

# TALES OF WISDOM

Written by  
**Prof. V. Sujatha**



**Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,  
Tirupati.  
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# TALES OF WISDOM

By

**Prof. V. Sujatha**

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## PREFACE

In India, it has been customary on the part of the grandparents to narrate stories to the grand children from our age-old Sanskrit literary works. These works bequeathed to us enrich us with the values of human life.

The author's intention in producing the book is to pass on a user-friendly reading material to the school going learners. Adults may read it as a piece of casual reading. The highlight of the book is that every story has been picturised for motivating and creating interest in the readers.

The book contains 101 stories, anecdotes and episodes narrated in the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata and the Puranas. The selection has been random. Care has been taken to select only such of those stories that are simple and interesting.

The study of these stories will contribute to the moral, spiritual and ethical dimension of human personality leading to a holistic outlook of life. Including such stories with themes and messages hidden in them would certainly allow the modern readers to disregard the evil and cultivate virtuous qualities. It would serve as a substitute to the grandparents who are conspicuous by their absence in the nuclear families of today and fill the vacuum faced by the grandchildren.



The onus lies on the parents to bring out a book of this kind to the attention of children and youth as it would help them in attaining knowledge.

In the Service of Lord Venkateswara



**Executive Officer**

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams  
Tirupati.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to those characters in the stories viz. the saints, the truthseekers, and the heroes and heroines, a study of whose noble actions, sacrifice and their urge for seeking the truth enriched my thoughts and knowledge.

I express my gratitude to those Sanskrit scholars who have guided and helped me all through while referring to ancient texts in Sanskrit; also to those authors and publishers whose books in Sanskrit, Telugu and English came in handy for reference.

The author

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## 1. The Real Nature of Brahman

The Gods of fire, wind and thunder are Agni, Vayu and Indra respectively. Once they were seen taking pride in themselves of their victory over the demons. They felt the power to win over the demons lay in them. However, they were ignorant of the fact that all that had happened was due to the power of Brahman. Having observed the vanity in these three gods, Brahman, the God of creation resolved to restrain their pride. The story goes like this :

Once when the three were rejoicing over their victory, there appeared a strange figure. Indra requested Agni to go first and find out the identity of the figure. So Agni went. The following conversation took place between them:

The figure : Who are you?

Agni : I am Agni, the God of fire.

The figure : What are you capable of doing?

Agni : I can burn anything and every thing, if and when necessary.

The figure : Here is a blade of grass. Burn it. Let me see.

As Agni tried again and again, he failed to burn the grass. Accepting the defeat he hung his head in shame and went back to his friends.

Next, it was Vayu's turn. The same questions were raised; Vayu emphatically told that he was capable of

blowing away anything which came in his way. When the figure asked him to blow the same blade of grass, he met with the same problem. The blade of grass didn't move an inch. He too then returned to the place where Indra was and reported the matter.

Then finally Indra, the ruler of Gods went. As he began moving towards the figure, it disappeared; instead, there appeared a beautiful woman adorned with jewels. She was Goddess Uma. She made it clear to Indra that the power for their victory over the demons lay with Brahman. It was then that the three Gods realized the nature of the Lord. As they were subjected to the test put by Brahman, they were considered the foremost among the Gods.

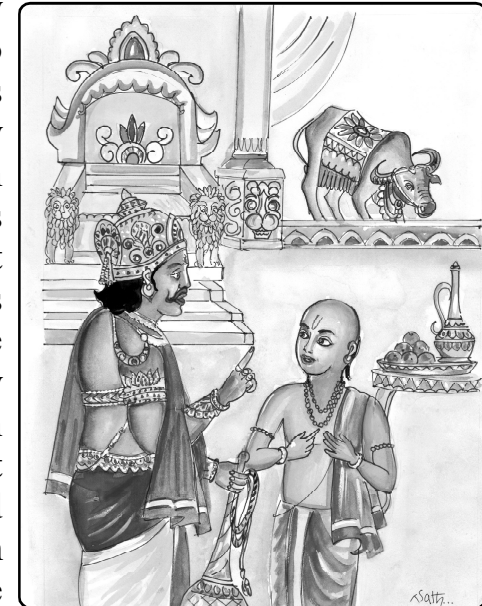
They realized that there was only one source of energy in the universe i.e. the one latent in Brahman and were thus humbled.

\* \* \*

## 2. Nachiketa - The Seeker of Truth

Once a sage named Vajisravasa performed a great sacrifice (yaga). As was customary, he began distributing lands, cows and other valuables to the honoured guests.

He had a son by name Nachiketa who keenly observed his father giving away old, weak and lean cows and horses as gifts. Nachiketa felt his father was inviting misfortune for himself by distributing such gifts. He calmly went near his father and said: "Father, whom are you offering me to?" The father didn't



answer. The son questioned him again, out the father was only too busy engaging the guests. The third time he repeated the same question. The father got angry and said, "I am giving you away to Yama, the Lord of Death." Nachiketa was in the least perturbed. He sought permission from his parents to leave immediately to the abode of Lord Yama. But the father grieved over what he had said because the promise was made during a yaga and had to be kept.

Nachiketa set out on his journey towards Yama's abode. When he entered it, to his disappointment, he learnt that Yama wasn't present there. Nachiketa was very sad, for, he had to wait there for three days. Yama returned to his abode only then and regretted that a Brahmin was being kept waiting at the entrance to his abode without food and water. He pleaded with Nachiketa to accept three boons he would offer as an atonement for his mistakes.

Accordingly, the first boon Nachiketa asked for was: "Oh Lord of Death, let my parents recognize me when I return to the earth. Grant my father peace of mind. Let them shower on me the same love and affection in the other births as in this birth." "Granted," said Yama spontaneously.

"Oh! Lord of Death! This yaga fire helps one reach the abode of heaven and enjoy a life of long lasting happiness. I want to learn about it. This is my second wish" said Nachiketa. The third boon sought was: "Teach me the truth about the body and soul after death. Does the soul exist apart from the senses and the mind?" Yama didn't wish to reveal the secret to this question. He tried to deviate from the subject matter by all means but to no avail. Nachiketa pressurized Lord Yama to give him an answer. Instead of giving him an answer, Yama, the Lord of Death said he would offer him material pleasures, beautiful women, huge

herds of cows, horses and elephants and a long life of luxury and happiness. Yet Nachiketa didn't show any interest in any of these pleasures. He knew that these are momentary and would return to him when one dies. His argument was that one cannot derive real pleasure out of them.

Yama admired Nachiketa's detachment from the worldly pleasures. So he said, "You are blessed, my dear and are fit to learn the truth." It was thus that Nachiketa acquired the knowledge about the soul from Lord Yama. Later he returned to the earth; his parents and others recognized him and blessed him.

\* \* \*

### 3. Mahidasa Aitareya

The practice of performing sacrifices and maintaining sacrificial fires and the different forms of worship are enunciated in the Puranas. The sages and rishis of yore followed these practices. The disciples showed their eagerness to learn everything from them practically. They always followed the gurus, wherever they went and observed whatever they did.

Once it so happened that a renowned brahmana began performing the sacrifice. There were many disciples who were seen moving around helping the guru and learning for themselves. This brahmana had two sons: one was born of his brahmana wife and the other of a sudra, low-caste woman named Itara. Both the sons showed the same eagerness to learn as the other disciples did. However, the son born of the sudra woman was being neglected by the father. The father wasn't interested in teaching him any of the concepts nor in training him. This infuriated the son and he sought to find a solution to the matter from his mother.

He approached his mother with anger burning in his eyes. He questioned his mother : "Why is it that father is indifferent to me? If father isn't interested in teaching me, where should I go to acquire knowledge?" The mother felt sorry for the son and tried to console him : "Dear son! don't forget the fact that you are a brahmana's son; yet you are also your mother's son who belonged to a low-caste. Yet there is a solace." She continued : "Listen. We all are children of Mahi,

the mother earth. We come from her. So, go to her for learning about the austerities and sacrifices."

The boy accordingly approached Mahi, the Goddess of Earth and took initiation under her. He learnt everything under her and returned home. He became so learned and knowledgeable that he began writing a book of rituals and sacrifices related to the Rigveda. He titled the book after his mother's name and thus evolved Aitareyopanishad. This book forms a small part of a great book Aitareyabrahmana. Aitareyabrahmana is considered to be an early book of the literature of the Upanishads.

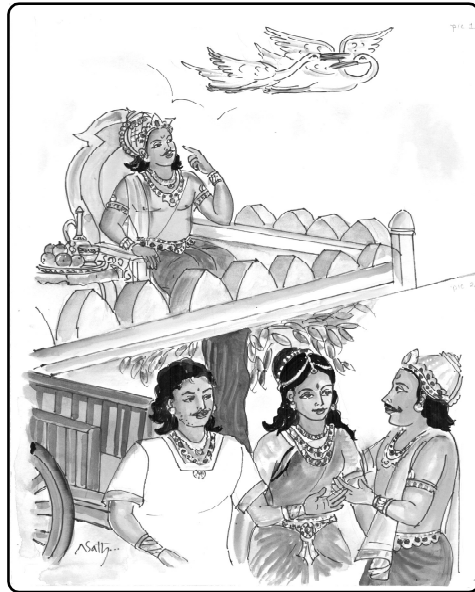
It is interesting to note that no one knows to this day, the father's name but the mother's name still resounds. The boy declared his name as Mahidasa Aitareya because he believed himself to be a child of his mother Itara and the Goddess of Earth, Mahi who was also his teacher.

\* \* \*

#### 4. Janasruti and Raikva, the Cart Driver

Once there lived a king named Janasruti, the grandson of Janasruta. He was rich, kind - hearted and was known for his qualities of giving away and providing for those in need. He built kitchens all over his kingdom as well as on the routes to other towns and cities. He had also built rest houses here and there. He believed that everyone would have the opportunity to eat his food and rest in the houses built by him.

On one summer evening, he was sitting in the terrace of his palace. He saw two swans flying over the palace. One swan said to the other : “Have you heard the name and fame of king Janasruti? People all over the kingdom praise him as a man of charity. Heaven also seems to shower its blessings on him.” The other swan replied: “Lo! Are you praising this king Janasruti? I don't think he has the knowledge that Raikva has though he is known as the man with the cart. Probably, you haven't heard about him.”



The king was perplexed. Immediately he called his servants and asked them: “Who is this Raikva whom I hear about? What is he? Where does he live?” The servants confessed that they know him to be an unassuming man who has attained the level of Brahman. But they have neither seen him, nor do they know his whereabouts.

The next day, the king sent his messengers in all directions to fetch Raikva. The servants went in all directions; returned to the king with a disappointed face. “Now, search for him in secluded places - near a river, a mountain side, under a secluded tree.” said the king. Accordingly they went; during their search the servants found Raikva in a secluded place sitting under a cart and scratching his skin.

The servants went near him and asked: “Are you Raikva?” Raikva answered: “Yes, I am”. The servants then ran back and revealed the news to the king. The king immediately began his journey to where Raikva was; he took along with him six hundred cows, a gold necklace, a chariot drawn by mules as gifts to Raikva with an intention to acquire knowledge of Brahman from him. He addressed Raikva thus: “Revered Sir, accept me as your disciple. Impart me that knowledge about the deity you worship. Also accept these as gifts.” However Raikva expressed the feeling that he wasn't interested in any of those gifts.

The king misunderstood his feelings assuming that the gifts brought were less in quantity; so, he returned to his palace; the next morning, he again met



Raikva and offered him more gifts; this time he also took with him his daughter to offer her in marriage to the brahmin Raikva.

The king went to the extent of giving his daughter (a Kshatriya) in marriage to a brahmin, probably because his main motive was to acquire philosophic wisdom. Understanding the king's motive Raikva accepted the offer of marriage; he also found in the king the sincerity to gain knowledge. So in return, he imparted knowledge to king Janasruti.

\* \* \*

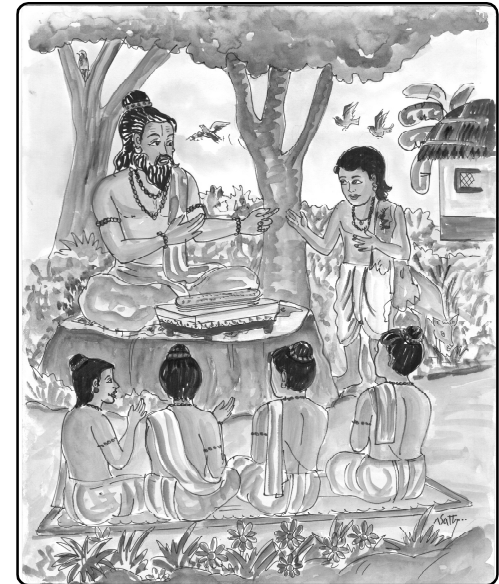
## 5. Satyakama Jabala

Gautama was renowned as a learned sage who lived in the Vedic age. He was the son of Haridruma. He had a number of disciples studying Vedas and other sacred lore under him in his asrama.

In ancient days, it was customary on the part of a student to reveal his identity to study under a guru. One day, Satyakama, a young boy expressed his desire to his mother to be Gautama's disciple. He knew he would be asked the line from which he was born. But neither he nor his mother Jabala was aware of his father's identity.

When he questioned his mother about his lineage, she was terrified. After a careful thought, she resolved to speak the truth. She

said, "Dear son, I am Jabala. You are Satyakama. That's all I can say. I do not know who your father is, because as a servant maid I used to move from house to house. I was never married. All I can say is you are Satyakama Jabala".



Satyakama with the truth now provided to him, resolved to go in search of sage Gautama. When he reached the asrama, it was twilight hour. The disciples had finished their learning. The guru noticed this boy standing at a distance. He called the boy to his side and said, “Oh, young boy! What is it that has brought you here? The boy said, “Sir, I wish to be your disciple.” As expected the guru questioned him, “What is your lineage?”

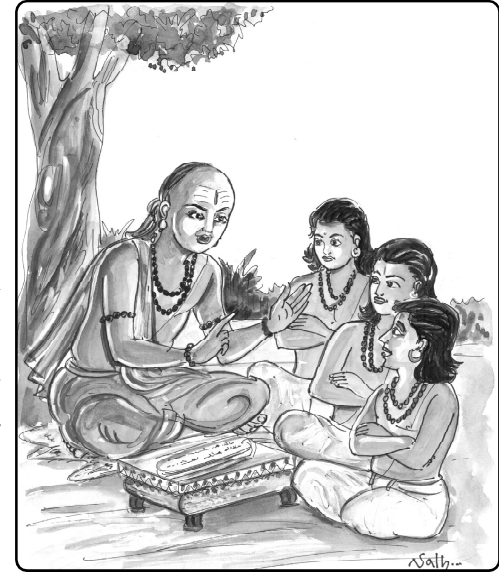
Satyakama repeated the same words uttered by his mother. The sage instantly recognized him to be a brahmana as one who wouldn't swerve away from speaking the truth; then he instructed him to fetch the firewood, indicating the acceptance of Satyakama as his student.

The first major task given to Jabala was to drive away four hundred weak and lean cows and to return only when the herd had become a thousand. After a few days Jabala returned to the guru with a thousand cows. The guru admired Jabala's qualities and the respect he paid towards his orders.

\* \* \*

## 6. Upakosala and His Teacher

Satyakama Jabala became a renowned guru imparting knowledge. He lived in the guru's house along with other disciples for twelve long years; during this period, he had sincerely learnt the scriptures, tended the fires, and devotedly served the guru and his wife. One day his guru began sending away many of his disciples to their homes after the twelve year period of study was completed by them. But Upakosala was held back; the guru didn't speak anything about sending him home. Upakosala felt disappointed; yet he never spoke a word to his guru.



One day the guru's wife said to her husband, “You know well that this Upakosala has been tending the fires all these years. He has also studied the scriptures. Yet, why do you delay in sending him home?” Satyakama went out of the house without answering her.

From that day, Upakosala stopped eating. When the guru's wife questioned him, he professed that he

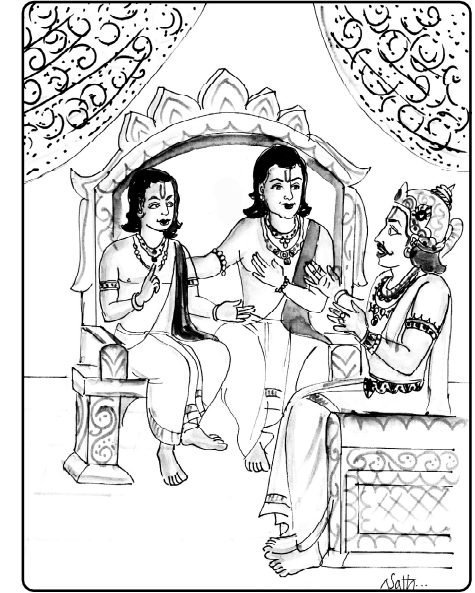
desired to purify himself. Agni, the God of fire saw all this; He was satisfied with Upakosala's learning and studies. So one day he appeared before him and began teaching him and widened his knowledge. He said, "Oh! Upakosala. Prana is brahman; joy is brahman; ether is brahman." When the guru returned home, he observed the shining face of his disciple. He said, "You seem to have realized the brahman. Who instructed you?" Upakosala answered that Agni, the God of fire had taught him. Satyakama told Upakosala that all blessings come together to those who have attained the level of brahman and that Upakosala needn't fear anything.

[Note: Satyakama, the guru himself learnt from the living creatures on the Earth : the cows, the birds, etc. His disciple had the learning from Agni, the God of fire. The Upanisads speak of such experiences as being common to disciples studying under the gurus in asramas.]

\* \* \*

## 7. Svetaketu Aruneya and King Pravahana Jabali

Sage Gautama possessed knowledge of the Brahman or ultimate reality. He had a son named Svetaketu Aruneya. One day this son went to the court of King Pravahana Jabali. The King was sitting upon the throne with all the ministers around. Svetaketu entered the assembly. The King welcomed him and asked him if he had been instructed and educated well by his father. Svetaketu proudly said, "Yes, Sir." Then the king asked him five questions. Svetaketu was unable to answer even one. Feeling humiliated, he returned home. He narrated to his father all that had happened in the assembly.



Gautama was shocked to hear about this and reflected on the answers to these questions. However well he thought, no answers came to his mind. He said to his son, "I cannot answer these questions myself, my son. Come, let us go to the king". In the court of the palace, Gautama stood in front of the king along

with his son. The king was surprised, yet happy. As per the custom of showing hospitality to a brahmana, he received him with great respect, seated him on a special chair and questioned him whether he would like to have wealth or lands as gifts. But Gautama denied any such gift and said to the king humbly: “Sir, I need neither wealth nor land; Let them be yours; I seek answers to the five questions put by you to my son.” King Pravahana said, “Oh! Great teacher! This knowledge is not known to any brahmana till now. Stay here for some time. I will impart the knowledge to you”.

Thus Gauthama and Svetaketu learnt the secret knowledge from the king, a kshatriya.

[Note: In ancient days, only brahmanas remained superior to the kshatriyas in the knowledge of brahman they possessed. However, there were incidents (such as in the story above) where the brahmanas showed eagerness to learn from the kshatriyas about the knowledge of brahman.]

\* \* \*

## **8. Uddalaka Aruni and King Asvapati**

Read another story about six wise brahmanas who were ignorant of the knowledge of brahman.

One day six brahmanas who were known to be great learners and presenters of knowledge discussed among themselves: “What is soul or atman? What is ultimate reality or brahman?”

When they found no answers, they decided to approach Uddalaka, son of Aruni, a famous teacher. They went to him as planned. To the surprise of the brahmanas, he said, “I cannot give the answers to your questions. Let us go and meet Asvapati, the king of Kekayas. He knows all about it.”

All of them went to meet the king. As it was customary, the king honoured the brahmanas who visited him; offered them valuable gifts, wealth, lands, etc. whichever they wished to take. Alas! None was interested in receiving any of these; they told the king they had come to receive the knowledge of brahman from him. Though the king was shocked, he readily accepted to teach them.

The next day the brahmanas went to the king with offerings; they considered him to be their Guru. Giving the guru his fees, was a practice followed in ancient days.

These brahmanas stayed for a long time with the guru and learnt the secret knowledge. Thus had a king, a kshatriya propagated the secret knowledge of brahman to the brahmanas.

\* \* \*

## 9. King Dilipa and Nandini, the Cow-Part I

King Dilipa was born in the line of kings of the solar dynasty. He reigned the kingdom of Kosala. His wife was Sudakshina, the daughter of the Lord of Magadha.

Once the king thought to himself: "I have worshipped the Gods with devotion. I have satisfied brahmanas and other great sages, have fed them with good food. I am righteous. Then, why is it that I remain childless even now?" This thought created an urge in him to meet his preceptor, Vasishta. Thus, on an auspicious day, he left the kingdom after handing it over to his ministers and moved towards his preceptor's hermitage. The queen also accompanied him.

The hermitage presented a scene of peace. Animals and birds moved hither and thither; no hostility existed between one and the other. The guru and the disciples engaged in the recitation of the Vedas and chanting of the mantras created an atmosphere of tranquility.

When the king and his queen reached the hermitage, sage Vasishta and his wife Arundhati warmly welcomed the guests. They were offered water, fruits and food with great respect. The sage who read the mind of the king asked him: "Oh king! What is it that is troubling your mind? Let me know the purpose of your visit."

The king replied: "Sir, the kings born in the Ikshvaku family entrusted their kingdom to their sons and went for penance. I, who, am childless, what do I do? Suggest any measure or remedy by which I may be blessed with a child."

Vasishta said: "Sir, listen. This is because you have incurred a curse from a holy cow. When you were returning home after having visited Lord Indra, one day it happened that you and your wife stood near a desire-yielding cow. You did not respect the cow. So, the cow cursed you to be childless. Here is Nandini, her offspring in my hermitage, with her calf. Pay obeisance to her. You are sure to be blessed with a son." The sage added: "One more word of caution. Look after the cow in such a way that no danger comes to her from a lion."

