign of love, and love means paying attention to detail. When we do something out of love, there is no question of neglect and inattention. Vasistha loved Dasaratha, not because he gave him extensive facilities, but because he saw in him a leader striving to uphold the principles of true leadership. He did not do his duty as a matter of ritual but performed them with such intensity out of love.* [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Brahma rakshasas were brahmanas in their previous birth reborn as demons for sins they had committed in their past lives. Whenever such sacrifices took place, brahma rakshasas would start hovering over the sacrificial arena waiting for that single mistake. One of the greatest sins is fault-finding* [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *In undertaking of auspicious works, as per sastra one must watch out for date, day, and the star of the day, called*tithi, vaara, nakshatra*in accordance with astrological import. In addition to these three are two more*yoga *and*karaNa*, which when added together this becomes*panchaanga*, five-aspects of time, which are essential to verify before conducting any auspicious work.* [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ritual preliminary to the soma sacrifice consisting of the kindling of the sacred fire and oblations being offered into it. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This is a ceremony lasting several days prior to the jyotishtoma sacrifice. Offerings are made in the sacrificial fire of cow's milk, goat's milk and bread made from barley flour. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Soma is described in the Vedas as a type of creeper. Its leaves were ceremonially pressed. The resulting juice was mixed with milk and taken as a beverage. In excess it has intoxicating effects. The sacrifice for drinking soma juice required a great deal of money, learned priests and a number of days to execute properly. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The hota priest is the one who invokes the Vedic gods by the recitation of appropriate hymns from the ag Veda. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. the adhvaryu priest recites the hymns of the Yajur Veda and offers oblations into the sacrificial fire. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The Udgata priest sings the hymns of the Sama Veda. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *The result of being happy is that one wants to share it with others. A brahmana is not respected due to his birth but because he has the wealth of realized knowledge. When this wealth of knowledge is combined with humility, it becomes like a magnetic force that commands respect.* [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *A yagna that ensures victory over the world* [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Dasaratha exhibited the quality of detachment and the priests, that of self-control. Both are qualities that purify. Those who have a lot wealth are too attached to part with it. Those who do not have wealth are willing to go to any extent, even compromising on their principles, to get it. In abundance, sharing gives satisfaction, and in scarcity, being content gives satisfaction. Those with plenty that do not share become hard-hearted and those with little that are not content become envious.* [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *The brahmanas knew their capabilities and were honest about it. Many people wish to have unlimited power without realizing that with power comes responsibility.* [↑](#footnote-ref-48)