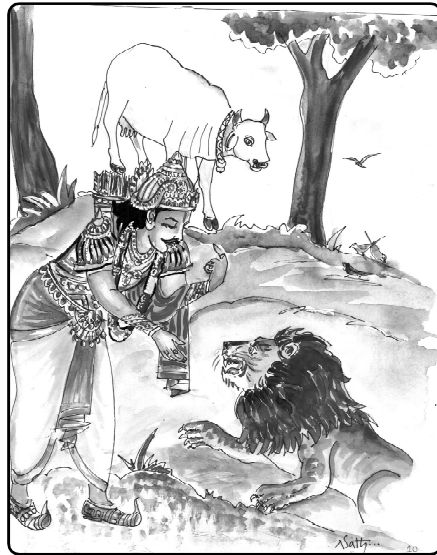
The king and the queen were happy and resolved to follow the instructions given by the sage.

\* \* \*

## 10. King Dilipa and Nandini, the Cow-Part II

The king and the queen stayed in the hermitage. Every morning, the queen worshipped the cow and fed her with grass, grains, etc. Then the king used to take her to the hill side for grazing; he followed the cow wherever she went; he ate after she had eaten grass; when he returned to the hermitage in the evening, again the queen worshipped and looked after the sacred cow.

One day while the cow was grazing, the king observed a lion approaching the cow. The king tried to lift his hand and take the arrow out of the quiver; but his hands became stiff as if paralyzed. Besides this the king heard a human voice in the lion.



It said, “O king! I have received a boon from Goddess Parvati to kill any animal here and have my fill. You are helpless.”

The king answered : “Oh king of beasts! I salute Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati. I belong to the Ikshvaku race. I am cursed and childless. On instructions from my preceptor, I am taking care of

this holy cow. So spare the cow; kill and devour me. I am ready to offer myself.”

Thus saying, the king bent his head as though offering his body to the lion. To his surprise, the lion did not attack him but a garland of flowers fell over his neck. When he raised his head, there stood the holy cow, Nandini, who spoke: “Oh king! It was a test put for you. You have passed it ! You were ready to sacrifice yourself in order to save me. I am pleased with you. Drink my milk; your desire to get a son will be fulfilled.”

When the king returned to the hermitage, Vasishta understood that the king had done his duty and had been blessed by the cow.

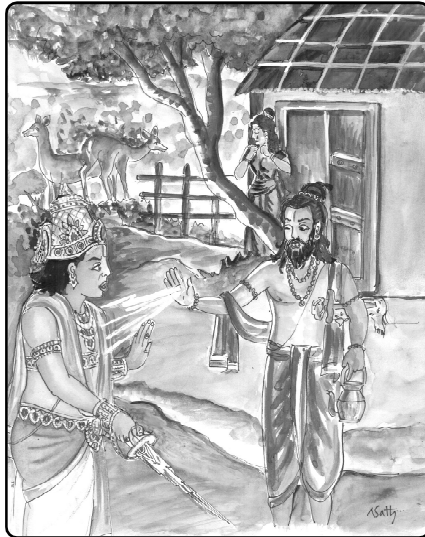
After sometime, Raghu was born to King Dilipa and Sudakshina. The ancestral line of Raghu is well-known on the earth as the solar dynasty. Lord Rama was a descendant of the race of kings of the solar dynasty.

\* \* \*

## 11. Sage Gautama and Lord Indra

Sage Gautama lived in a beautiful hermitage in a forest. He was renowned for his austerity and penances as also the curses he pronounced on those who committed sins. His wife was Ahalya, considered the prettiest woman; she was devoted to her husband.

The Lord of the Lords Indra had always been attracted towards this beautiful lady. So he waited for an opportunity to possess her. Once Gautama had gone out. At such a time, Lord Indra disguised himself as Gautama and entered the sage's cottage. He committed the sin of uniting with Ahalya.



Even before he could go out, sage Gautama arrived. Looking at Indra hurriedly leaving the cottage in his guise and observing some sense of fear in him, he could gauge what had happened. Immediately, he cursed Indra as well as Ahalya. The curse on Indra was: "O cruel fellow, this adultery will spread in the human world; half the sin will be yours, while the other half will fall on the one who has partaken in the action. "The curse on Ahalya was: "O wicked lady, you will remain here as a stone for several years without tasting

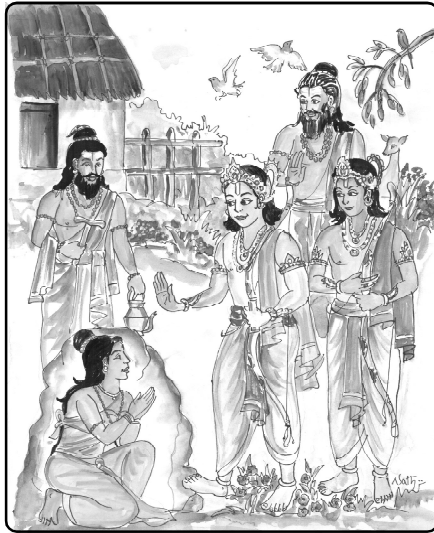
any food, by living only on air, chanting Lord Rama's name; neither you nor your beauty can be seen by anyone. No living creatures will live here from today. When Lord Rama visits this hermitage, you will be redeemed of your sin. Offer him hospitality and gain purity." He continued: "You will be rid of your sins when Lord Rama touches the stone."

\* \* \*

## 12. Redemption of Ahalya

One day, after obtaining permission from king Dasaratha, rishi Visvamitra led Lord Rama and Lakshmana towards Siddhasrama, the place where he was to hold the sacrifice (yaga). The two brothers were to protect the sacrifice from two demons Marica and Subahu. After the sacrifice was over, they spent three nights there; later they reached the town of Mithila.

On their way, they proceeded towards sage Gautama's asrama. Rama questioned rishi Visvamitra about the holy asrama: "Whose hermitage is this? Though there is greenery everywhere, with trees bearing flowers and fruits, the place seems to be bereft of any living creatures."



It was then that Visvamitra narrated the episode of the curse on Ahalya. He told Rama that ever since the curse was pronounced on her, she became invisible to everyone and remained there as a stone. He said, "Rama, the time has now come for Ahalya to be liberated from the sin". So, when Rama touched the stone, Ahalya, the creation of Lord Brahma emerged

out of it. She recognized the four armed man, with conch and discus, mace and lotus flower, to be Lord Narayana; she fell at His feet; tears of joy flowed from her eyes. Singing praises of the Lord and reciting hymns, she followed Rama.

Later on, with the blessings from the Lord, she was united with her husband, sage Gautama; they lived happily ever after.

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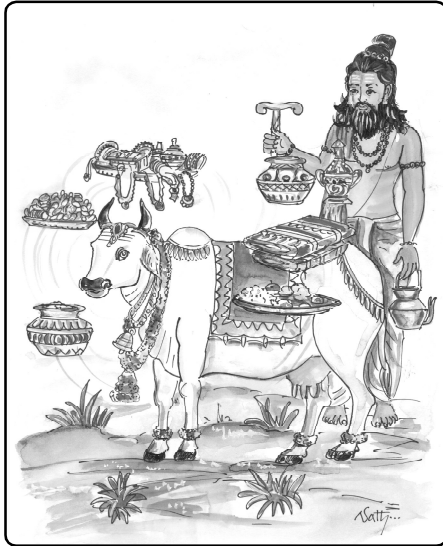


### 13. Vasishta and Visvamitra

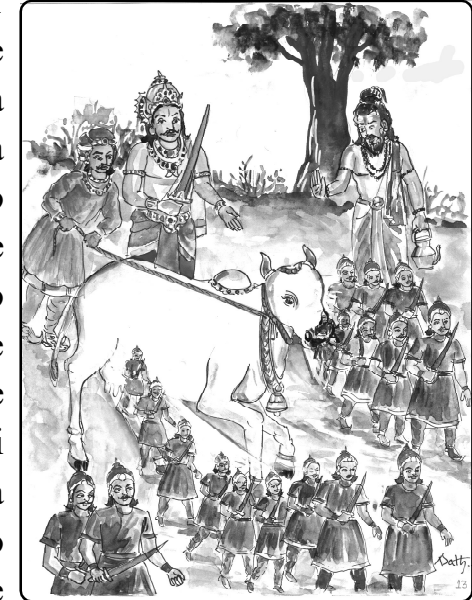
Visvamitra was the grandson of a king named Kausika. He earned name as a righteous and virtuous king. He was ruling the kingdom of Kanyakubja peacefully.

Once this king went on hunting in the forest with his entourage. Tired of hunting and feeling fatigued, he looked for a place to rest; in a short distance from there, he saw the hermitage of Sage Vasishta. The sage, who saw the king approaching his hermitage, rose and offered him water and a special seat. Then he began offering him and his friends milk, fruits, etc. The supply came to him from the holy cow, Kamadhenu which he reared; it yielded him whatever he wished for: wild fruits, milk, drinks, robes, etc.

The mind of the king was poisoned by now as he watched all this in amazement; he desired to possess the cow. So, he said to the rishi: "Oh holy brahman! Give me this cow in exchange for ten thousand cows



or take my kingdom." The shocked rishi spoke thus: "O senseless king! I keep this cow for purposes of sacrifices and to feed celestials and other holy guests who come to my hermitage." The argument between the two continued for sometime; later the king said, "I am a kshatriya and you, a mere brahmana. So the cow will be more useful to me than to you. I will take the cow by force if you are not willing." The rishi said: "Being a kshatriya, you can do what you wish." The next moment, Visvamitra seized the cow Kamadhenu; he dragged her hither and thither when she resisted to go with him. She cried and sought help from Vasishta to rescue her.



Vasishta said : The kshatriyas are known for their physical strength; the brahmanas, for their forgiveness. So, I cannot help you. If you like, you can go.

Nandini said : Sir, if you say you would not abandon me, no one can take me by force.

The rishi replied piteously that he doesn't desire to abandon her. The cow took no time to attack Visvamitra and his men, now that the confirmation had come from its master. Troops of soldiers barged out from her body, tail, eyes, ears, udder and mouth. Visvamitra's men fled in all directions; but no one was killed. Visvamitra now realized the truth. He addressed the rishi thus, "Respected sir, what are my powers before your spiritual powers achieved through penance? I, who was proud and arrogant, seek your forgiveness."

Visvamitra, from then on, abandoned the kingdom and took to asceticism; thus did he become a Brahmarshi.

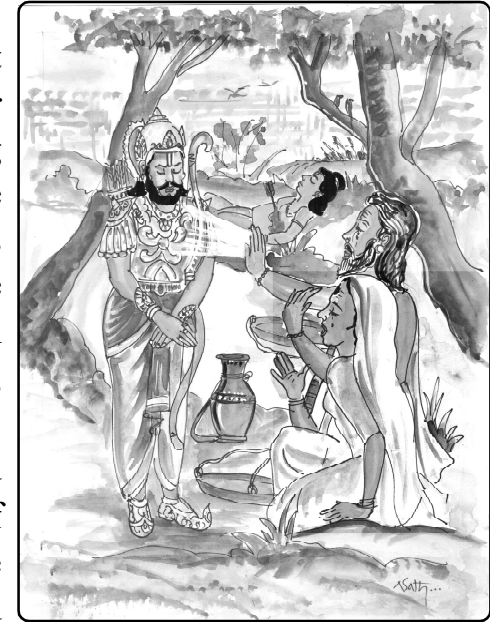
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## 14. The Curse on King Dasaratha

King Dasaratha who belonged to the race of the Sun god, reigned the kingdom of Kosala. Ayodhya was its capital city.

Here is an episode which happened in the early life of Dasaratha.

Once he went to the forests for hunting. Hunting was one of the pastimes of the kings in yester years. As he was moving about in the forest, suddenly, he heard a sound. Assuming that sound to be the trumpet of a wild elephant, he raised his bow and shot an arrow in that



direction. Around the same time, there was near the pond a boy by name Sravana, who was collecting water in a pot. He was at that time in the service of his aged parents. Unfortunately, the arrow pierced the heart of this young boy. The king heard a shrill cry of the human being. Rushing towards that direction, he saw Sravana lying in a pool of blood and struggling for breath.

He struck the boy unknowingly. He raised the boy onto his lap. The boy spoke the last words requesting the king to take water to his blind parents who were dying of thirst. Unable to save the boy's life the king decided to make amends by serving the parents. He took water in the pot to the aged couple. He confessed his guilt of having killed their son. He took them near where their son lay dead. The parents caressed the boy's body and lamented. The father said, "O king! You have killed my only son. Who will look after us now? You are responsible for our sorrow".

The king remained silent unable to react. The father continued his lamentations and cursed the king thus :

"I am old, pining in sorrow for the loss of my only son, O king! You will also face the same situation in your old age. As you have killed my son unintentionally, the curse is not severe. Otherwise the entire Raghu race would have perished."

Speaking thus, the man and his wife met with their death, unable to overcome the shock they had received.

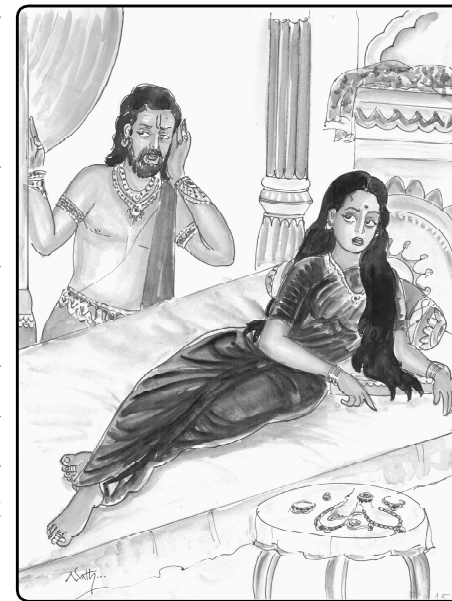
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## 15. Dasaratha's boon to Kaikeyi

You have read in the previous story, that Dasaratha had received a curse from the aged father of Sravana.

Read the story narrated below on how the curse took its effect on Dasaratha's life.

King Dasaratha had four sons viz, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna born to his three wives Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumithra. Among the four sons, Dasaratha was very fond of Lord Rama. Never was a day spent without seeing Sri Rama. Once sage Visvamitra had



requested the king to send Rama and Lakshmana along with him to the forest to guard against demons who disturbed his yaga. The king was about to refuse permission, when Vasishta insisted that the brothers be sent. Such was the king's love towards Sri Rama. He could never imagine a separation between him and Rama.

The four brothers grew up. They became skilled in the art of warfare and learnt archery. They were married. King Dasaratha was growing old. So one day he announced the name of Lord Rama to be his heir-apparent and instructions were given for the coronation ceremony to be held. The queens, the ministers, and all the subjects in the Kingdom rejoiced; they began the preparations for the prestigious event.

King Dasaratha after supervising the preparations went into his inner apartments. But before he entered his chamber, he observed Kaikeyi in a different mood, with her hair dishevelled all over her shoulders. The king repeatedly questioned her about the cause for it. Then Kaikeyi demanded that the king should offer her the two boons which he had promised her on an earlier occasion.

In the earlier part of the king's life, Kaikeyi had defended and saved the life of the king when he encountered danger and death. It was then the king had promised her two boons. She chose this moment as opportune to claim the two boons, at a time when the whole kingdom was in excitement and happiness.

One of the two boons she sought was that Lord Rama should go to the forests and live in exile for 14 years. The other was that her son Bharata was to be crowned the king. When the king heard it, his sorrow knew no bounds. However, Lord Rama readily

accepted to abide by his father's promises and followed it immediately. The next morning, He, along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana set out to the forests.

Many days passed. The king pined in sorrow over the separation from his sons. Lord Rama had lost the crown; moreover, he had also to live in the forests for 14 years devoid of all luxury. These thoughts haunted the king by day and night. Day after day, he shrunk in health and finally died.

Thus it was then that king Dasaratha faced the curse of Sravana's father.

\* \* \*

## 16. Sri Rama, the Lord of Dharma

You read in the earlier story about Lord Rama who had to forgo the throne and live the life of an ascetic in the forests. This was in consequence to king Dasaratha granting the boons to one of his queens Kaikeyi. Here is an anecdote in the life of Sri Rama before he set out on his journey to the forests.

Lord Rama accepted to take along with him his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana as they expressed their inability to stay in the Kingdom of Ayodhya in the absence of Lord Rama. They felt that they could not even imagine such a separation. Lord Rama asked his beloved wife to prepare for the journey. In the meantime, he resolved to give away gifts in charity to the rishis, brahmanas and his other dependents before departing to the forests. Lakshmana was assigned the duty to go and invite sage Suyajna, son of Vasishta to the palace first as he was considered the foremost among brahmanas.

As was the practice in the ages past, Lord Rama rose from his seat and honoured the guest when each guest arrived. He supplied Suyajna with gold ornaments and precious gems for the arms, ears, etc. He reported to the sage how Sita too greatly wished to donate costly ornaments to the wife of the sage, who was her friend. The sage was also offered a couch decorated with jewels as also a cover to the bed. Lord Rama's generosity knew no bounds when he gave away to him, the great elephant Satrunjaya, which was earlier

presented to him by his maternal uncle. Having accepted such gifts, the sage on his part, invoked his blessings on the devoted couple and left. The next callers were Agastya and Kausika (son of Visvamitra), the celebrated brahmanas. These two sages were gratified with gold, silver and thousands of cows. Lord Rama said to his brother: "Lakshmana! Pay great attention to that brahman who is a teacher, who recites Vedas, who waits upon Kausalya; give him palanquins, servants and garments. Here is Citratha, our charioteer and minister, who has served us for long. Give him costly ornaments, gold and 10,000 cows. In addition to these, there are these disciples studying under the preceptors leading a life of fasting. Let them be given thousands of bullocks to be used for cultivation, cows for yielding milk, ghee, etc., so that they may eat delicious food once their studies come to an end. Lo! there are those boys with only a loin cloth around their waist. Give them in thousands. We must honour all these people in such a way that mother Kausalya will rejoice."

At one stage, Lord Rama saw the distressed dependents and servants standing in front of him in tears. He instructed the other servants to give them all whatever they needed. Then he bade them to look after his house and Lakshmana's house well until he returned from the forests.

\* \* \*

## 17. Trijata, the Poor Brahmin

During the period when Sri Rama was involved in charitable activities, it was believed that there lived an old brahmana by name Trijata in the forest near the kingdom of Ayodhya. He had a wife and a large family of children to feed. He was always seen with an axe, a spade and a shovel which he carried to dig the soil. His means of feeding the family members having failed, his wife said to him one day, "Go to Lord Rama, the knower of Dharma. Discard these, the axe and the spade. We may be released from this poverty, I am sure."

Under the gravity of the situation, the brahmana felt seeking blessings from Lord Rama was the answer. With a torn cloth around his waist, he entered the gates of the palace. He passed through the crowd, but none stopped him. Though he was in tatters, his face shone like the face of great sages like Bhrgu and Angirasa. Approaching Lord Rama, he said, "O royal prince! I am a poor brahmana. I have nothing to feed my family with. Grant your favours." Here Sri Rama played a joke on the old man. He said, "I have been distributing thousands of cows recently. You can receive as many of them as you want. Now throw your staff with all your might and all the cows and the area covered under it will be yours."

The poor brahmana truly followed his orders. Tying his garment tightly around his waist, he whirled the stick round and threw it in full breath. The staff

fell beyond Sarayu river in front of an oxen. Sri Rama embraced this Trijata and ordered the cowherds falling within this area to take all the cows to the hermitage of this brahmana.

Then Rama addressed Trijata: "Do not be offended by the jest I indulged in. It was only to know about your power of penance, which is unparalleled. Do ask without any restrain if you need anything more." Greatly rejoiced, Trijata left the kingdom after bestowing his benign blessings on Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshmana that they attain fame, strength, delight and happiness.

Thus did Lord Rama grant gifts to the sages, brahmanas, ministers, dependents, servants and the needy according to their respective needs and merits. It is said that there was no brahmana, beggar, or relative or servant who has not received nor was dissatisfied with the donations given by Sri Rama.

\* \* \*

## 18. Sabari

Sabari was born as a woman of low status. She was known to be a great devotee of Lord Sri Rama. She lived in a hermitage on the banks of river Pampa.

In her youth, she had given up all material life and resorted to a monk's life. At the beginning, she sought knowledge from sage Matangi. The other sages boycotted him as he had given shelter to a woman born of low status. Therefore, Sabari herself asked for forgiveness from this sage and went away to live separately. All her life, she spent in meditation and on achieving spirituality.



One day, Lord Sri Rama and his brother who were moving in the forests, came alongside Pampa river. They were on their way to meet Sugriva, the monkey king. Sabari was delighted to meet the two brothers. As is customary, she offered them water and washed their feet. Lord Sri Rama addressed her thus: "Oh, respectable lady! Have you obtained the fruits of your penance? Are you happy and contented?" She

answered "Oh Lord! I have been blessed by your presence; the fruits of my penance are now obtained."

She had an indication about their arrival, even before they reached her hermitage. She picked up fruits of varying sizes, tastes and odour and offered them to Lord Sri Rama and Lakshmana. The two great souls partook of them. At the request of Sri Rama, Sabari displayed before them a vision of the mighty forests, full of birds and beasts. With her spiritual power, she showed them the place where the great rishis and munis had attained salvation after performing rituals. Then she said, "O Lord! I wish to give up this body of mine." With permission from Lord Sri Rama, she offered herself to the God of fire.

It was thus, a woman born of low status became an ascetic and went up to heaven, the regions reached by great rishis and munis. She was blessed by Lord Sri Rama who appeared before her as an honoured guest and ate in her hermitage.

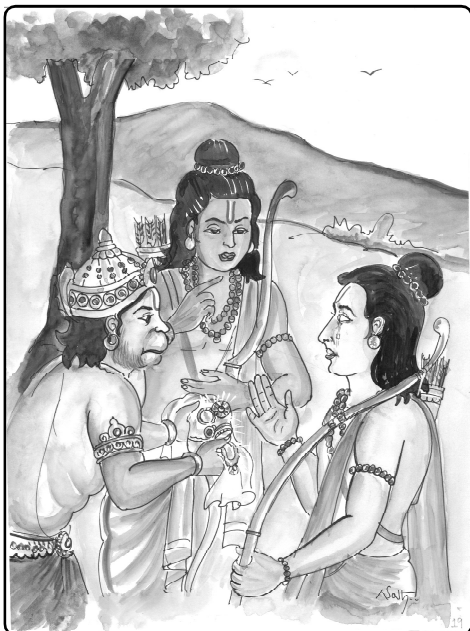
[Note: Sabari knew that Sri Rama really was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu upon the Earth.]

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## 19. Lakshmana's Respect for Sita

Lord Sri Rama was exiled to the forest for fourteen years as per his father Dasaratha's injunction. This was because king Dasaratha had to keep up his promise to Kaikeyi, one of his queens, who desired to crown his son Bharata and send Rama to exile. Lakshmana and Sita also accompanied Lord Rama to the forest.

King Ravana planned to abduct Sita. On the advice of Ravana, Marica, his uncle took the form of a deer, weaned Rama away from his hermitage as though Rama were to chase him. In the process, the deer was killed by Rama; As he lay dying, he cried, "Sita, Lakshmana", assuming the voice of Rama. Then Sita urged Lakshmana to go to Rama's rescue thinking that he was in danger. In the meantime, Ravana, king of Lanka, came in the guise of a sanyasin and stood before their cottage and begged alms from Sita who was alone; he kidnapped her by taking her away in a chariot, flying high. When the two brothers



returned, they found to their dismay that Sita was not to be seen there.

During their search for Sita, the two brothers reached Kishkindha which was ruled by the monkey king Sugriva. The latter promised them that he would help them in tracing Sita's whereabouts. But Lord Rama was anxious and worried as they couldn't trace even her footsteps. Then Sugriva recalled to his mind about the bundle of clothes which fell down earlier from high above. He stated that it contained some jewels.

Lord Rama expressed his wish to see it immediately. But when it was brought, he was so grief-stricken that he couldn't open it. He asked Lakshmana to open and examine them. After examining them, Lakshmana replied. "Brother, I always consider her as my mother. I pay my respects to her and receive blessings by falling at her feet. Hence, I can assure you that these anklets are hers; but I am not familiar with the other pieces of jewellery."

Listening to this Lord Rama only felt too happy at the respect of Lakshmana for Sita.

\* \* \*



## 20. Hanuman and Mount Mainaka

Hanuman, the monkey chief had been assigned the responsibility of discovering the whereabouts of Sita, who had been abducted by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Hanuman had to cross the ocean (the abode of Varuna) and reach the regions of Lanka on the other shore of the sea. He faced three obstacles in his journey across the sea viz., Mount Mainaka, Surasa, the mother of Nagas and Simhika, an ogress.

Before embarking on his journey, he promised Sri Rama and his army of monkeys that he would return along with Sita.

First Hanuman encountered Mount Mainaka in his journey over the ocean. While Hanuman began moving over the ocean, the deity of the ocean strongly felt a need and desire to protect this Hanuman, who was a messenger of Sri Rama, a descendant of the Ikshvaku race. Moreover, the deity reasoned out to himself that king Sagara (an ancestor of Sri Rama) had once extended his help to the ocean. Resolving



thus, the deity called upon Mount Mainaka, the foremost of mountains to come to his service.

She spoke to the mountain in the following manner: "O Mainaka! Hanuman the leader of the army of monkeys is now flying over the ocean with all his might. He is on an important mission of rescuing Sita, the devoted wife of Sri Rama. So, he is to be considered a servant of the Ikshvaku race. You rise from the water for Hanuman to rest on you. This would allow him to take rest and regain his strength and vigour to cover the remaining distance.

Mount Mainaka, on instructions from the deity, showed itself out of the water. However, Hanuman felt it was intentionally blocking his way. Angrily Hanuman struck against the mountain; the mountain in the least grieved over his action. Instead, the mountain took on a human form and stood on his own peak. He spoke to Hanuman with pleasing words and offered hospitality. It said, "O Lord of the monkeys, the devoted servant of Sri Rama! Rest here and resume your journey. In the former yuga, when Lord Indra attacked me, your father, the wind-god rescued me. Service must be rendered in return for a service. That is the Law."

Hanuman now understood Mainaka's intention to help him. Hearing the soft words and words of affection coming from him, Hanuman replied, "O Mainaka! I am very pleased with you. Do not misunderstand that your hospitality has been rejected. "Duty first" is my

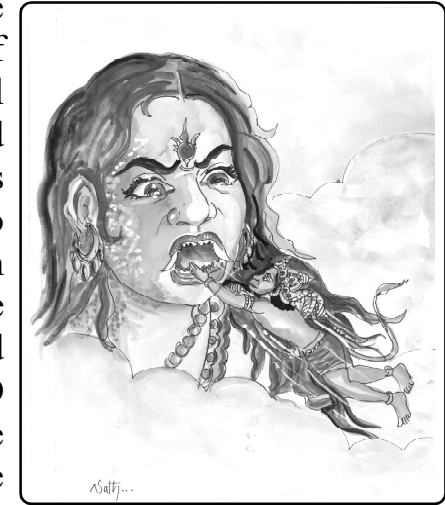
policy." Saying so he honoured the mountain's gesture to help him by touching it with his hand and flew away. Mount Mainaka and the deity of the ocean rejoiced to see Hanuman flying higher and higher, covered by clouds now and then, moving faster on his path of duty. The rishis and other Gods showered their blessings on him; and applauded Hanuman's resolve to accomplish and achieve success on his own without receiving any help that came his way.

\* \* \*

## 21. Hanuman and Surasa

Here is another story wherein Hanuman encountered Surasa, the mother of the Nagas.

Hanuman continued his flight over the sea after taking leave from mount Mainaka. The devas, gandharvas and siddhas resolved to test the strength and powers of Hanuman. So they all called upon Surasa and bid her to obstruct his way, by appearing to him in the form of an ogress. As instructed she obstructed his way and spoke to him thus: "O chief among the monkeys. Gods have provided me food in your form. I have the boon from the Creator to catch and devour whoever came in my way". Then she even opened her mouth wide open to devour Hanuman as though demanding him to enter her mouth.



Finding such a figure standing in his way and retarding his journey, he narrated to her in soft words his mission of rescuing Sita. He sought her permission to enter her mouth on his return journey after he had seen Sita. Not satisfied with such an answer, she stood in front of him again with her mouth wide open. Now

that Hanuman had been provoked, he challenged the lady to widen her mouth and let him in. Then, Surasa began widening her mouth, while Hanuman rose in size. This went on till each had outshone the other. At one stage, Hanuman shrank to the size of a thumb; and as quickly as he entered the mouth, so fast did he come out without killing her. Thus did Hanuman fulfill her demand of entering her mouth; and won over the challenge put by the Devas and others.

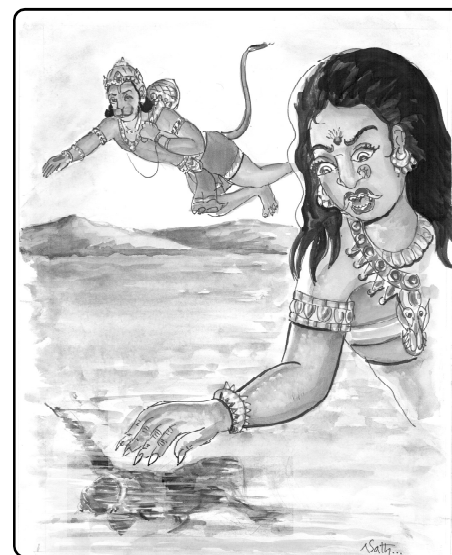
Hanuman has been praised for this action of his, in overcoming Surasa and escaping alive from her mouth. This is the second obstacle overcome by Hanuman. The first obstacle was winning over the affection from mount Mainaka through his hospitality.

\* \* \*

## 22. Hanuman and Simhika, the Ogress

Here is another story wherein Hanuman had to face another demon - like female figure which blocked Hanuman's way to Lanka.

After releasing himself from the clutches of Surasa in ogress form, Hanuman coursed his way speedily in the air eager to reach Lanka. Alas! not far off, another demon - like creature, named Simhika impeded his way. She had powers to change her form at will. This creature captured her victim Hanuman by catching hold of his shadow. Caught unawares, Hanuman tried to look



this side and that to escape from her. To his surprise, the creature looked a female, a demoness with ugly features. He immediately remembered Sugriva, his leader warning him of a creature which devours its victim after following its shadows. Knowing her to be Simhika, Hanuman set himself to growing in size. Observing this, Simhika too began widening her mouth. As in the case of conquering Surasa, here too, Hanuman finally reducing himself in size, entered her

mouth. He tore through her vulnerable parts and emerged out the other side killing her instantly.

The creatures over the ocean applauded Hanuman's action in killing a mighty creature. The message given was: "Whoever has the four noble virtues viz., firmness, vision, understanding and skill, never fails in his undertakings."

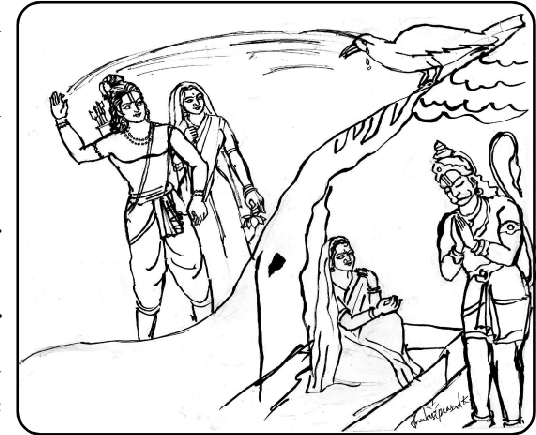
Hanuman rose higher into the sky, flew with great speed like Garuda, here overcoming demons, there reptiles, waves of the sea, etc.; finally he could descend on the Trikuta mountain on the shores of Lanka. He contracted his body into a minute form fearing the attention of the enemies in the island of Lanka; then began searching for Sita.

\* \* \*

## 23. Goddess Sita and the Crow

In Lanka Hanuman flew over various regions and saw Sita sitting under a big tree within the kingdom of demon Ravana.

When Hanuman approached Sita, she had her own apprehensions about Hanuman's identity. Her suspicions disappeared after Hanuman had eulogized the qualities of Lord



Rama and Lakshmana, the scions of the Raghu race.

Hanuman presented Sita with the jewel of Rama. In turn when Hanuman requested Sita to give him a token of identity to be shown to Sri Rama, Sita gave him a jewel of her head; she also narrated an incident which took place when she was with Sri Rama.

She began the story thus: "O Hanuman! Listen to this episode. If you narrate this to my Lord, it would be a token of confirmation to the fact that you have met me. Once, in our sojourn in the parts of the forest, Sri Rama, Lakshmana and myself came to Citrakuta mountain, near Mandakini river. We had partaken of some food. There was some food left on the ground. A crow had alighted there and pecked at the food. Neither

I nor the brothers were mindful of it. After sometime, we slept.

The crow, the foremost among birds, (son of Lord Indra) appeared and began injuring me again and again, though I tried to ward it off, throwing mud balls at him. The injury caused by the bird was so severe that blood fell in drops on the body of Lord Rama who was sleeping in my lap. The Lord who woke up saw the crow sitting on the branch of a tree near by with its bloody beak. Enraged, he picked up a blade of Kusa grass and threw at it. The blade began chasing the crow wherever he went. He went round the three worlds in vain. No God came to his rescue. Realizing his mistake and the powers in the Lord, the crow now fell at the feet of Lord Sri Rama.

Though the Lord protected the life of the crow, He was helpless in harming the crow, as the blade of grass (the weapon) sent by him couldn't be made ineffective. At the request of the crow, Rama hit its right eye. Thus, the crow became one-eyed."

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## **24. The True Disciples - Part I**

Once there lived a rishi named Dhaumya. Three disciples studied under him. They were Upamanyu, Aruni and Veda.

One day the guru allotted each of these disciples some work. One of his students Aruni of Panchala was instructed to go and stop the flow of water in his field. Respecting the guru's orders Aruni went to the fields and tried to stop the water from flowing. When he couldn't, he decided to lay himself down across the point from where it was flowing. In that position, he remained there for a long time without food and water. Time passed by.

In the evening all other students who returned to the ashrama reported to the rishi about their work. Aruni was not to be seen. The guru questioned them about Aruni's whereabouts as he was anxious. He, along with the other disciples moved out in search of Aruni. After moving some distance, the guru began shouting the name of the boy at intervals. When Aruni heard the guru's voice, he answered his call. He jumped to his feet and ran towards the master. He narrated to him how he had attended to his work.

He stood in attention before the guru to receive more commands from him. The guru honoured Aruni with the title "Uddalaka" as he was pleased with Aruni's devotion to work. He also blessed him with good fortune and wisdom of the Vedas and Dharmasastra. Aruni moved away to a country of his choice later.

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## 25. The True Disciples - Part II

Upamanyu was another disciple of rishi Dhaumya. One day the guru put Upamanyu in charge of his herd of cows.

Upamanyu used to look after the cows and report to his preceptor everyday. Once the preceptor wished to know from Upamanyu how he supported himself for his livelihood.

Upamanyu said : "I support myself by begging."

Dhaumya asked : "Dear child! How can you use what you receive by begging without my permission?"

Upamanyu was not at all offended by the guru's words. From the next day, he began depositing whatever money he earned with the guru. Finding nothing to survive on, he began drinking the milk of cows! Lo! The guru accused him of stealing the milk. So, Upamanyu stopped this action. After a few days, the guru questioned him again:

Dhaumya : "You have stopped begging and drinking the milk of cows! How do you support yourself now?"

Upamanyu : "I now survive on the froth thrown out by the calves".

Again the guru showed dissatisfaction.

Having thus been prevented by the guru from supporting himself, he now began wandering in the forests. One day, he felt very hungry. So he began

eating the leaves from Arka tree. As the leaves were poisonous, he lost his sight. When he continued his journey through the forest, he fell into a well.

In the evening, the guru went in search of Upamanyu. As he reached forest regions, he began calling to Upamanyu, now and then. Upamanyu who was inside the well answered the guru's call. The guru rescued him.

On learning about Upamanyu's experiences and the fact that he was blind, the guru instructed him to worship the twin Asvins, who were known to be the physicians to the Gods. After constant worship of the twin Asvins, Upamanyu regained his sight. The guru troubled him no more as he was contented with Upamanyu's devotion and sincerity to work. Thus he gained fame as a true and faithful disciple.

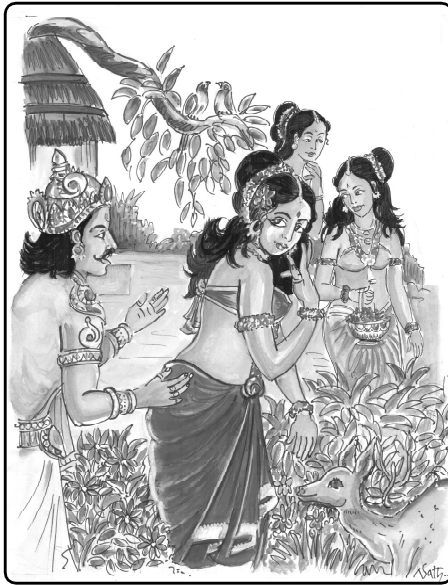
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## 26. Sakuntala and Dushyanta - Part I

King Viswamitra was known to be a great yogi as also a rishi. It is believed that once he committed a sin of enjoying the beauty of Menaka, one of the apsaras. Through this a girl child was born to them. Both the rishi and Menaka left the girl to her fate; however she was protected by Sakuni birds. Once sage Kanva saw her, picked her up, named her Sakuntala and reared her.

Sakuntala was living happily in sage Kanva's hermitage in the forests serving him well. It so happened one day when Kanva had gone out for gathering firewood, there arrived a king by name Dushyanta, at the hermitage.

Sakuntala offered him water to wash his feet and received him with all due hospitality. The king said to her, "There is no one inside. Whose hermitage is this?" Sakuntala narrated to him that it belonged to sage Kanva. He wondered about the presence of a young girl in that hermitage. To clear his doubt, a brahman



narrated to him the story of Sakuntala, and how sage Kanva had taken her under his care.

The king was overwhelmed by her beauty and the next instant he proposed to marry her. The girl, however, wished to wait till her foster father arrived. The king who was too impatient, married her according to what is known as Gandharva rites. But this Sakuntala conditioned the king that the son born to her should become his heir. Accepting the condition, the king departed to his kingdom even before sage Kanva returned. The sage on returning home, by his yogic powers knew everything and blessed the girl.

After a few months a boy was born to Sakuntala. As he grew up, he learnt everything from his grandfather. The sage had foretold that he would reach the heights of an emperor. One day the sage felt that it was time to send Sakuntala and her son over to the king as tradition says that the wife should not be absent for too long from her husband's home.

\* \* \*

## 27. Sakuntala and Dushyanta - Part II

Sakuntala arrived at the portals of the king's court with her son. She presented herself to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I am Sakuntala, daughter of sage Kanva, whom you married at the hermitage in the forest by Gandharva rites. Here is your son, accept us into your race." Though the king recognized her, he said, "Who are you? I know you not, get away". To which Sakuntala replied, "Sir, you may think that none was present at our marriage. The sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the wind were witnesses. The Omniscient One knows everything. Why do you refuse to accept the bond?" The king laughed and said, "I repeat again. I do not know you; I don't believe what you say and can never accept you." To which Sakuntala retorted, "Your Majesty! My birth is better than yours. You are a mortal whereas I was born to a sage and an apsara. Heaven is my ancestor's home. "When both the king and Sakuntala were involved in such heated argument, a heavenly voice was heard. It said, "O king! Don't delay. Accept the lady as your wife and the boy as your son."

The king had only waited for such a divine command by which he thought the people would have belief in the truth and accept them to be husband and wife. The king accepted his son as his heir apparent.

After the king's death, this son took over the reigns and ruled the kingdom to the satisfaction of all. He performed many sacrifices and came to be known as Bharata, the ancestor of the Pandavas and Kauravas of the great epic, "The Mahabharata". From him was derived the name Bharatavarsha (the land of Bharata).

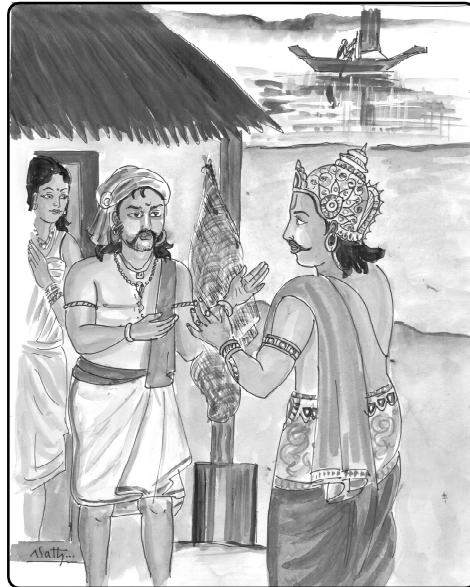
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## 28. Bhishma's Vow

Devavrata was born to King Santanu and Goddess Ganga. When the boy grew up, he was crowned the heir-apparent of king Santanu amidst the joy of the people in the kingdom.

Years went by. One day, it so happened when the king was wandering along the banks of river Yamuna, he smelt some sweet perfume in the air. As he followed it, he was led to a lady of beauty and loveliness. She happened to be



Matsyagandhi, the daughter of the chief of the fishermen. He asked her to marry him. She led him to seek the permission of her father. The chief of the fishermen was excited and happy at the prospect. However he said to the king, "Promise me that the sons born of Satyawati would become the king after you." The king was rudely shocked; he didn't agree to the condition, though he was passionately in love with Satyawati.

When he returned to his capital, he looked depressed. He remained dull, inactive and morose, with his heart pining for her. Devavrata who observed his father's sorrow said, "Dear father, you have everything to keep you happy : money, power, servants, etc. Why then do you look so sorrowful?" The father replied - "Dear son, you are my only son. In a king's lineage, having but one son is considered equivalent to having no sons. I am worried." Finding that this was not the reason for his father's worry, Devavrata gathered information from his charioteer who told him about the king's love for Satyawati.

The son went straight to the fishermen's place bent upon satisfying his father's wishes. He promised to Satyawati's father that Satyawati's sons would rule the kingdom and begged him to allow his father to marry Satyawati. Satyawati's father who still had his own fears said to Devavrata, "O Prince! You have made the promise. But what about the sons who would be born to you. Wouldn't they claim the throne? That is what bothers me."

Devavrata replied, "Sir, I promise I would never marry; I also renounce my birth-right as heir-apparent to this kingdom." That very instant, there showered flowers on Devavrata, with all the Gods and Goddesses crying, "Bhishma! Bhishma!", which means one who undertakes a terrible vow. With this vow, he led

Satyavati to the kingdom and performed his father's marriage with her.

Thus Devavrata came to be known as Bhishma. He lived a long life as he received a boon from his father to die whenever he wished; he also gained the respect of one and all as the oldest member of the Kuru clan. At the end of the Kurukshetra war, he lay in a bed of arrows for many days after which he died at the moment he chose.

\* \* \*

## **29. Drona and Drupada**

Drona was the son of rishi Bharadwaja. Once Drupada, the son of the king of Panchalas visited Bharadwaja's hermitage with an intention to learn the art of archery. Drona and Drupada began learning the sastras and archery under the rishi; they ate and played together and became great friends. While a boy, Drupada promised Drona that he would give half of his kingdom to his friend when he ascended the throne. He also expressed his desire that their friendship should continue forever.

As days passed by, Drona married the sister of Krupa and had a son Asvatthama. Being poor, one day he went to Parasurama Bhargava to receive alms. The latter had by then completed distributing his riches. However, he offered to teach Drona more about the use of weapons. Drona continued to live in utter poverty. One day his child was crying for milk and his wife advised him to approach his boy-hood friend, who is now the king of Panchala. When Drona went there, he was humiliated thus: "Friendship is possible only between equals. What relationship can there be between a king and a wandering beggar." Drona returned home disappointed but determined to take revenge on him when an opportune moment came.

In the later years, on the request from Bhishma, Drona became the guru to the pandava and kaurava princes. Once the guru demanded from his disciples his fee (gurudaksina). This was offered to him when

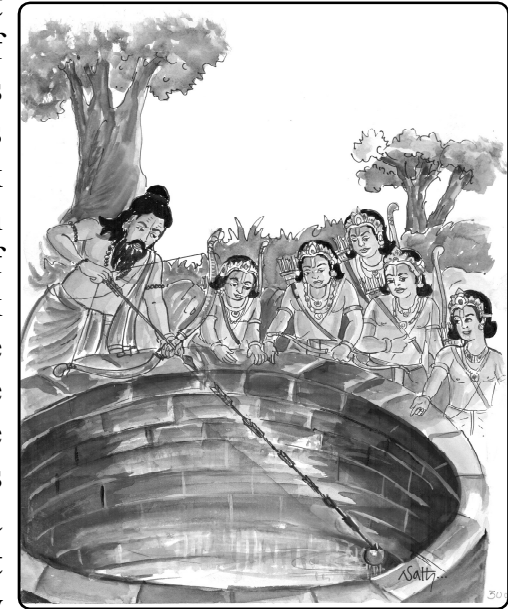
Arjuna conquered the kingdom of Panchala by defeating Drupada. Thus Drona was able to take control of half of the kingdom as promised by Drupada earlier. Angered by the humiliation, Drupada performed tapas and was blessed with Drustadyumna who was to kill Drona later in the great Kuruksetra war. He also got from the sacrificial fire, a daughter named Draupadi, who was to marry the five pandava brothers later on.

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### 30. The Princes Under Test

The pandava and kaurava princes learn the art of archery and the use of weapons under the guru Dronacharya.

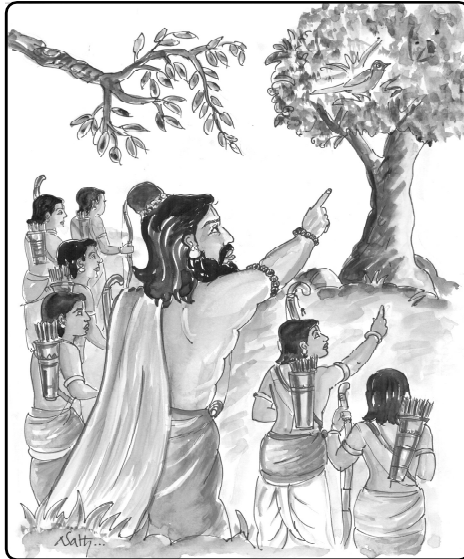
One day when the pandava princes were playing with a wooden ball, it fell into a well. Drona observed this and offered to take the ball out when the efforts of all the disciples failed. He threw his ring and it got stuck to the ball; he then sent out a piece of grass which stuck to the ring; in the same manner, he sent out more pieces of grass which formed a chain; thus it became lengthy and the ring was retrieved.



On another day, the guru wanted to test the skill of these disciples. So, he prepared an artificial bird made of wood and placed it on a tree. Then he summoned all his disciples. They stood in a line. He showed everyone the bird and instructed them that they must bring the bird down with a single arrow.

Now, he called them one by one. Yudhishtira was the first to face the test followed by many others. The guru asked everyone of them if they could see the bird in the branch. Yudhishtira said, "Sir, I can see the bird, the leaf, the tree, etc." Many gave similar answers; the guru wasn't satisfied. Only four others were left Nakula, Sahadeva, Asvatthama and Arjuna, coming in that order to face the test.

Among them, the first three almost gave the same answer; yet the guru didn't accept such answers. He asked all of them to step behind. The final man to come was Arjuna. He stepped forward, saw towards the tree and said, "Sir, I see only the bird's head; its eyes are open". Drona was now pleased with the answer from Arjuna and instructed him to shoot at it. He was successful in bringing the bird down.



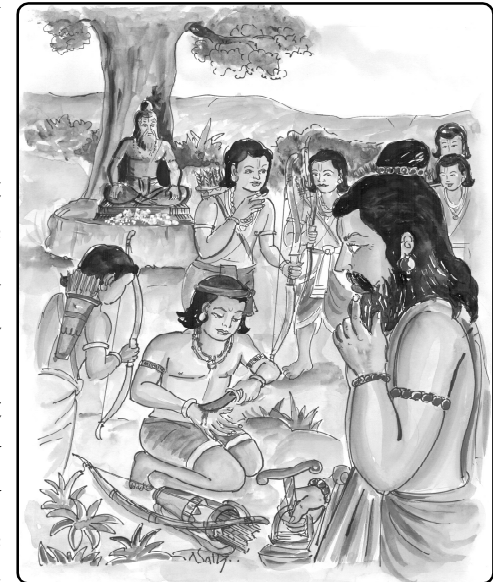
Then, the teacher explained to the other pupils that one must be able to see only the target and nothing else, if one is to become a good master in archery.

\* \* \*

### 31. Ekalavya

One day Dronacharya was teaching the pandava and kaurava princes in a forest; then there came a young man by name, Ekalavya. He introduced himself to the teacher as the son of the king of Nishadas, a tribesman of the mountains. He said, "I wish to be your disciple. Please accept me". Drona retorted: "Young man, I teach only Kshatriyas. So, I cannot teach you. Go away."

Ekalavya didn't react but went home calmly. He acted immediately upon a way out of this problem. He went out, gathered clay and prepared a clay model of Drona, the teacher. He placed it



on a pedestal under a tree. Everyday he sat before it, meditated upon his guru and began learning archery and trained himself in the skills of warfare.

One day, it so happened that the guru with his disciples moved into the same area in the forest where Ekalavya lived. As they were walking along the forest range, they saw here and there the signs of someone

who had been practising archery there. After a while, the dog which was following them started barking profusely noticing a dark-faced man there. It was Ekalavya. But the dog's barking stopped abruptly because Ekalavya had sent a volley of arrows into its mouth, snubbing its voice. They turned back only to see that the dog had been attacked with arrows.

It was clear to the guru and his disciples that here was an archer par excellence; after walking a few yards, they saw Ekalavya and the statue of Drona. They admired Ekalavya's determination to learn under the guru, but the guru, in his heart of hearts feared and envied the skills of Ekalavya.

Drona's fear was that Ekalavya would become the staunch rival of the princes especially Arjuna because his skills of archery were visible. He cunningly thought of a plan to wipe out the skills in this low-caste man. So he said to Ekalavya, "You say you are my disciple, though I didn't teach you; yet your prowess is excellent and admirable. I forget meeting you before and denying your request to be my disciple. However, past is past. Truly if you feel you are my pupil, what would you like to offer me as the teacher's fee?"

Ekalavya spontaneously reacted: "Sir, if you really wish it, I am willing to give you anything you ask for." Drona desired from this disciple the thumb of his right hand as *gurudakshina* (fee). Ekalavya was only ready to offer him anything. So, he cut off his

right thumb and placed it at the feet of the guru. By this, he remained permanently disabled to use his bow and arrows. Drona's intention was to incapacitate his hands so that he could never come in the way of the royal princes any longer. The royal princes were aghast at this action of Ekalavya.

Thus did Ekalavya's action remain in history as a disciple who sacrificed his prowess by offering it as a fee to his guru.

\* \* \*

### 32. Karna's Identity

In the Mahabharata, in the royal kingdom of king Dhritarashtra, the pandavas and the kauravas were cousins.

One day the king desired to witness the mastery with which the princes could use the weapons. Thus was arranged a combat between the pandava and kaurava princes, prominent among them being Bhima and Arjuna, on the side of the pandavas and prince Duryodhana, on the side of the kauravas. The public were also invited to watch the princes in action. Everyone was enthusiastic and watched the event with admiration.



In the first instance, the wrestling and club competition was between Bhima and Duryodhana. Later Arjuna too joined Bhima to support him and proved his skills beyond excellence. Duryodhana became envious about this and was also infuriated when Drona declared that there was none to equal Arjuna.

When Duryodhana's skills proved ineffective, Karna decided to join him and desired to fight with the princes. But Kripacharya, an elderly man on the stage raised an objection. He said, "Who are you? It is only after declaring your lineage that you will be permitted to compete with the pandava princes." Karna who was at a loss to prove his identity, stood humiliated. It was then that Duryodhana rescued him by crowning him the king of Anga. He was decorated with all due honours. To the surprise of everyone in the audience, there emerged an old charioteer Athiratha, who claimed Karna as his son and embraced him. This enraged Arjuna who refused to fight with the son of a charioteer. Karna's face reddened with anger and shame. Fortunately, the sun had set by then and the combat was stopped.

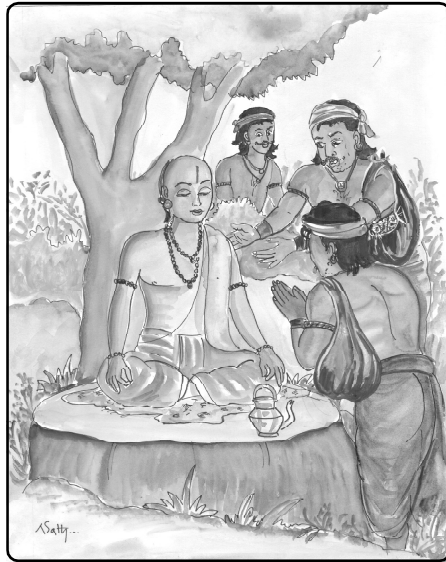
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### 33. Animandavya

Once there lived a brahmana, who was known as Mandavya. He was a true ascetic. He always sat at the entrance to his hermit and performed penance. He also used to observe a vow of silence at such times.

Once while he was in meditation, a group of robbers forcibly entered his ashram. They requested him to save them from the guards of the king who were chasing them. The sage spoke not a word, but observed them. After hiding the stolen articles, they hid themselves in a corner. Soon, the guards came running and addressed the sage thus: "Oh brahmana! Tell us the direction in which the thieves have gone. Quick!" The rishi didn't respond to their queries, but silently watched their anxiety.

The guards then saw no point in waiting; they forced themselves into the hermitage; dragged the thieves out and collected the stolen articles. Suspecting the sage to be part of the robber gang, they bound him also. Then they reported to the king taking with them



the Brahmana, and the gang of robbers and handed over the stolen articles.

The king punished the sage along with the thieves. The great rishi was put on the trident.

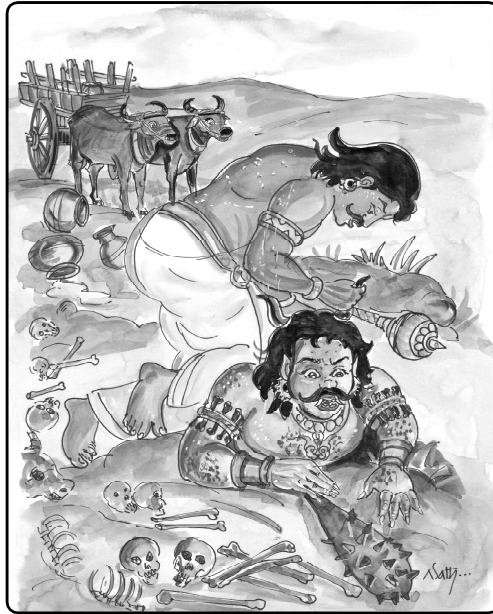
Many years passed; all the thieves died. Yet the rishi remained alive, though he was without food all these years. The matter was reported to the king. The king realized that he was not an ordinary thief. He begged forgiveness from the rishi; his men tried to release him from the trident. Alas! the tip (Ani) of the trident wouldn't get separated from the body of the rishi. Hence, he came to be known as Animandavya.

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### 34. The Slaying of Bakasura

One day Kunti and the pandava brothers were wandering in the forests. They entered the gates of a city called Ekachakra. They heard from the people that everyone in that city lived in fear everyday. Even the king had left fearing death from one of the demons named Bakasura. Legend has it that this demon killed men and animals everyday at random and haphazardly.

To solve this problem, one day the city councillors and heads met and discussed the issue. They spoke to the demon too. They promised to supply enough food to the demon everyday, but on one condition. He should stop visiting them everyday and resist from killing human beings and animals at his will. When this plan was agreed to, the people lived under less tension. Thus it was, from the next day, a cart with all kinds of food was arranged for the demon; in addition, everyday a man was to be sacrificed and sent to him.



One day, Kunti and Bhima heard wailings from inside the landlord's house. On inquiry, it was learnt that it was the landlord's turn to send one member from his house as food for the demon. The mother and son were aghast at the sacrifice each member in the family was making to offer himself as food, including the young daughter of the landlord. Kunti felt indebted to the landlord for sheltering them. So, it was her duty to protect them. She said to them, "Do not worry, sir. My son Bhima is very strong. I will send him to the demon today. Arrange for other food items. He can kill the rakshasa and you can live in peace everyday hereafter".

Accordingly, on instructions from the mother, Bhima drove a cartload of food to the cave of the demon. Calling out the attention of the demon Bakasura, he began eating the food in front of him. Watching all this in rage, Bakasura began inflicting injuries on Bhima. Bhima neither moved from the place nor felt the pain; all along while he was eating, a fierce fighting went on between the two. After the food was eaten, Bhima threw him up and down many times and finally killed him.

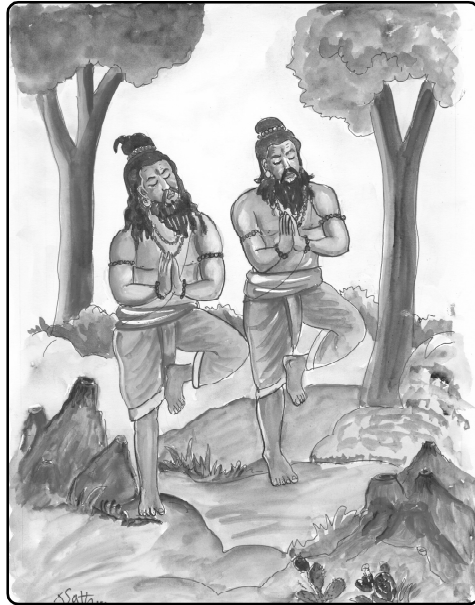
The demon's cries of pain were heard by the people in the city. They gathered at the gates and watched Bhima dragging the dead body. They heaved a sigh of relief and lived happily ever after.

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### 35. Sunda and Upasunda - Part I

Long ago there lived a powerful demon named Nikumbha. He belonged to the Danava race and came in the line of Hiranyakasipu. He had two sons by name Sunda and Upasunda. Both of them had the same views, determination and both were powerful, strong and energetic. They did the same work and shared both joy and sorrow together. They ate and slept together. Similarly had wicked hearts as they both thought of conquering and becoming Lords of the three worlds.



After they were initiated into boyhood, they went towards Vindhya mountains. They had matted locks of hair, covered themselves with the bark of trees, subsisted themselves on fruits and water. Strictly following the vows, they stood on one leg, threw their own flesh into the sacred fire and continued their austerities.

They had the power to win over the Gods and get boons granted. So the celestials began to worry about the consequences of such penances. They feared

that there would be chaos and confusion, disaster and destruction in the three worlds. So the celestials began sending obstacles in the way of their penances; they began sending precious stones and jewellery to attract them towards material pleasures followed by beautiful women. Yet there was no respite in their tapas.

The celestials tried to put an end to it through "Maya" (an illusion); every woman, wife and sister was made to appear before them with dishevelled hair and attack the two brothers; none of these plans worked.

Now, Lord Brahma appeared before the two brothers and wished to grant them a boon: Then they said, "Oh! Lord! Grant us such power and strength so as to take any form we can at our will; let us possess the knowledge of the weapons and the powers of Maya; Let us be immortal." Lord Brahma said, "Everything is granted, except immortality." Though they weren't satisfied with such an answer, their list of desires continued: "We should have no fear from any moving or non-moving objects or creatures except anger created between ourselves." The boon was granted.

The two brothers then left for home, adorned themselves with costly jewellery, robes and crowns. The earlier ascetic dresses have been warded off. Every house and street witnessed joy and merriment; eating, drinking, singing and dancing went on; with the powers thus vested in them, they both began to create

a great confusion in the three worlds. In Heaven, the celestials and other Gods, in the nether world, the inhabitants like snakes, and upon the Earth, all living creatures including people ran to Lord Brahma to save them from such a disturbance. No creature or human being stayed in one's own region but ran helter skelter; every region upon the Earth wore a deserted look, devoid of vegetation, festivities, marriages, etc. The two brothers brought the three worlds under their control; they enjoyed their time engaging themselves in various pleasurable activities.

Now Lord Brahma saw this and instructed the architect Visvakarma of the universe to create a figure that would create enmity between the two brothers. Tilottama was the maiden created with extraordinary beauty for this purpose.

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### 36. Sunda and Upasunda - Part II

One day, the two brothers went to the Vindhya mountains taking along with them their whole retinue, their family members and relatives. The two brothers were drunk with power and wine. There were beautiful women enticing them through music and dance. It was at such an hour the charming Tilottama dressed in a single red silk cloth, adorned with beautiful ornaments entered the area where the two brothers sat.

As soon as the two brothers saw this unparalleled beauty, their dark red eyes were struck with wonder; desire to possess her followed next; both of them ran towards her; Sunda caught her by her right hand and Upasunda by her left



hand. The drunken men became mad by now; Sunda said, "She's mine. So she's your superior." "No, she's mine. So, she's your sister-in-law", retorted his brother, Upasunda. All love, fondness and bond was lost between the two. "I took her hand first, so, she's mine,". "No, No. I took her hand, first. So, she's mine," were

the words heard constantly in the argument between the two.

Armed with maces and clubs, they took no time to attack each other. So fierce did the battle go on that their bodies were soon covered with blood. Soon they dropped dead to the ground. The wives, the relatives and other men who watched this ran away in all directions to seek shelter. Thus the lives of the two brothers came to an end when they showed anger against each other.

Lord Brahma appreciated Tilottama for acting her part well. He granted her a boon: "None will be able to gaze at you for any length of time." Through Tilottama, Lord Brahma brought peace to the three worlds; everyone went back happily to their respective regions.

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### 37. The Birth of Jarasandha

Brhadratha reigned the kingdom of Magadha. He had two wives. He promised their parents that he would look after them on equal terms. Unfortunately, Brhadratha was childless.

One day, he along with his wives left the kingdom and moved into the forests in order to worship god. Along the route, once he met a sage and requested him to bless them with a child. As fortune would have it, just then a fruit fell from a tree into the hands of the sage. The sage



gave it to the king and instructed the king to give it to his wives. The king did so; in course of time, the queens became pregnant; only one child was born to them. What was surprising and shocking was that each wife gave birth to one half of a male child; each child had one ear, one eye, one hand, one leg, and so on. This was because the king cut the fruit into two equal halves and had offered them to his wives. He considered his action right and impartial because he

felt he was fulfilling the promise he had made to his fathers-in-law.

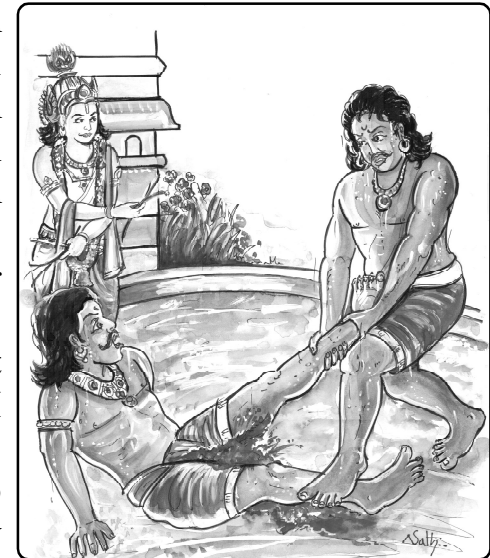
The parents, unable to reconcile themselves to a situation where in they have to bring up the child, put the two halves in a bundle and threw it away. The bundle was picked up by a rakshasa and by chance, when he brought the two halves nearer, they came together and got attached; to his amazement, there was life in the child then. The rakshasa somehow felt that he shouldn't kill the child. Therefore he approached the king and said, "Sir, take this child and rear it; the child is yours."

The king was only too happy to receive the child. Jara was the name of the rakshasa. 'Sandhi' means 'to join'. Because the rakshasa was responsible for giving a life to the child by joining the two halves, the child was named Jarasandha. The child grew up in the palace like any other normal child. After the death of his father, he ascended the throne.

\* \* \*

### 38. The Slaying of Jarasandha

In yesteryears, the princes who performed Rajasuya sacrifice successfully were decorated with the title of an emperor. Once Yudhishtira, the eldest of the pandava princes approached Sri Krishna and informed him about his desire to perform this yaga. Sri Krishna advised him thus: "You can definitely perform the sacrifice, but this is possible only after killing Jarasandha. He is a man of great prowess. Once I fought against him, but finally had to accept defeat. By fighting him, you can not only perform the sacrifice but also release many kings in his prison."



Sri Krishna said this because Jarasandha was considered a very powerful king with heroic qualities. He had conquered many kingdoms and has held many kings under his subjection. They were all in his prisons as captives.

Yudhishtira, who heard about Krishna's failure in defeating Jarasandha, lost all hopes and decided

not to take up such a sacrifice. However, his two brothers Bhima and Arjuna rejected such a decision. They argued that a Kshatriya cannot afford to speak on such terms. They suggested that they were ready to join him in overpowering Jarasandha. Krishna too encouraged Yudhishtira to go ahead with the yaga.

The fight began. Lord Krishna witnessed it. He supported the pandava princes. A surprising action was observed by Bhima; whenever he tore Jarasandha's legs apart, they came together and Jarasandha turned alive. When Bhima was about to accept defeat, Sri Krishna came to his rescue. Without the knowledge of Jarasandha, he demonstrated to Bhima how he has to deal with the problem of winning over Jarasandha. Lord Krishna picked up a tuft of grass, and tore it length wise; threw the two pieces in two different directions by crossing his hands. Bhima understood this; accordingly the next moment, he tore Jarasandha's body into two halves, threw the left side of the body to the right, and the right side to the left. The unique quality here is that they cannot join now. Thus an end was put to Jarasandha.

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### **39. Yudhishtira and the Rajasuyayaga**

Yudhishtira achieved sovereignty after winning the war with his cousins, the Kauravas. After consulting Sri Krishna, he arranged to perform the Rajasuyayaga. In olden days, yagas (sacrifices) were frequently conducted either at the beginning or at the end of an auspicious event as an offer of prayer to the gods.

Every layman, sage, priest, king in the neighbouring kingdom and towns felt happy to attend the yaga. The eldest pandava prince consulted the rishis, priests and other elders about the day, the place, time in which the yaga was to be held. Lord Krishna guided the pandavas in the preparations for the sacrifice. Famous priests such as Vyasa, Vasishta, Visvamitra, Bharadwaja, Kasyapa and Vaisampayana were invited. Gurus of the pandava and kaurava princes Dronacharya and Kripacharya, elders of the family Bhishma, Vidura and Dhrutarashtra and his sons were among the invitees. Siddhas and gandharvas, kinnaras, charanas and rakshasas also joined.

Without any hurdle, the Yaga was completed successfully. Rishis like Narada had also appreciated it. The concluding part of the ceremony saw to the customary honouring of guests. Prince Yudhishtira contemplated on who should be the foremost among the guests to be honoured. Different opinions were put forth. But it was Sahadeva, one of the Pandava brothers who suggested Lord Krishna's name. The idea

was that in honouring Lord Krishna, they would all be honouring all living and non-living objects since he resides in all. This thought was agreed to by one and all including the elders in the camp.

As per the decision taken by the congregation of holy priests, brahmanas, kings and others, Yudhishtira welcomed Lord Krishna to be seated in a special seat. He washed his feet and sprinkled the water over his head as also over his wife and brothers. This was followed by a rich offering of silk and gold ornaments to Lord Krishna. Everyone rejoiced and paid their salutation to him.

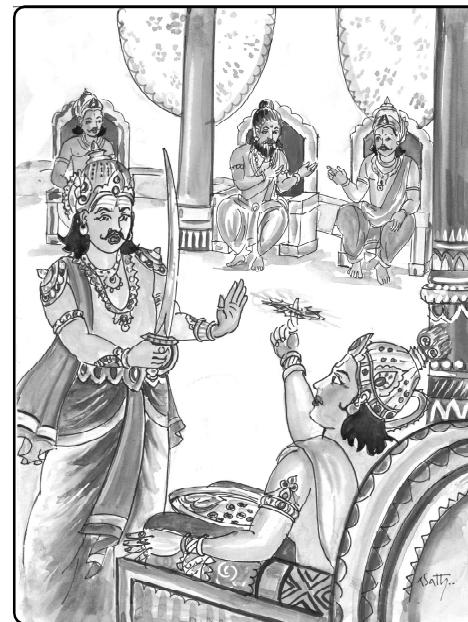
However, there was one among the guests whose wrath invited the attention of all present there. This was Sisupala, who was none other than the cousin of Lord Krishna.

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## 40. The Slaying of Sisupala

Sisupala was the king of the country of Cedi. His mother and Krishna's mother were sisters. He was born with four hands and a third eye. He suffered from the following curse: when anyone held him in one's hands, and if his two arms and the third eye disappeared, he would meet with his death. This was prophesied by a voice at his birth.

One day, Lord Krishna held him in his hands. His hands and eye disappeared. The mother fearing his death pleaded with Lord Krishna to spare her son. It was then that Lord Krishna, making amendment to the prophecy, told Sisupala's mother that he would forgive Sisupala and save him until he had made a hundred mistakes.



At the rajasuya yaga performed by Yudhishtira, this Sisupala raised his voice, objecting against Lord Krishna being honoured first. Rising from the chair he condemned the wise men to be foolish in accepting the proposal; he also inflicted a volley of accusations

against the Lord and sought to know why some of the rishis known for their knowledge, austerity, penance and yogic powers were not chosen amongst them all. He reasoned with everyone present there that Lord Krishna was a mere cowherd, born in a prison, brought up in a Yadava family and so on.

Many among the audience reacted against Sisupala's argument, though the pandava brothers had nothing to argue; but armed with weapons they raised their hands against him. Lord Krishna too joined them because it was the hundredth mistake of Sisupala. The Lord threw his chakra at Sisupala and severed the latter's head from the body. Everyone noticed something surprising here; a spark of light rose from the dead body of Sisupala and moved towards Lord Krishna.

Thus Sisupala was finally released from the curse of Sanatkumara brothers; he reached the heavenly abode where he remained praising the Lord's name and acting as a guard.

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## **41. The Crafty Duryodhana**

Dhrutarashtra, Pandu and Vidura were the three princes of the kingdom of Hastinapura. Dhrutarashtra was blind; so, his wife Gandhari remained blindfolded all her life.

Dhrutarashtra had a hundred sons born to him. They were called Kauravas. To Pandu were born three sons Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna by Kunti and Nakula and Sahadeva by his other wife Madri. These sons were called Pandavas. Vidura remained a bachelor.

When Pandu, one of the three brothers met with an untimely death, Dhrutarashtra called for a meeting with his councillors, family heads and other great teachers like Drona, Kripa, etc; everyone of the elders assembled there proposed the name of Yudhishtira to rule the kingdom, as per custom. Unfortunately Duryodhana, the eldest among the kaurava brothers objected to it. The elders advised him to give up at least half of the kingdom to the pandavas. When Duryodhana did not accept the suggestion, they warned him that either a war may arise or a dishonour may await the whole family.

Whatever may be said or done, Duryodana wasn't willing to part with even a bit of the kingdom. With an agitated mind, he sought the help of Sakuni, his uncle, to overcome this problem. The cunning Sakuni devised a plan to invite the pandava brothers to a game

of dice in which he considered himself the finest player. Since the pandavas were regarded as men of honour and nobility, the uncle and nephew thought it would be easy to drag them into the trap. Sakuni promised to play for Duryodhana and win for him the whole kingdom.

Duryodhana approached his father with the proposal. Dhritarashtra hesitated at first; later accepted to this proposition as he didn't wish to dissatisfy his son over such an issue. Vidura, one of the uncles undertook the task of taking the news to the pandava brothers.

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## 42. The Disrobing of Draupadi

Vidura went to inform the pandava brothers about Duryodhana's scheme. They respected Vidura's words and immediately set their journey towards Hastinapura.

The kauravas, in the meanwhile, readied the old palace of Pandu and welcomed them with all the warmth and affection.

The pandavas were served delicious food and offered good entertainment and bed. However Bhima was careful in partaking of the food, as on an earlier occasion, the kauravas had poisoned his food.

On the scheduled day, the game began with the pandavas on one side, and the kauravas on the other side. Seated around in the parlour were the family elders and other members, gurus, etc. It was the cunning Sakuni who threw the dice every time. Unfortunately, the eldest of the pandava brothers Yudhishtira lost the count every time. Thus in the gamble, he lost item after item, in the following order: his chariot and horses, the elephants of war, gold and jewellery in his treasury,





grain in the granary etc.; more shocking was that the game did not end there; he began losing his soldiers in the army, next his brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, later Arjuna and Bhima and himself, in that order. When Yudhishtira had lost everything, Duryodhana found an opportune moment; he didn't spare Draupadi.

Duryodhana ordered his men to go and bring Draupadi to the council hall. These men, with trembling hands, narrated the incidents that happened in the hall to Draupadi. She wanted an answer to her question: she asked, "Did my husband stake himself first or stake me first?" But Duryodhana was too rude to send her an answer; she was dragged by her hair to the council hall; none of the elders dared to speak a word, lest they should fall victims to the curse of Duryodhana.

In the court hall, she was forcibly thrown against the floor mercilessly in the midst of great noble men and kinsmen. Dussasana, on the orders from Duryodhana, began disrobing Draupadi. Alas! Draupadi was at a loss to benefit from the help of her husbands because they were Duryodhana's slaves now; they sat bending their heads in shame. Bhima cast a wrathful glance at Yudhishtira, probably wishing to get an order from him to attack Duryodhana and Dussasana. When this was not to be, Draupadi wailing and weeping, at last sought the help from her Lord, Sri Krishna. Lord Sri Krishna heard Draupadi's prayer

and began sending an unending weave of cloth to protect her.

Dussasana had by now become exhausted and fell down. Neither king Dhritarashtra nor the queen, nor the other elders came to her rescue. Bhima now arose, took an oath to kill Dussasana and drink his blood. Draupadi on her part vowed not to knot her hair until she smeared it with Dussasana's blood.

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### 43. Arjuna and Lord Siva, the Hunter

The pandavas were living in exile in the forests; then a discussion arose on the strength of the pandava army to face the war with the kauravas. At such a moment there came the great sage Vyasa to meet the pandavas. He spoke to them and advised Arjuna to go to the Himalayas and practise austerities to obtain holy weapons.

Thus Arjuna set his journey towards the Himalayas after bidding goodbye to his brothers and wife and getting the blessings from the elders. Arjuna passed through dense forests and began the austerities. One day, an old brahmana met him and offered him other worldly pleasures and induced him to accept them. But Arjuna who was firm in his resolution to possess new weapons refused. Then the old man revealed himself to be Lord Indra, his father who wished him success in his mission; he also advised him to do penance and obtain the blessing of Lord Siva.

Arjuna created a clay idol of Lord Siva and performed penance and worshipped the Lord sincerely. He lived only on fruits; his body became bony; he



was unmindful of his physical body. Months passed; one day, while he was moving about in the forests, a wild boar tried to attack him. He took an arrow and shot at it. At about the same time, another arrow struck the boar's body from somewhere. Lord Siva, in the guise of a hunter had entered the forests along with Parvati to test the powers of Arjuna.

Arjuna shouted, "Who are you? Why are you here in the wild forest with your queen?" The Lord retorted, "Why are you here?" Without answering each other's question, each claimed the victim of one's attack to be his; both were ready to fight with each other.

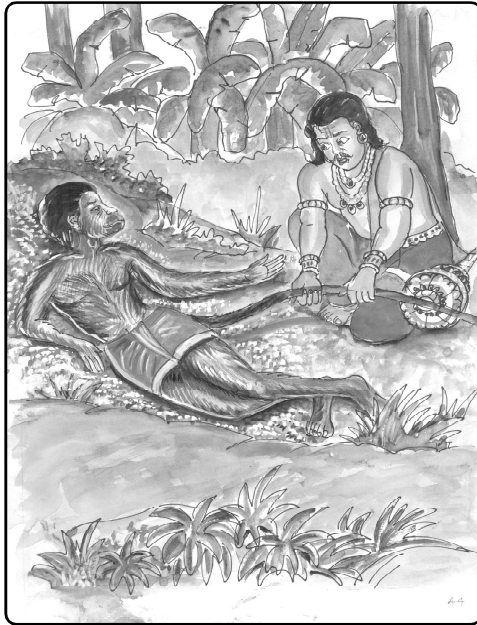
Arjuna fought till his quiver of arrows became empty. They had no effect on the hunter. Then he began to use his bow; but it was broken with ease by the hunter. Next, Arjuna raised his sword towards his rival. Alas! it was shattered to pieces. Arjuna was amazed at this power of the hunter; the hunter finally caught him and Arjuna was defeated. Arjuna now sought help from Lord Siva. He threw some flowers over the Lord's image he found nearby. But the garland fell over the hunter's neck. It was then that he realized the true identity of the hunter.

He fell at the Lord's feet and prayed for forgiveness. Siva smiled and granted him the divine weapons. He gave him back his Gandiva, the divine bow and other weapons. It was here that Arjuna was blessed with the divine weapon Pasupata. Arjuna became more powerful and strong by the divine touch of Lord Siva.

#### 44. Bhima and Hanuman

When Arjuna was away, the other pandava brothers, viz. Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva along with Draupadi moved about in the forests, in grief. On one such occasion, while in the Kamyaka forests, they came to Gandhamadana mountain. Suddenly, the wind blew scattering the petals of a lotus flower; there was also a sweet smell coming from that direction. Draupadi who experienced something special about the beauty and fragrance of the flower desired to have it.

Bhima decided to undertake this task of searching for the flowers in the deep forests. All along the journey, Bhima had to fight against many wild animals. In the process of escape, he had to kill some of them. After overcoming attacks from wild animals, he reached the slopes of a mountain, where lay an old monkey with its tail obstructing Bhima's way. It was Hanuman, the monkey



chief; he knew the visitor to be his brother. Hence, wanted to protect him from danger, as he knew the path to be inaccessible to ordinary men. Hanuman warned Bhima that only sages who have performed penances and sacrifices could cross this path. He questioned Bhima on his ruthless action of killing animals though he was a human being with senses. Later he wished to know from Bhima who he was and why he had come that way.

Thus Bhima was disturbed constantly by Hanuman with a volley of questions. Bhima confessed that he was a Kshatriya of the Kuru race born to Kunti and Vayu. Being disappointed, Bhima now in turn, questioned Hanuman about his identity and the latter smiled away without giving him a reply hiding the fact that he was also a son of Vayu; thus a brother to Bhima. Notwithstanding all this, Bhima did not waver in his resolve to go further to fetch the flower.

Bhima who felt the ego in himself at being denied a way confessed that he could cross over him like Hanuman who crossed the ocean. When Hanuman wished to know what Bhima knew about Hanuman, the latter narrated the story thus: "He was the chief of the monkeys who had helped Sita, on one side, and Rama on the other, informing the whereabouts of each to the other and concerned about their welfare. He along with the other monkeys had waged a war against Ravana, thereby helping Rama in the release of Sita

from the clutches of Ravana." Hanuman revealed to Bhima now as to who he was and helped him in crossing over the mountain to acquire the flower from a Saugandhika tree.

At the request of Bhima, Hanuman grew bigger and bigger in size and showed the original form in which he crossed the ocean. They embraced each other. Bhima became stronger, renewed with more vigour and energy.

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## 45. The Never-Draining Vessel

During their exile, the pandavas were living in the forests happily and peacefully. Whenever a guest arrived, he was fed to his satisfaction. Once Draupadi fell into trouble because she ran out of food. Then she prayed to the sun god; the god gifted her with a vessel which would yield any amount of food anytime when the demand was made. But there was one condition to be followed, if she desired to enjoy its fruits. Draupadi would eat only after all her husbands had eaten their meals. The vessel would not supply anything after this.



Back in the kingdom, one day sage Durvasa visited Duryodhana in his palace; he was well received by him and his men. So, the sage was pleased and offered a boon to Duryodhana. Duryodhana saw an opportune moment knocking at his doorsteps. He asked the sage to visit the pandavas in the forests. He believed that the pandavas cannot render the same amount of service and hospitality as

he had done and thus would suffer a curse from the rishi.

Durvasa set his journey towards the forests as wished by Duryodhana. The pandavas received him and his retinue with due respect and warmth; as was the custom, they bade the guests to go to the river and take bath after which they would be served food. Unfortunately, Draupadi fell into trouble because she had just finished eating the food. The magic vessel wouldn't work now. She knew she and her husbands would have to face the curse from the rishi. The husbands weren't aware of this fact. So Draupadi gained courage and prayed to Lord Krishna.

The Lord immediately appeared before her and said, "Give me some food." Shocked, she cried to Lord Krishna that there was none in the pot. But the Lord wouldn't listen. So, Draupadi brought the vessel and gave it to him. The Lord found a part of the food sticking to the inner side of the vessel and partook of it.

Meanwhile, the sage and his team members had taken bath in the river. When they stepped out of the river, one said, "Oh! I feel my stomach is full". Another said, "I cannot eat anything more." Similar was the sage's feeling. Weighing the situation, he decided to escape from the pandavas and ran away with his followers.

After waiting for a long time, the pandava brothers went to the river. They found no trace of the

sage and others either near the river or at any other place. They were disappointed. When they returned to the cottage, Draupadi reported to them that she had prayed to Lord Krishna for help when there was no food left. Lord Krishna assured them that no harm comes to those who are true to Dharma. The pandava brothers and Draupadi were relieved. Draupadi bade Krishna to protect her and her husbands thus in future in times of crisis.

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## 46. Ashtavakra

When the pandava brothers were wandering in the forests, they heard the following story of Ashtavakra:

Kahor or Kagola (as some others put it) was a disciple of sage Uddalaka. He had all the good attributes and devotedly served his guru. The only weakness was that he was bereft of any good learning; notwithstanding this, the sage gave his daughter in marriage to this disciple.



One day Kahor was sitting at home and was trying to recite verses from the Vedas. His wife who was pregnant, sat by his side. Suddenly they heard a voice crying from within the womb of the lady: "Father, I have learnt some of the verses from the Vedas by God's grace. But I am sorry to say that you are making mistakes very often."

Kahor who was shocked to hear this, cursed his son to be born with eight deformities.

One day Kahor went to the court of king Janaka to beg. Unfortunately, the king asked him to have a

debate with a great scholar called Vandin, the son of king Varuna. Kahor was defeated in the debate and was sent away to the underworld as a punishment. His wife pined in sorrow for long. Later she gave birth to a boy. The boy was born with deformity in eight places. So he was named Ashtavakra. 'Ashta' means eight, 'Vakra' means deformity: As he was growing up, one day his mother narrated the story behind the misfortune his father had met with; instantly, the son desired to rescue his father.

Having decided thus, he set off to king Janaka's kingdom. The doorkeepers at the entrance to the palace were unwilling to send a mere boy into the palace. So, Ashtavakra visited the palace the next day with his uncle Svetaketu. The king summoned the boy to the hall on hearing about his reasoning capabilities. A debate ensued with Vandin, his father's opponent. In the debate, the latter was defeated after a long and heated argument.

Thus, Kahor was released from the clutches of the king. On realizing his son's capabilities, Kahor withdrew the curse on his son; he was asked to take bath in a river when his deformities disappeared and he appeared a normal boy. Yet, he continued to be known with the same name for ever.

A dialogue between Ashtavakra and king Janaka is believed to have appeared as a short treatise on Advaita Vedanta, "Ashtavakra Samhita".

## 47. The Slaying of Kichaka

The pandavas lived in exile in the forests for a period of twelve years. Besides this, in the thirteenth year, they were supposed to live incognito, i.e they weren't allowed to show their true identity.

Here is a story narrating the harrowing experiences of Draupadi living in disguise.

In the thirteenth year, the pandava brothers and Draupadi chose to live in the kingdom of Matsya where Virata was the king. Each one was in disguise. To the king they appeared charming with qualities of nobility in them.

Yudhishtira, the eldest of the pandava brothers used to entertain king Virata playing dice with him. Bhima chose to be the chief of the cooks. Arjuna with his feminine qualities suited well as a dance teacher to princess Uttara, the daughter of King Virata, as also to the other ladies in the palace. He was renamed as Brhannala. Nakula took the role of a stable keeper while Sahadeva looked after the cows and bulls. Draupadi's fate led her to become a maid of Sudheshna, the queen of King Virata. Her duty was in the inner apartments of the queen.

Kichaka, the brother of Sudheshna was the commander-in-chief of the army in Virata's kingdom. The people considered Kichaka to be the real king rather than king Virata owing to the former's powers. One day, Kichaka observed Draupadi at work in the

quarters of the queen. He was so awestruck by her beauty that he started pestering her to come to his apartments. He attempted to misbehave with her. Sensing danger any moment, Draupadi sought the help of Bhima. One day at dead of night, without anyone's knowledge, Bhima devised a plan to meet Kichaka in his apartments in the guise of Draupadi and thus planned to kill him.

Desiring to put the plan into action, Draupadi invited Kichaka to come to the dancing hall of the ladies at night when no one would be there. On the appointed night, Bhima waited on a couch for Kichaka, in the guise of Draupadi, with a veil. Draupadi waited behind a pillar. Kichaka arrived and spoke words of love to Bhima in disguise; he held Bhima's hands. Suspecting them to be the hands of a male, he turned and was surprised to see Bhima in front of him.

Both reacted aggressively to the situation and fought violently for long. Finally Bhima thrashed and killed Kichaka. He also fought against the brothers of Kichaka and killed them. But the pandavas now fell into danger. Everyone suspected that the man who killed Kichaka should be Bhima as there was none to excel Bhima in power and strength. There was the fear that, if Bhima's identity gets revealed, the period of incognito may extend by another thirteen years. However, the pandavas were safe.

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### 48. King Dambhodbhava

Long long ago, there lived a king named Dambhodbhava; he was a very powerful and mighty king who felt proud that he had conquered many others in battle. He ruled over the Earth and enjoyed everything in the world. From time to time, he used to question brahmanas, and other kshatriyas if there was anyone else who was more powerful than him or equal to himself. "Is there any sudra, a vaisya, a kshatriya or a brahmana of my strength? Show him to me."

The brahmanas who were well-versed in vedas and other religious matters warned him of his vanity and conceit. One day to restrain the pride and arrogance of the king, a brahmana said to him, "There are two rishis who have achieved victory in every battle. Know thyself to be less powerful than them." The king then wished to know where they lived and who they were. The brahmanas replied: "The two persons we spoke about are Nara and Narayana born as humans upon the earth. Go and fight with them, if you still have the urge in you."

The brahmanas informed him about the whereabouts of Nara and Narayana; that they were in the hidden regions of the Gandhamadana mountains. Without waiting any more, the king collected an army and moved towards the said mountain. Unable to find anyone there, he moved into the deeper regions. Later he found the two rishis in deep meditation. The king spoke to them and told them about his wish to fight

with them. However, the rishis pointed out that they didn't have any wish to fight with him. With the king persistently repeating his idea, the two rishis decided to teach him a lesson.

At the beginning, Nara took a few blades of grass and informed the king he was ready. A fight ensued when the king's army began attacking the rishi from all directions with arrows. Nara simply took the blades and threw them towards the enemy group. Alas! the eyes, ears and nostrils of the soldiers were cut off by the blades piercing them. Now the king began directly attacking Narayana; the king's army could not withstand the power of the blades of grass. When he saw himself and his whole army powerless, he realized and recognized the powers in the two rishis.

Falling at their feet, the king begged for forgiveness. Nara and Narayana cleansed the mind of the king and released him from their clutches. They advised him: "O king! Do not be proud. Be virtuous and respect the words of the brahmanas. Being a kshatriya, do not entertain bad intentions; do not insult anybody - either superior or inferior to you."

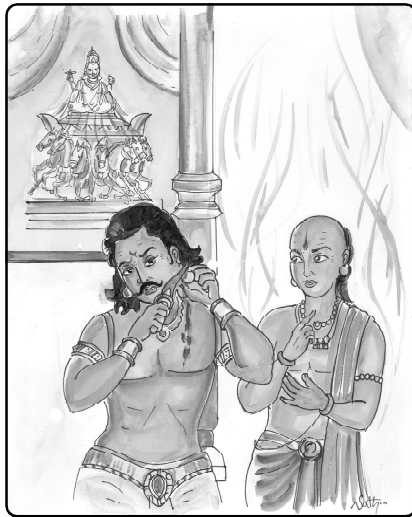
The king returned to his palace a reformed man and began ruling his kingdom righteously devoid of any vanity and pride. Regularly, he kept enquiring the brahmanas about their welfare and received their blessings.

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## 49. Karna - the Charitable, the Heroic, and the Chivalrous

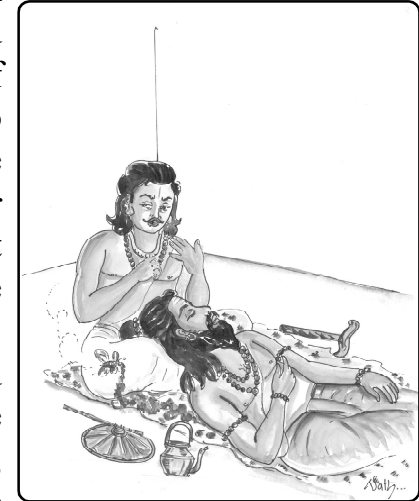
Lord Indra foresaw the war between his son Arjuna and Karna. He feared that Karna would win over Arjuna; so, he planned to deprive Karna of his powers. Hence, in the guise of a brahmana, he approached Karna. Though Karna had already been warned by the Sun god of an impending risk he had to face from a brahmana, he did not fear; he received him with all respect. The brahmana expressed his desire to have his earrings and armour. Karna, who was born with these in his body, cut them off and offered them to him without any hesitation. It



was his habit not to refuse any gift that was asked of him. Lord Indra, amazed at his generosity, offered Karna a boon. Karna said: "I wish to get the weapon of Sakti which would have the power to kill anyone." Granting the boon the Lord said: "Agreed. But it would kill only one enemy, whomever you want to; it would then return to me."

Karna once presented himself to the guru Parasurama as a brahmana, without revealing his true

identity. Nevertheless, he learnt the use of the weapons from him in the guise of a brahmin. One day, it so happened that Parasurama was sleeping, reclining in the lap of Karna. A stinging worm pierced through the thigh of Karna and he began to bleed. However much he tried, he could not bear the pain. Yet, he didn't move fearing that the guru may be disturbed. But at one stage the guru was woken up by the touch of blood. He cried, "Who are you? You are not a brahmana. Only a ksatriya can tolerate the pain." Karna, at this hour, had inevitably to confess that he was not a brahmana. The guru cursed him thus: "Your weapon would fail you at the right moment. You cannot remember the invocatory mantra."



As per the curse pronounced by the guru, Karna couldn't remember the mantra when he was fighting against Arjuna in the Kurukshetra war. He was killed by Arjuna when his chariot wheel got stuck in the earth.

Kunti, the mother of the pandavas revealed after the war that Karna was her son and the eldest brother of the pandavas.

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## 50. Sankha and Likhita

After the Kurukshetra war, Yudhishtira sat disappointed, regretting the loss of many lives in both the armies. Then, Sage Vyasa narrated the following story to draw his attention to the duties of a king.

Sankha and Likhita were two sages and also brothers who lived in the country of king Sudyumna.

The two brothers lived in two separate houses built near the river Bahuda. The houses were surrounded by beautiful flower and fruitbearing trees. Once Likhita came to visit Sankha in the latter's house. However Sankha had gone out. Likhita who saw the fruits in the trees plucked some and began eating them.



Just then, it so happened that Sankha arrived. Looking at his brother eating the fruits, he asked: "Where did you pick these fruits from?"

Likhita replied, "From your garden."

Sankha said, "Brother, you are a thief because you have taken something from my garden without my permission. Go to the king and confess your mistake."

Likhita didn't question his brother. He immediately went to meet king Sudyumna. The king came out with his ministers when the gate-keepers informed him of sage Likhita's arrival. The king questioned the sage about the purpose of his visit. Likhita said that he must be punished for his act of thieving. But the king who considered the mistake of Likhita to be something trivial, refused to punish him; he felt reluctant. However on the insistence and demand from Likhita, he was forced to punish him. The king ordered his servants to cut off both the arms of Likhita.

Likhita arrived home and reported to his brother that he had received the punishment and sought pardon from his brother. Sage Sankha expressed the feeling that he was not angry with his brother; then he instructed his brother to go to the river-bank and wash himself. Amazingly, after the bath, Likhita saw his arms restored. This was possible as a result of the power of penances in Sankha.

Sankha said, "Though I had powers to punish you, I have sent you to the king because I felt it was the king to bring justice in the case." Such was the quality of the sage Sankha. The king on his part acted justly and gained name and fame.

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## 51. The Fowler and The Pigeon

Once there was a fowler who earned his living by killing birds and other creatures and selling their flesh. Everyone disliked him as he resorted to such actions.

One day, as was his habit, he was seen in a forest hunting birds. There arose a terrible storm and when the fowler was about to take shelter, there came the feeble voice of a female-pigeon wanting to be rescued. The fowler picked up the bird and put her in his cage. Even now the fowler proved his cruelty by caging the bird.

When the rain stopped, he began moving away from there, wandered, and as dusk fell came to a tree full of birds. Having decided to take shelter under it for the night, he slept. Fortunately for the female pigeon, this was its very home. But alas! It was caged and could not come out.

In the morning, she heard a male pigeon recalling aloud the good qualities of his wife. He expressed his sorrow in leading a life without his wife. The wife, viz. the female pigeon heard this and reacted back making observations on the qualities of a husband and how fortunate she was to be wedded to him. She spoke thus: "Dear, look at this wretched fowler here who has caged me. However he is your guest. Offer him hospitality; do not consider him your enemy by which you may be afflicted with a sin as bad as killing a cow

or a brahmana. Tradition has it that killing a cow or a brahmana is a sin."

So the male pigeon asked the fowler how he could help him; to this the fowler replied: "I need some food, I am also thirsty." The pigeon replied that he cannot serve him food as it is not in their habit to store food. Speaking thus the pigeon jumped into the fire that has been made, as an act of self-sacrifice and offered himself as food to the fowler.

Now the fowler thought: "What is this I have done? I have been the cause of all this. I would now renounce all this act of killing creatures and lead a life of asceticism. Then he threw away all the tools used in hunting and released the caged female bird.

But what is the use? The female bird was now alone having lost her companion. Reflecting on the thought that leading a life without him would be meaningless, she too was about to jump into the fire. However, with the blessings from gods the husband appeared from above the fire. Thus the two pigeons were reunited and lived a life of happiness.

Puranas say that an act of hospitality would always be rewarded and considered meritorious.

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## 52. The Camel

At the end of the great war at Kurukshetra between the pandava and the kuru race, the former emerged victorious. However, Yudhishtira was unwilling to either celebrate the victory or ascend the throne as he was exceedingly shaken by sorrow over the death of his own kinsmen. Narada, rishi Vyasa and many other brahmanas consoled Yudhishtira and advised him to approach the grandfather Bhishma for counsel.

Accordingly Yudhishtira met Bhishma and questioned him as to what kind of work should be done by a king and what are those works by which a king may become happy. In this context, it is believed that Bhishma narrated the following story about a camel. There is a reference to all this in the Santiparva of the Mahabharata.

In the golden age of Krtayuga, there lived a huge camel who performed penances in the forest observing a life of austerity and rigid vows. The Lord was highly gratified and blessed the camel with boons. The camel said, "O Lord, let my neck become so long that I would be able to get any food that may lie at the end of even a hundred yojanas." The great Lord said, "Let it be so." He also gained the power to remember and recall his past actions. The camel then returned to the forest rejoicing. But the boon worked upon him as a curse because since that day he lived a life of idleness. Indeed, he did not even go out in search of food.

One day it so happened that the camel was grazing by extending his long neck. At the same time, a severe

storm occurred. It began raining heavily. The whole earth was under deluge. Then the camel began moving to find a shelter for himself; in the process, he found a cave. He could put his head and only a part of his neck into it. The remaining portion of his body was getting drenched; he began shivering with cold. Meanwhile, there came a jackal and his wife. They too were fully drenched, but after entering the cave, they were safe.

The jackal, besides being a meat-eater was hungry at that time. So he began eating a part of the neck of the camel. Sensing this and writhing in pain, the camel tried to shorten his neck. But as he moved it up and down, the jackal and his wife applied more pressure and dragged his flesh. Soon the camel died. The storm stopped and the jackal and his wife left for home safely.

Thus, narrating the story of the camel did Bhishma counsel Yudhishtira that victory rests upon intelligence. He advised him to avoid idleness, control his senses and cleverly execute his duties with proper means by doing which the kingdom will stand for long.

Bhishma finally said to Yudhishtira, "O Yudhishtira! Exercising thy intelligence, act in this world!"

[Note: The camel had to pay heavily for his foolishness and callous attitude; whereas in the case of the jackal, his size, intelligence and shrewd nature saved and protected him from the calamity that arose.]

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### 53. The Arrogant Door-Keepers

Vaikunta is the abode of the god of gods, Lord Vishnu. He is always seen in a reclining posture lying on the coils of the five-headed serpent. Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu and the goddess of prosperity always appears at his feet.

Once a group of rishis, viz. Sanatkumara and his brothers wished to visit the Lord. After passing through about six gates, they reached the entrance to the seventh gate. Here they were not allowed to proceed as two gate keepers viz. Jaya and Vijaya prohibited them from entering the gates. Angered at the humiliation caused to them, as is their wont, they instantly cursed the two door-keepers. The annoyed rishis spoke thus: "You seem to feel proud being in the service of the Lord. We curse that you should be away from the presence of the Lord. You will fall to the earth and be born as men involving yourselves in evil doings."



The two door-keepers fell at their feet and begged them to rid them of the curse; the rishis, after careful

thought said, "In your succeeding births you will hate the Lord. Yet the Lord will dwell in your hearts."

The rishis then met the Lord and reported to Him of the events that took place at His doorsteps. The two door-keepers themselves met Lord Narayana and implored him to save them from the curse. The Lord said, "I cannot do away with the punishment given by the rishis. However, I can modify it. It is that you will be born three times upon the earth. You will hate me, yet you will think of me more than a devotee. You will reach me finally, when I would be liberating you from this curse."

In their first birth, they were born as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu to Diti, and a great muni Kasyapa. In the next birth, they were born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna. Sisupala and Dantavakra were the roles taken up by them in the last birth. The emotions mada (arrogance), kama (lust) and krodha (anger) respectively nailed over these men in the three successive births they took wherein they indulged in evil actions.

The human incarnation of Narayana put an end to their lives. Then the duo, relieved from their curse returned to Vaikunta, the abode of Lord Vishnu.

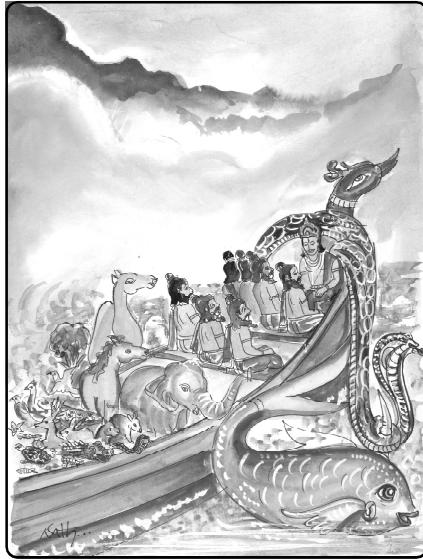
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## 54. Lord Vishnu as the Fish

Puranas narrate the stories of Lord Vishnu who assumed different forms upon the Earth either as a living creature or as a human being. They speak about the following ten incarnations or avatars of the Lord upon the Earth: Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise), Varaha (boar), Narasimha (half lion, half-man), Vamana (a short man), Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Balarama and Kalki. Whenever the Lord witnessed the misuse or destruction of the Vedas or Dharma, He appeared on the Earth.

The present story narrates to you how Lord Vishnu incarnated himself in the form of a fish (Matsya).

Once there lived a king named Satyawrat who ruled the kingdom of Dravid. He was brave, righteous and intelligent. He was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. One day he went to the river bank to offer his ablutions. As he dipped his cupped hands into the water and raised it, to his surprise, he found a fish in it. When he was about to release the fish into the waters, he heard a human voice. It said, "Sir, please save me from the



big fish in the waters." As was his habit, desiring to protect the fish who sought refuge under him, he put the fish in his sacred pot (kamandalu) and returned to the palace.

Back in the palace, the king noticed an amazing scene. The fish began growing in size. So, he put it in larger pitchers everytime it grew bigger. Lo! Those pitchers too became small for the fish to survive in them. So the fish was put in a large pond and then finally in the sea. Observing the unusual nature in which the fish was growing, the king suspected some divine intention in all these actions. It came out to be true when Lord Vishnu appeared before him and said, "Hey king! The time for the whole world, including the earth, to be wiped out has come." He requested the King thus: "Please take all the creatures, a seed each of every grain, plant, one animal of each type and board the boat, along with the renowned seven rishis. Tie one of my horns (in the form of a fish) to the boat, when the storm blows. Use Vasuki, the snake as a rope. I will raise the boat to Mount Himavan and rescue you all before the deluge will destroy the whole world."

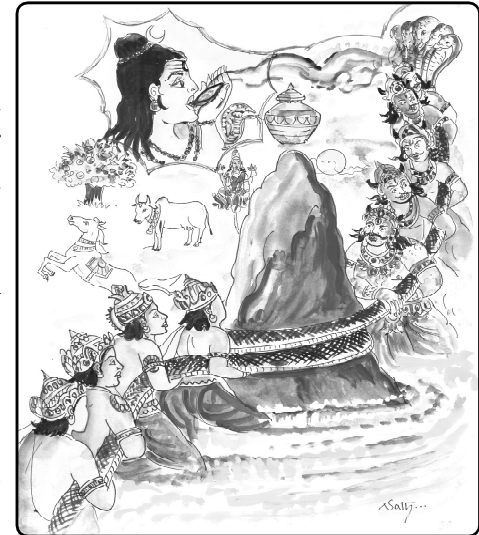
On the seventh day, a great deluge did arise as spoken by the Lord and submerged the entire earth under water. The seven rishis, the living creatures were the only ones to survive. A new era began with them, once the deluge had subsided.

This was the **Matsyavatara** (incarnation of fish) of the Lord in the Satyayuga. Besides restoring the living plants and creatures for the next era, the Lord also recovered the Vedas from Hayagriva, an asura, who stole them from Lord Brahma. The Lord also taught Brahmavidya, the greatest knowledge, to king Satyavrat to be passed on to humanity.

\* \* \*

## 55. Lord Vishnu as the Tortoise

Once sage Durvasa was insulted by Lord Indra when he was returning from Vaikunta, the abode of Lord Vishnu. So the sage cursed that the three worlds would lose all prosperity and glory. When everyone approached Lord Brahma for a solution, the hands were pointed towards Lord Vishnu. Moreover there had been a controversy raging on the worlds among the demons that they too wanted to become immortals like the gods.



Lord Vishnu had suggested to Lord Brahma and others that a product called 'amrtam' (elixir) from the ocean of milk has to be churned. For this purpose a churning rod and a rope were needed. The Lord advised that mount Manthara be taken as the churning rod and brought to the middle of the ocean; while the serpent Vasuki has to act as the churning rope.

To begin the process, they attempt at bringing the mountain to the middle of the ocean. But even before it is achieved, a lot of damage is caused to the living creatures in the sea as well as to the living persons carrying it. They were crushed under it. At

one stage the mountain began to sink. Lord Vishnu now took the form of a huge tortoise and entered the waters and held the Manthara mountain on his back.

To begin with, the gods held the head of Vasuki while the tail was held by the demons. As the churning became violent, Vasuki complained of discomfort; moreover, the demons did not wish to hold the tail. So, they changed sides. Besides all this, (halahala) poison started spilling out of the serpent's mouth. It was spreading all over the earth. The gods who witnessed this thought an end must be put to this. Lord Vishnu suggested the name of Lord Siva, who alone was capable of controlling it.

Thus it was that Lord Siva was requested for help. He held his hands in a cup form and gulped the poison into his throat. Since then, Lord Siva came to be called the blue-throated Lord as the poison created a scar over his throat.

As for the 'amrtam', though an equal share was to be taken by the devas as well as the asuras, it didn't happen so, as Lord Vishnu played a trick and allowed only the devas to take it. That is why, now, we hear about only the gods to be immortal.

There was a belief that the spilled over poison was swallowed by some living creatures such as the reptiles, snakes, crocodiles, etc. It was thus that they had become poisonous creatures on the earth.

Thus Lord Vishnu in his incarnation as a tortoise termed **Kurmavantara** had restored the lost glory of the gods.

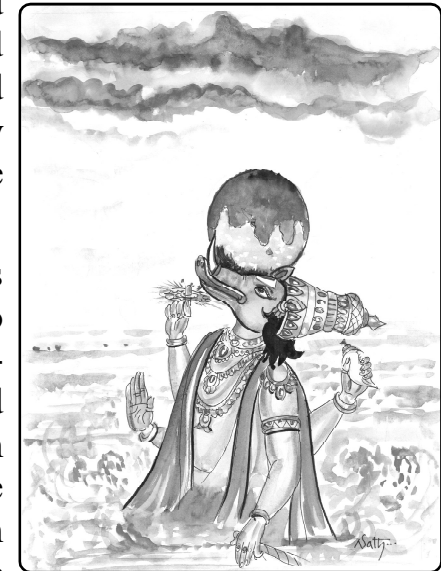
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## 56. Hiranyaksha and Lord Vishnu as the Boar

As per the curse of the rishis, Jaya and Vijaya were born as two brothers, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu to sage Kasyapa and Diti. They were asuras by nature. Their intention was to rule heaven by defeating Lord Vishnu. They performed severe penances and were granted boons by Lord Brahma, the creator.

Hiranyaksha was granted the boon to control all the realms - the heaven, the earth and the hell. Using this boon as an advantage, he once submerged the earth under the ocean. He created chaos and confusion upon the earth disturbing the living creatures at his will. Next he entered Vibhavari, the city of Varuna, the Lord of the nether worlds. In addition to all this, he waited eagerly to have a combat with Lord Vishnu Himself.

A great battle ensued between the Lord and Hiranyaksha; it went on for a long time. Finally, Hiranyaksha was killed and the Lord appeared in the form of a boar and brought out the earth from under





the ocean, using the two tusks. This incarnation of Lord Vishnu as a boar is termed **Varahavatara**.

Hiranyakasipu the brother of Hiranyaksha also acquired great power and strength after his penances. The boon he obtained was unique and strange. It was that death should neither come to him on the earth nor in the sky, neither inside nor outside his home, neither by day nor by night, neither a man nor an animal should kill him.

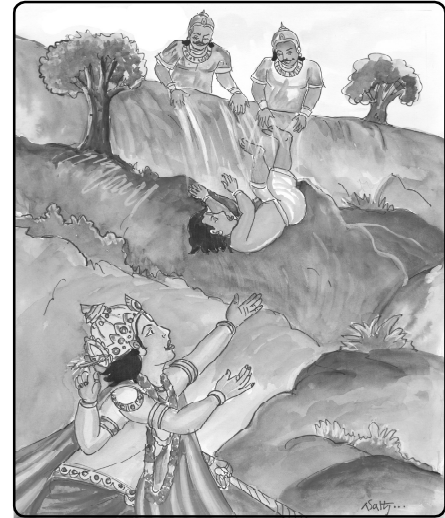
Like his brother, he indulged himself in cruelties and atrocities on human beings, especially the devotees of Lord Vishnu. Surprisingly he began harming his own son Pahlada, as the latter always had a deep devotion to Lord Vishnu.

\* \* \*

## 57. The Self-Controlled Pahlada

Hiranyakasipu began wreaking vengeance on the Lord for having killed his brother Hiranyaksha by harassing Pahlada, his devotee. Here are some incidents in the life of Pahlada who suffered at the hands of his father.

When Pahlada grew up to be a boy, he was sent to a gurukula for studies. The teacher was given instruction that Pahlada should be taught in such a way that he should be weaned away from his devotion to Lord Vishnu. After some months passed, the boy



was brought home. The father was eager to know how much of the scriptures he had learnt and how far he had come in forgetting Lord Vishnu. In the conversation with his son, the father heard that he continued to praise the Lord as the supreme one, thus earning the wrath of his father. The father retorted: "Who else can be the Lord when I am here?" He accused the teacher of guilt; but the latter humbly submitted that he was not the cause for it.

Enraged, Hiranyakasipu sent away his son to the gurukula again with a warning to the teachers.

The boy was sent home once again after a few months of teaching. The father noticed that the son had in no way changed his attitude towards his faith in the Lord. Maddened by the answers coming from his son, Hiranyakasipu began inflicting a series of injuries on the boy. First, he commanded his soldiers to injure the boy with mighty weapons. However, the weapons didn't cause any harm to the boy. So, by and by, the father continued to punish the boy in the following manner: he made the most poisonous snakes sting their poison into the boy's body; then elephants were brought to trample the boy to death; fire was created to throw him into it; though fierce wind aided the raging fire, Prahlada wasn't in the least affected. The father became tired of such tortures as they had no impact on the boy nor in his faith in the Lord; so once again he sent away his son along with his teachers.

In course of time, the boy was again led to the father's palace; the teachers expressed their helplessness in diverting the attention of the boy away from Lord Vishnu. Again, the boy was subjected to the following afflictions: poison was mixed with food; magicians caused a demon to come out of the fire that sprang upon Prahlada; he was taken to the peak of a mountain and was thrown down from there. So constant was the boy's chanting of the Lord's name and his devotion so steadfast that the Lord took him into his hands and thus saved him.

\* \* \*

## **58. Lord Vishnu as Narasimha**

In the previous story, you read how Prahlada suffered at the hands of his own father. However, he was the least affected. This was because of his constant devotion to the Lord and the Lord protecting his devotee every time a punishment was given.

Whenever the father met the son, a heated argument arose between the two, the father questioning about the identity and presence of the Lord. One day, the father enraged at the boy's unchanged mind questioned him where his Lord was.

Hiranyakasipu said : Where is your Lord? Show me.

Prahlada replied : He is in me; He is in you.  
He is in everything; He is everywhere.

Hiranyakasipu : Where is he? Is he in this pillar?

Prahlada : Yes, father.

With this answer coming from the boy's mouth, he was enraged; he took a club and hit one of the pillars within his palace. The pillar crashed with a thunder, the sound of which pierced through the whole palace. Lord Vishnu emerged out of the pillar ferociously, as a being, who was neither a man nor a beast. He was a man-lion, the form of Narasimha. Roaring furiously, he lifted Hiranyakasipu, moved towards the threshold,

placed him on his lap, tore through his body parts and killed him in the twilight hour.

Try to remember at this point the boon Hiranyakasipu received from Lord Brahma. Death came to him according to the boon he received. No man or beast killed him, but a man-lion (Narasimha); neither on the earth nor in the sky, but midway on the lap of the Lord; neither inside nor outside his home, but on the threshold; neither by day nor by night, but in twilight.



The Lords from the three worlds appeared and witnessed the event. So fierce was Lord Narasimha's anger that they requested the Lord to control the anger. Prahlada, on his part, seemed to have pleaded with the Lord to forgive his father. When the Lord wished to give a boon to Prahlada, the latter wished that he should be born in all the lives to come as a devotee of the Lord.

Here the Lord took the **Narasimhavatara** to quell the pride in Hiranyakasipu.

\* \* \*

## 59. King Bali and the Gods

Lord Vishnu appeared on the Earth with an umbrella in one hand and a kamandalu (a holy pot) in his other hand; also a brahmadanda (a brahmana's staff) hanging from it. He appeared in this manner as a brahmana wearing a sacred thread to teach a lesson to king Bali, who had occupied the land of the devas and was feeling proud.

King Bali was the grandson of Prahlada; he was the lord of the asuras. Once he lost all his glory and had approached Sukracarya, his guru. He had the confidence that his guru will not abandon him. By performing a yajna on the instructions from Sukracarya, he regained power and strength and became valorous and mighty. Armed with a big army, he approached the gates of Lord Indra's city, Amaravati. Lord Indra alarmed at seeing such an army was sure he would be defeated by Bali. When he sought help from his guru Brhaspati, the latter said: "Indra! The time is his now. Leave the place for your good." With a lot of persuasion from the guru, Lord Indra moved away from there. The king began attacking the regions of other gods. They all suffered defeat under him.

Aditi was the mother of all gods. She grieved over the situation when she saw Lord Indra and other gods scattered and dethroned from their abodes. Sage Kasyapa advised her to worship Lord Vishnu. Pleased with her prayers, Lord Vishnu promised to her that he

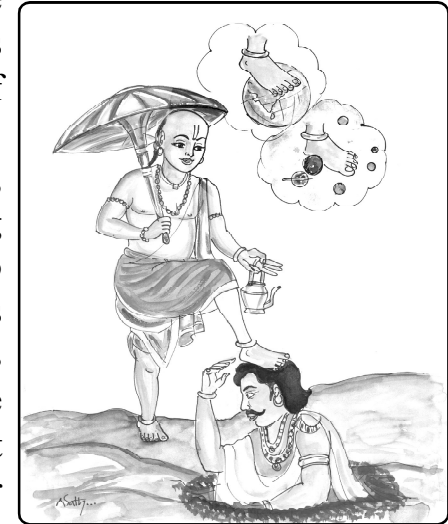
would be born as her son and would help her other sons from this calamity.

On the twelfth day of the month of Bhadrapada, a child was born. He was of small size and duly initiated into brahminhood. Because of his size, he was named Vamana. His other name was Upendra. All the gods granted him gifts of varying nature.

\* \* \*

## 60. Vamana, the dwarf

Bali was performing the Asvamedhayaga on the banks of Narmada under the direct supervision of his guru Sukracarya. Vamana entered this region and all eyes fell on this little boy. There was an unusual glow in the area. Some guessed this brightness to be the presence of Lord Vishnu Himself; everyone stood up, aghast at the sight. King Bali also stood up to invite the new guest. As per custom, he was given all the respect due to a guest. Bali didn't lose time to ask him for favours and bless him.



The boy spoke words of praise about the noble and humble qualities of Bali who belonged to the Bhrgu race. The great Sukracarya being the latter's guru felt he can be assured that his wishes would be granted. King Bali's father Virocana, and Prahlada, his grandfather were kings renowned for giving alms and respecting those who seek their favours. Speaking thus and raising the spirit in Bali, the boy said, "All I want from you is only three feet of land measured by my feet. I stand assured."

But Bali assumed that the child was innocent in asking for too little. He told him that he wished to grant him more. But the child spoke wisely saying he had enough and was not willing to ask for anything more. Bali laughed and instantly said, "So be it. I give you what you ask for." Sukracarya's warning to the king at the beginning that the child wasn't a child as Bali imagined, fell on deaf ears. He knew that he was Lord Vishnu Himself. Bali said to his guru: "Sir, I don't wish to disrespect a brahmana. My ancestors have always kept up their promises. They never made a false statement."

The Lord grew in size and showed his 'Visvarupa' (giant appearance) to Bali who was elated. Guru Sukracarya's warnings came true. The Lord (Vamana) placed one foot of his on the Earth belonging to Bali; another pointing towards the heaven (the world of gods). Not finding a place for the third step, placed it on the head of Bali himself and pushed him down to the nether world. Bali's army of asuras attempted to fight with Vamana. But Bali stopped them because he realized the power of the Lord. King Bali paid due respects to Vamana who blessed him to be humble.

Thus Lord Vishnu, in the incarnation termed **Vamanavatara** appearing as a dwarf, put an end to king Bali's vanity and helped all the Gods to regain their abodes.

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## 61. Parasurama - Part I

Gadhi was a king who had a beautiful daughter, Satyavati. But he had no sons. The King's wife pined in sorrow over this. Years passed by and Satyavati grew up to the marriageable age. She was given away in marriage to a brahmin named Ruchika.

The mother and the daughter wished to have sons born to them. The king's wife requested the brahmin to bless her with a son. Accordingly, the brahmin gave two different pots of sanctified water, one to his wife and the other to his mother-in-law. The brahmin's intention was that a boy with brahminic qualities was to be born to the former and a boy with kshatriya qualities was to be born to the latter. However, the two ladies were unaware of it. Instructions were given to them not to exchange the pots. But the cunning mother suspecting some foul play from the brahmin drank from the pot meant for her daughter and the daughter, from her mother's pot.

When Ruchika came to know about it, he felt sad; both the mother and the daughter were also shocked and ashamed for not following the instructions. There was nothing he could do now. Now, a saintly son with a sweet nature would be born to Satyavati; Her mother would beget a boy with brahminic qualities.

The son born to Satyavati was named Jamadagni. He married Renuka after his mother's death. Five sons

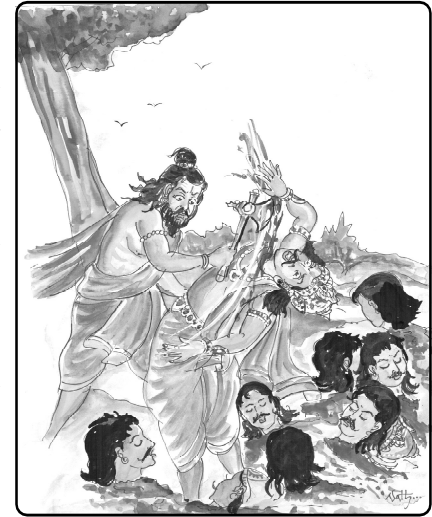
were born to them: Vasuman, Vasu, Vasusena, Ramanavan, Rama. It was this Rama who had the qualities of a kshatriya. Surprisingly, he began hating all kshatriyas, since he was a brahmin by birth. His first enemy was king Kartavirya of the country of Hehaya.

\* \* \*

## 62. Parasurama-Part II

King Kartavirya was a powerful king. He received blessings from Lord Dattatreya. However, he was arrogant as he believed himself to be stronger than the others.

Once while he was hunting in the forest, he visited the asrama of Jamadagni. After his arrival, the sage looked after the king and his retinue with all due honour and respect to be paid to a guest. When the king was about to leave, he observed a beautiful cow named kamadhenu in the garden. The cow was believed to be a sacred cow, a cow of plenty.



The king ordered his soldiers to take it to his kingdom of Mahishmati by force, if it doesn't yield. The orders were truly followed. Jamadagni could do nothing to save the cow and grieved over it. His son Rama when he knew about it became angry. This Rama was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. The Lord gifted him with an axe, which he carried over his shoulders always. Thus did he become Parasurama as 'Parasu' means 'axe'.

Even before the king entered his city, he saw the enraged Rama chasing him. So he sent an army of

soldiers to fight against him. But Rama destroyed them all. So the king himself began attacking Rama with his thousand hands; however, Parasurama was more powerful and sent back the arrows. The fight went on for a long time. Finally, Parasurama cut off the head of king Kartavirya.

One year or so had passed. Kartavirya's sons had not forgotten how their father had been killed. They were planning to avenge their father's death. So, one day they reached Jamadagni's asrama. Fortunately, they saw the sage in deep meditation. They found this an opportune moment, and took no time to cut off the head of Jamadagni. His wife who witnessed the scene cried out loudly to her son, "Rama! Rama!"

Rama arrived at the asrama hurriedly only to find his father dead. When he came to know the cause, he didn't spare a moment. With his axe over his shoulders, he hastened towards the city of Mahishmati, to avenge his father's death. On arrival there, he killed all the sons of king Kartavirya and heaped their bodies as a mountain. Blood flowed in the kingdom.

It is said that since then, Rama had gone round the world twenty-one times, killing all the Kshatriyas he met whom he hated. His intention was to wipe out the entire Kshatriya clan. Parasurama was said to have used blood to perform the funeral rites of his father.

It was thus that Lord Vishnu appeared as a brahmin in the world, in the incarnation of Parasurama termed **Parasuramavatara** to avenge kshatriyas.

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### 63. Sita's abduction

You have read in an earlier story how Dasaratha was forced to fulfill the two boons he had given to Kaikeyi, one of his queens. As a consequence of this, Rama had to leave for the forests.

The story which follows narrates an incident in Rama's life in the forest.

R a m a ,  
Lakshmana and  
Sita lived a hard  
life in the forests,



surviving on fruits and sleeping either on the bare floor or on beds made of grass. They lived in Panchavati, a place considered to be calm and comfortable to live in.

Surpanakha was one of the sisters of the ten-headed Ravana, the king of Lanka; she belonged to rakshasa race. One day she was wandering in the regions of Pancavati. She approached Rama and was overwhelmed to behold his beauty. She pestered him to marry her. However, she was sent by him to Lakshmana who stood at a distance. Enraged at the same proposal made to him, Lakshmana cut off her nose and ears. The severely injured Surpanakha sought the help of three other rakshasas to attack the two brothers. However, they were killed by Sri Rama. So

she ran straight to her brother Ravana groaning in pain; the latter listened to Surpanakha who narrated about how she was insulted and attacked; she also spoke about the beauty of Sita. Ravana then decided to take revenge on Rama.

Some days passed. Sita saw a beautiful golden deer pass by her cottage; when she desired to have it, Rama began chasing the deer. After a long chase, he shot an arrow at it; a voice emerged from it. It cried, "Sita! Lakshmana!" Rama knew now it was a magic deer sent to deceive him. Sita who was in the cottage heard this voice; she pleaded with Lakshmana to go and save her husband. Lakshmana wasn't willing to leave Sita alone. When Sita spoke harshly that he had bad intentions, he went away in the direction of the voice leaving her alone after drawing a line asking her not to cross it.

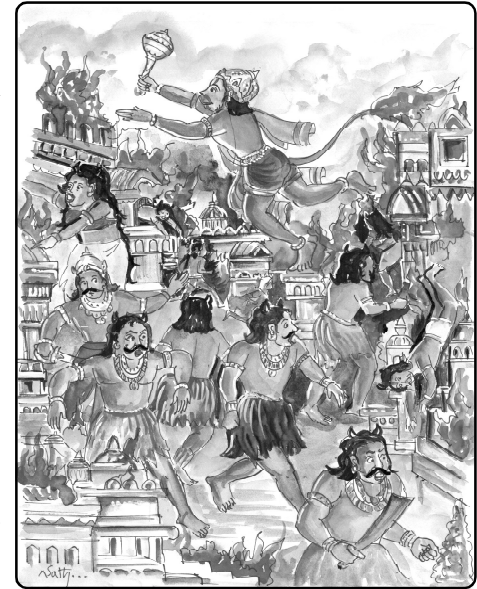
In the meantime, Ravana disguised himself as a sanyasin, entered the gates of Sita's cottage. He begged for food from Sita; he also insisted that she has to come out and offer him the food. When she did so, he forcibly took her away.

Rama was plunged in sorrow. He and his brother searched for Sita in all directions but to no avail. During their search, they saw the broken wings of a bird named Jatayu. This Jatayu had fought with Ravana in an attempt to rescue Sita from the clutches of Ravana. The bird explained to them the plight of Sita. Then it fell dead.

\* \* \*

## 64. The Search for Sita

Further on their journey through the forests in search of Sita, Rama and Lakshmana met Sugriva, the king of the monkey race who lived in the hilly regions. Hanuman was Sugriva's minister. Rama told them that they were the princes of Ayodhya and explained to them about the kidnapping of Sita, his wife. On coming to know about their true identities and purpose of visit, Sugriva made friends with them and promised to help them in finding Sita.



On the other side, Sugriva was also in sorrow because his brother Vali had taken away his wife forcibly and expelled him from his kingdom. Rama fought a war with Vali and killed him. Thus Sugriva's wife and the kingdom of Kishkindha were restored to him and he began to live happily.

In due course, Sugriva sent his army of monkeys in all the directions to find Sita. Three groups which went in three directions returned in the evening disappointed. Famous and valiant monkeys like



Hanuman, Jambavanta, Angada, Nila and others moved towards the southern direction. There Hanuman crossed the ocean, expecting to find Sita. He landed on the shores of Lanka. He searched in many places for Sita. Disappointed and hungry, he sat upon the branches of an Ashoka tree. When he looked below, he beheld the figure of a lady with dishevelled hair. He guessed she might be Sita. He descended from the tree and handed over the ring to her given by Rama; Sita was excited.

The rakshasas saw Hanuman conversing with Sita. They reported the matter to king Ravana. They began attacking him. The fighting became fierce. This angered Hanuman and he began uprooting some plants in the garden and destroyed its beauty.

Then the king's son Indrajit arrived on the scene. Hanuman and Indrajit fought for long. Indrajit tied Hanuman's legs and hands and dragged him from the Ashoka garden to the court hall of the palace. Hanuman expressed his view to Ravana that it was unfair on his part to abduct another man's wife. He also pleaded with him to release Sita so that peace can prevail in the kingdom. The infuriated Ravana ordered his men to set fire to the tail because he believed that monkeys were afraid of fire. However, when Sita came to know his tail was set fire to, she prayed to the Lord of fire. Hanuman was thus safe. He went about the whole of Lanka setting fire in turn to every house, building, tree, etc.; each street and colony was engulfed

in flames expect Vibhishana's house. People ran in panic.

Then Hanuman along with his retinue returned to the kingdom of Sugriva. He handed over a jewel of Sita to Rama as a token of having met her. Rama's joy knew no bounds. Hanuman reported to the two brothers and Sugriva that there was no hope of Sita being set free from the hold of Ravana.

\* \* \*

## 65. Liberation of Kumbhakarna

Rama and Lakshmana followed by Sugriva, Hanuman and the rest of the monkey race reached the shores of the ocean to discuss a plan on how to get back Sita. As per the plan, the monkey army built a bridge across the ocean, crossed it and set foot on the soils of Lanka.

Sugriva first sent Angada to Ravana's palace for peace talks. Angada had introduced himself as Vali's son. When Ravana came to know who Angada was, he commanded his servants to capture the monkey. However the powerful Angada escaped by jumping high and hitting against Ravana's crown.



The battle between the monkey race and the rakshasas continued for a long time and turned violent. Famous soldiers on both sides lost their lives. At such a time, Ravana sent his son Indrajit. Using the powers of magic for which he is well-known, he attacked Rama and Lakshmana with the weapon of snakes. They fell down. Indrajit concluded that they have been defeated because he felt that no powerful man can overcome the attack from snakes. However, it is said

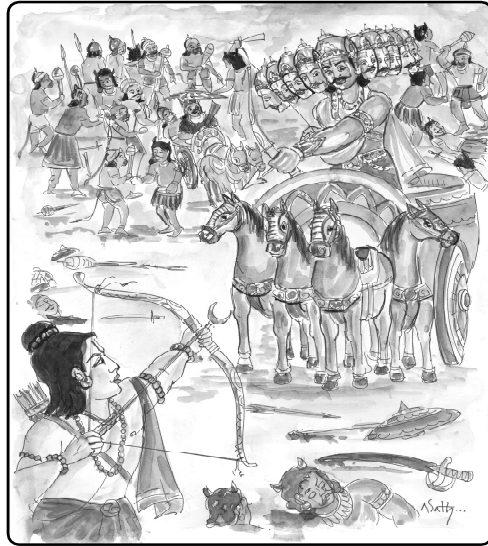
that the Garuda bird had rescued the two brothers from danger. To the surprise of Ravana and Indrajit, the monkey army roared again as Rama and Lakshmana were alive. Then Ravana had no other option but to seek the help from his elder brother Kumbhakarna. This was not so easy because he was a man of massive structure and sleeps for half of the year. Trumpets were sounded and the drums beaten. With great difficulty, Ravana's men woke him up.

Such a man set his foot on the battlefield. Many of the monkeys ran in panic due to fear. He held Sugriva but he escaped from his grip. Hanuman and Lakshmana began assaulting him. After a heated battle, Rama joined them and killed him. When Indrajit heard about his uncle's death, he entered the battlefield. He criticised Vibhishana for joining the enemy ranks and defaming the family name. Indrajit faced Lakshmana first. The latter decided to use his powerful weapon of Indra on Indrajit. By this, the latter's bejewelled head was cut off.

\* \* \*

## 66. Liberation of Ravana

King Ravana felt distressed and shocked at the huge loss of his powerful army. His kinsman too have fallen victims in the hands of Rama and Lakshmana. So the enraged Ravana himself came down now to the battle scene with the intention of taking revenge on Lakshmana. He reacted angrily on seeing Vibhishana on the other side. He drew an arrow at him. However Lakshmana came to his rescue. Alas! The arrow hit him; it was so powerful that Lakshmana fell down unconscious. Ravana returned to his palace rejoicing.



Rama was steeped in sorrow. He felt relieved when someone said that Lakshmana was only unconscious but not dead. It was suggested that a herb named Sanjivani can bring back Lakshmana to consciousness. Hanuman was sent on this errand; it was said that this plant was available only on the Drona mountainside. As night had set in, Hanuman could not identify the herb. So, he uprooted the mountain and brought it. When the paste of the herb was applied over Lakshmana, he regained consciousness.

Ravana was dumbfounded to hear about Lakshmana's recovery to life. As Rama's army was ready again, he arrived and encountered Rama and Lakshmana. Rama stood on the ground while Ravana was seen in the chariot. Each powerful weapon sent by Ravana was neutralized by the arrows coming from Rama. He lost the power to attack the two brothers. Finally the ten-headed Ravana was killed; he lay dead on the ground, when Rama used the weapon of Brahma.

The devas, asuras, celestial ladies and gandharvas showered their blessings on Rama and Lakshmana. Rama bid farewell to Vibhisana after crowning him the king of Lanka. He left for Ayodhya accompanied by Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman.

In Ayodhya to the merriment of everyone, Rama was crowned the king.

It was thus, in the incarnation as Sri Rama, termed **Ramavatara** that Lord Vishnu wiped out the evil-natured Ravana and Kumbhakarna, who were Jaya and Vijaya in their earlier births; they were liberated from their sins by Sri Rama.

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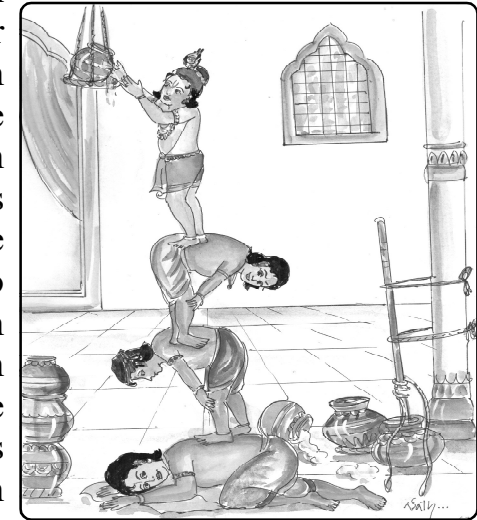
## 67. Sri Krishna's Birth

Lord Krishna was born to Devaki and Vasudeva in his uncle Kamsa's prison in the Dvaparayuga, before the age of Kali began. Kamsa lived in the city of Madhura. He had imprisoned Krishna's parents fearing his death from their eighth child - a boy who would be born to them as predicted by a heavenly voice.

When the eighth child was born as a boy, Vasudeva to save the child, took him away secretly in the night to Nanda and Yasoda's house in Gokula. He had to cross the swollen river Yamuna in thunder and lightning. Yasoda had given birth to a girl child there. Vasudeva carried away the girl child after placing his male child alongside Yasoda. All this happened with the powers of 'Maya' in Sri Krishna. He appeared in the incarnation of Lord Vishnu to free the people in the city of Madhura from the tyranny of a wicked king named Kamsa. The boy grew up under the love and care of Nanda and Yasoda in Gokula.



As a child in human form, he did show his mischievous nature. If one is to narrate the tricks Krishna played in his boyhood, the list becomes never ending. The gopis and other cowherds often complained to Yasoda about his pranks, the most common of which was stealing either curds or butter in other houses. He became well-known for stealing these as also milk from the pots. He used to induce other children also to join him. When he could not reach the pots, he made his friends bend down and climb one over the other to form a ladder or made a hole in the pots with a stick when they were unable to reach them.



He used to release cows in the sheds before their milking time. Some exclaimed: "O Mother! Who would bear your child's tricks?" Others commented with mouths wide-open: "Oh no! This is too shocking!"

Yasoda who heard all this, sometimes believed them and beat him and at other times refused to lend them an ear.

\* \* \*

## 68. Sri Krishna's Pranks

Yasoda who brought up Sri Krishna faced many situations wherein she had to be answerable to the naughty tricks played by the divine boy on others. She herself was disturbed many times while she was attending to her household work. As a mother she enjoyed some of them and cast aside other complaints which came from various quarters.

Here are some anecdotes in the life of Sri Krishna which are not only interesting but also create wonder as well. In these incidents, Yasoda tries various measures to keep the boy away from her and others so that there would be no hindrance to their household work.

One day the gopas and gopikas come running to Yasoda complaining that the divine boy had eaten mud. The mother rushed out to find the truth. But child Krishna denied such an action. She wished to check and find the truth for herself. She asked Sri Krishna to open the mouth. Lo! What did she find? She saw the whole universe with its moving and unmoving organisms - the sky, the stars, as also water, fire and air. She was surprised to find the land on which she



was standing, the islands and the mountains. Unable to overcome the truth of the scene she had witnessed, she wondered whether it was Lord's Maya or a dream.

On one occasion, Yasoda tried to tie the child to a mortar. But at every attempt, the rope became two inches short. Soon she began perspiring and became tired. Finally the Lord allowed himself to be tied up. Thus leaving him there, she went away. The child tried to release himself. When he couldn't, he dragged the mortar and started moving forward. The weight of the mortar, in no way caused any burden to the child. But trouble started when it was stuck between two trees. He had to exert pressure to free it from the trees; in the melee, the trees got uprooted with a big sound. Every one ran towards that direction and was awestruck at the sight.

On another occasion, the mother prepared a sling bed from under a cart and allowed the child to go to sleep. When the child fell asleep, the mother left the place. When she returned, she was surprised to see the cart upside down and searched for the child. She bent down and lifted the child in her arms in anxiety; to her surprise she found the child safe.

The child seemed to have woken up, and cried; as the mother hadn't responded, he seemed to have kicked and moved within the sling violently, which caused the cart to turn topsy-turvy. Yet the damage caused to the cart was unbelievable in magnitude.

\* \* \*

## 69. Sri Krishna and Kaliya, the serpent

The cowherds and other villagers in Gokula complained to Sri Krishna about the terror being created by a black serpent Kaliya in Kalindi (Yamuna) river. They approached him as they believed him to be the one who was to root out the evil and the wicked out of the earth.

Kaliya was a multi-headed serpent who lived in the caverns of the river and was ejecting poison in the waters. The effect of the poison was such that the plants, animals, birds and other creatures living nearby dropped dead, either by inhaling the surrounding air or drinking the water from the river.



Moved with pity on seeing some of the villagers lying lifeless on the banks of the river, Sri Krishna jumped into the waters from the top of a Kadamba tree; the leaves of this tree had also withered away. Unfortunately Sri Krishna fell into the clutches of the black serpent. Emitting deadly poison from its mouth, he coiled himself tightly around Krishna as though to squeeze the energy out of him; he rattled at being disturbed suddenly within his territory. Sri Krishna struggled to get himself released from its pangs. In the melee, both of them disappeared into the water.

The gopas and gopikas and the cowherds felt distressed at Krishna's disappearance; they witnessed evil omens portending danger. The news spread far and wide. Hundreds gathered on the banks of the Yamuna. They felt that life would be meaningless without Krishna. The women on the bank of the river found it difficult to dissuade the Lord's mother who desired to join her son. Meanwhile, Sri Krishna released himself from its coils after much trial; then, he mounted onto its hood and began to dance. As and when the serpent's head was raised, deadly venom spewed out of its mouth and nostrils; Krishna would then be ready to put the head down with his heels. Head after head was stamped down upon by Him as he danced to the tunes of drums and tabors. The gandharvas, the siddhas, the apsaras and other celestials rejoiced on watching his dance - drama.

Through his past good actions, Kaliya now realized that his opponent was none other than the Lord Himself. He and his wives fell prostrate before him who was the forgiver of sins.

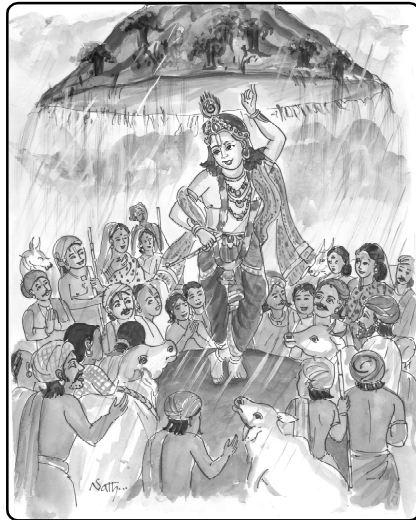
The merciful Lord told him to move away from these waters to the sea, along with his other host of serpents. Thus, did the Lord relieve the people of the misery, and made the waters of Yamuna pure. Lord Krishna left the marks of his footprints on the hoods of the snake as a royal divine seal. He assured Kaliya that he and his creed need not live in fear of Garuda.

Finally the Lord joined Yasoda, Nanda, the cowherds and other men and women on the banks of the river Yamuna to the merriment of all.

## 70. Sri Krishna and the Govardhana Mountain

The inhabitants of Vraja were getting prepared for the conduct of Indrayajna, a yajna to be offered to propitiate the rain god Indra to shower and bless them with good rains. When Lord Krishna heard about this from Nanda and the other villagers, he inquired of them what purpose is achieved from performing a yajna to lord Indra. The villagers expressed the belief that it would help the crops to grow and bring prosperity to the nation. But Lord Krishna pointed out to them that one has to experience the joys, sufferings and fears in one's life in order to wipe out the karma springing from the actions of one's previous life. So, he suggested that the cows, the mountains and the trees be worshipped as the cowherds live in or near the forests and mountains; also that the same material gathered for the Indrayajna could be utilized for worshipping the cows, the mountains, etc. This news resulted in Indra getting agitated and angry.

He created a panic. Lightning and thunder were raised; clouds burst and rain shattered down on the



earth. People ran helter skelter. The ups and downs of the land were not to be differentiated because it was flooded with water. They prayed to Lord Krishna to keep them away from this fury.

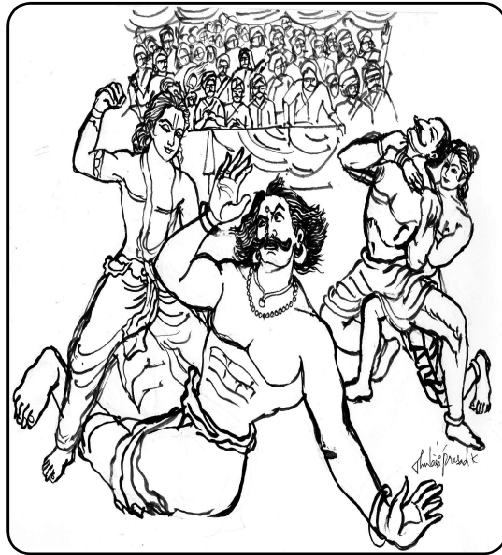
Observing the situation and the people's misery and helplessness, Lord Krishna thought: "This must be the work of the irate Indra. I shall rescue these people who have taken shelter under me. So saying he lifted the Govardhana mountain on his little finger and raised it high. He asked all the people to come under it to protect themselves from the torrents. People ran here and there, shifted articles of domestic necessity and settled down under the mountain. Krishna assured them all that the mountain would not fall down and the villagers lived peacefully under it.

Lord Indra perceived the power with which Lord Krishna stood for many days with the finger raised. By being debased, the former dispelled his pride and vanity; he brought the chaotic situation to a halt. Then the sun began shining brightly; it was now time for the inhabitants to go back to their places after which Krishna replaced the mountain in its place.

Every man, woman and child, the gopas and the gopikas danced round (circumambulated) Lord Krishna as well as the mountain and worshipped Him and offered fruits and flowers. Having thus completed the worship, they returned home. All living creatures (including the cattle) lived happily thereafter.

## 71. Sri Krishna and Balarama

Balarama was born as the seventh child to Devaki and Vasudeva and Sri Krishna as the eighth child. When Kamsa came to know that the eighth child was born, he ran to the prison and to his surprise he saw a girl on the lap of his sister Devaki. Yet the fear in him continued. So, he began mercilessly killing all the children born in the city. He imprisoned his own father Ugrasena because the latter warned him of his cruel actions.



He began sending rakshasas in all directions to identify Sri Krishna from among the children. Once a rakshasa named Putana entered Sri Krishna's house and began feeding him. But Sri Krishna who knew everything began sucking blood out of Putana and killed her. With Putana's death, Kamsa believed that his enemy must be growing in Gokula. So, he sent rakshasa after rakshasa to find and kill Sri Krishna. Next came the asura Sakata who entered the wheel of a cart intending to carry away Sri Krishna and kill him. But the wheel

was kicked away. Next Trinavarta appeared as a whirlwind. When he lifted Sri Krishna, the latter became too heavy to be carried; thus Trinavarta collapsed on the ground.

Around the same time, Balarama who was also growing, had acted similarly killing monstresses such as Dhenuka, Pralamba, etc. The two brothers jointly killed a wild elephant Kuvalayapida. On the other hand, they also blessed those that honoured them such as the gardener and a hunch-backed maid-servant Kubja. The gopas and gopis lived happily in Gokula with the belief that the divine child would bring peace and prosperity to their homes.

But back in Madhura, Kamsa still hadn't overcome the fear of death. The news that the most powerful Kuvalayapida had also been subdued, shocked him. Now, he invited the two children, Sri Krishna and Balarama for a wrestling match. The brothers, accompanied by their village folk, reached the arena. Kamsa was seated at a higher level. The wrestling began. Chanura and Mustika, two mighty men faced Sri Krishna and Balarama respectively. People feared the teams were uneven as they considered the two brothers to be children. However, after violent blows and bouts, Sri Krishna lifted Chanura, twirled him round and round and dashed him to the ground. At the same time, Mustika was also severely attacked by Balarama and both lay dead on the ground.



Kamsa who lost his powerful men and army, shouted to his soldiers to capture Sri Krishna and Balarama. He also commanded them to execute Vasudeva and Ugrasena. Sri Krishna could no longer tolerate the sinful words and actions of his uncle. He went near him, threw him to the ground and fell on him. He crushed him to death. Everyone in the city of Madhura rejoiced except his wives and some loyal servants.

Thus Sri Krishna and Balarama in their incarnations termed **Krishnavatara** and **Balaramavatara** had killed the evil Kamsa, and released the people from his atrocities. Whenever and wherever evil and unrighteousness appeared, they had rescued and liberated the human beings and all other living creatures upon the earth.

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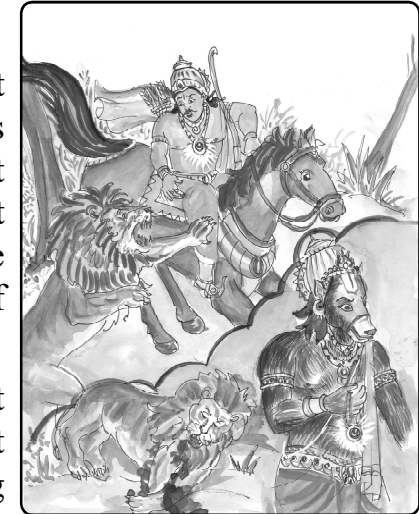
## 72. The Jewel Samantaka - Part I

Satrajit was a devotee of the Sun God. The Sun God presented him with a jewel named samantaka, for the devotion shown to him. Everyone believed that the jewel when worn around the neck dazzles the eyes of those who look at it even from a distance.

One day Satrajit wore it and went towards Dwaraka. It is said that the place where it is kept and worshipped will be devoid of any kind of harm and adversities.

Lord Krishna felt it proper that the jewel must be in the hands of the king of Yadavas. But Satrajit was unwilling. Once Satrajit's brother Prasena went hunting in the forests wearing this jewel. It appeared he encountered a lion and the lion mistaking the jewel to be a part of the flesh, took away the jewel after killing him. He was in turn killed by a bear. The latter took away the jewel from its claws to be given to its child as a play toy.

Back in the country, Satrajit was getting worried as Prasena hadn't returned home. He alleged that Lord Krishna had stolen the jewel from Prasena and killed him. To dismiss the suspicion arising out of this



situation, Lord Krishna himself set out in the direction of the forest along with his followers. After a long search, the dead body of Prasena and his horse were found. He assumed that Prasena must have been killed by a lion. Following the footsteps of the lion, he was led to a dead lion which was believed to have been killed by a bear in turn.

Krishna moved a long way in the forest in search of the bear. When he arrived at the entrance to the cave of the bear, he found the path to the cave dark and narrow. However, he entered it leaving his followers outside. The female bear on seeing a man - like figure shouted for help. The male bear Jambavan appeared. Lord Krishna saw the samantaka jewel in the hands of the child bear. It had become a toy to it. There ensued a fierce battle between Lord Krishna and the male bear. Krishna explained to Jambavan that he had entered his cave in search of the jewel and not to harm him.

After a long battle, losing all the energies and becoming feeble, the bear recognized that the opponent was none other than Lord Krishna. The former handed over the jewel to Lord Krishna happily; he also gave his daughter Jambavati in marriage to Lord Krishna.

Lord Krishna then returned to the country and handed over the jewel samantaka to Satrajit. The latter felt ashamed at the suspicions raised against Lord Krishna. Feeling excited over the recovery of the jewel, he gave his daughter Satyabhama in marriage to Lord Krishna.

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### 73. The Jewel Samantaka - Part II

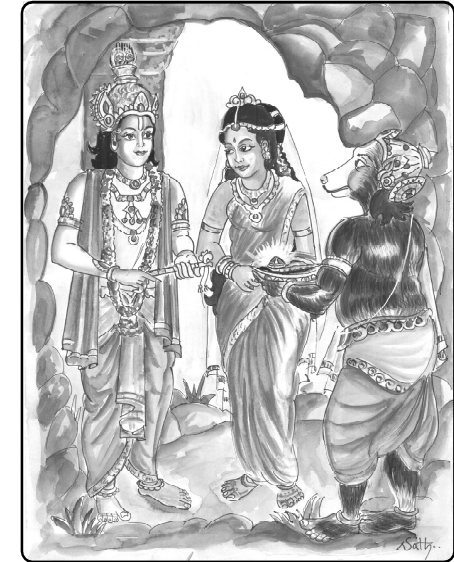
Satrajit after giving his daughter in marriage to Lord Krishna contemplated handing over the jewel as a gift to Lord Krishna. However, Krishna rejected such an offer making the point clear that after the death of Satrajit anyhow the jewel would belong to Satyabhama, his only daughter.

Yet the matter regarding the jewel didn't end there for Satrajit or for Krishna. Two deceitful people namely Akrura and Krtavarma hatched a conspiracy to get rid of Satrajit in order that they could have the invaluable jewel.

A yadava by name Satadhanva had been earlier betrothed to Satyabhama. Now that Satyabhama was married to Krishna, Satadhanva was at a loss. Hence, Akrura and Krtavarma provoked

Satadhanva to take revenge on Satrajit while asleep. In no time, the process was carried out and Satrajit lay dead; the jewel was then taken away by Satadhanva.

Satyabhama was inconsolable. Lord Krishna who was away in the Kuru land had already heard the news. Lord Krishna, Balarama and Satyabhama rushed towards the city of Dwaraka. Satadhanva on coming



to know about Lord Krishna's decision to punish him, approached Krtavarma and Akrura who instigated him to attack Satrajit. However, to his disappointment both advised him to seek forgiveness from Lord Krishna; they expressed their helplessness in coming to the rescue of Satadhanva.

He took to his heels on horseback as he saw Krishna following him on Garuda. Hurriedly, he left behind the jewel with Akrura before escaping. After some distance, the horse fell dead. After a long chase Satadhanva too was killed by Lord Krishna. But Krishna couldn't find the jewel.

Watching the turn of events and learning about Satadhanva's death, it became clear to Akrura and Krtavarma that they were in danger; hence they too began to flee. However, Krtavarma was caught hold of but to Krishna's disappointment the jewel was not with Krtavarma also. Later Akrura was questioned about the jewel. Lord Krishna instead of threatening Akrura with being in possession of the jewel honoured him with words of praise thus: "Akrura! The jewel rightly belongs to the only daughter of Satrajit, as he had no sons. Moreover as ordinary people are not qualified to wear it, I feel the jewel should lie in your hands." Akrura who was shocked at his being treated in such a manner, took out the jewel and placed it in the hands of Lord Krishna.

Lord Krishna however placed the jewel again in the hands of Akrura. Thus Akrura was rid of the guilt and blame on him in the eyes of his countrymen.

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## **74. The Killing of Dantavakra**

Salva, Sisupala's friend heard about the latter's death at the hands of Lord Krishna at the Rajasuyayaga performed by Yudhishtira. Angered at this he vowed before the audience gathered at Rukmini's wedding that he would wipe out the yadava race.

After constant prayers, he obtained from Lord Pasupati a magic aerial car which could take him to any place he desired. The Lord also granted him a city of iron called Sobha, which is supposed to be unconquerable. With a raging mind to fight the yadavas, he went to Dwaravati, the land of the yadavas taking a huge army with him. He created havoc by destroying the woods, spoiling the beauty of the gardens and bringing down high buildings in the land.

Lord Krishna who was angry with the high-handedness of Salva, assured his people not to worry. A terrible fight, as between the gods and demons, erupted with Lord Krishna's son and the yadavas on one side and Salva and his forces on the other. Salva who possessed the power of Maya, made himself visible one moment and disappeared the next, confusing the yadavas and Rukmini's son.

In the battle, Dyuman a strong and powerful minister of Salva was attacked severely, who in turn injured Lord Krishna. Watching this, Rukmini's son directed the driver of the chariot to move towards Dyuman where he lay. He sent many sharp arrows at him and killed him. The army of Salva suffered heavy

losses. Finally Lord Krishna attacked Salva with his mace; he vomitted blood. As a consequence of this, Salva abducted Sri Krishna's father. Later, he stood before Sri Krishna and threatened to kill His father Vasudeva.

Lord Krishna resolved to destroy Salva with his mace. The enemy fell to the ground and lost all his powers. Sri Krishna severed his head off. However Sri Krishna's duty didn't end there, as there came forth next, Dantavakra another friend of Sisupala.

This wicked man revenging the death of his friends Sisupala and Salva, determined to rid the earth of the chief of the yadava race. He said, "Krishna, you are my uncle's son. Yet I will slay you and pay my debts to my friends because you discharged them from this world."

A fierce battle went on between the two armies. Finally Sri Krishna hit Dantavakra on the chest, after which he vomitted blood and fell down dead.

Thus it was that Dantavakra reached the heavenly abode when a light from his body entered Sri Krishna's, as when Sisupala died. He was released from this birth after suffering the curse inflicted on him by the Sanatkumara brothers in his earlier life.

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## 75. King Sibi - Part I

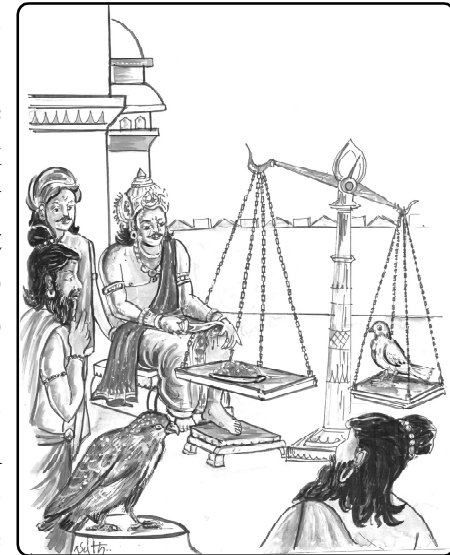
Once there lived in the kingdom of Benares, a king named Sibi. He was considered to be a truthful, loyal, courageous and righteous king.

One day as he was sitting on his throne, there fell on his lap a pigeon, seeking shelter from a hawk that was chasing him.

The king promised to rescue him from his enemy. However, some time later, a hawk alighted at the window of the darbar hall; it demanded the king to surrender the pigeon to him as it was his food. The king refused to send the pigeon to him as he had promised to save the pigeon. The hawk replied, "Hey

king! The pigeon is my food for the day. If you don't give it, my child and my wife would be left without food. I know you are into a fix now; you have to be loyal to me on one side and save the pigeon on the other. Reflect carefully upon this and act."

The king somehow felt that there was something extraordinary about the speech of the hawk. However to make matters clear, the king said, "Hey bird! You



have plenty of other varieties of food at your disposal outside my hall. Why then do you insist on eating this pigeon alone as your food. If you want, I can get you a buffalo or an ox, or cook delicious food with rice and serve you." The hawk haughtily replied, "I don't care about all other varieties of food. If you can, give me your flesh equivalent in weight to that of the pigeon."

At once the ministers were terrified. But the king calmly replied, "I am happy to part with my flesh, if only you would be satisfied. To provide the guest with whatever he desired is my duty." So saying he immediately ordered his servants to bring him a balance and a knife. When they were brought, he cut a piece of flesh from his left thigh and placed it on one pan of the scale. The pigeon was placed on the other. But the king's flesh weighed less. Some more pieces of flesh from his right thigh were cut now. Even then the bird weighed heavier. The same process continued. The ministers were getting worried about the king. The news of the king's action spread to the queens, other ministers and the people of the kingdom. Everyone ran from all directions and gathered in the durbar hall. They saw the king cutting more and more pieces of flesh and placing them on the scale. Even then, the two pans never balanced. To the surprise and shock of everyone present there, the hawk flew away into the air."

Though the hawk flew away without troubling the king any further, the king fell into a state of

confusion. He presumed that there was something fascinating about the whole affair. The pigeon then calmly addressed the king, "Your Majesty! He is not a hawk. He is Indra, the god of celestials. Earlier, you were right in considering him as extraordinary. I too, am not a pigeon. I am Agni, the God of Fire. All this happened only to test your loyalty towards your duty. You have proved you are loyal, faithful, dutiful and truthful."

In Heaven, the Gods, the nymphs and the celestials sang and danced to the tunes of drums when they beheld the king's actions.

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## 76. King Sibi - Part II

You read about the loyalty of King Sibi in the previous story. Here is another story relating to the quality of paying his due and befitting respect to a brahmana.

One day the council was being held in the court hall and the king was seated on his throne. At such a time, the servant announced the arrival of a brahmana. The king immediately descended the throne, went out and entreated the brahmana to come inside.



Once inside the hall, after the usual salutations and customary practices, the king enquired the latter as to what he would like to eat. The brahmana angrily said, "I want the flesh of your son, kill him yourself, cook the flesh and inform me when it is ready." He went out. The king, who was in the least angered, did so and invited the holy man to partake of the food. When the brahmana was invited to eat, he gave another shock to the other ministers. "I don't want any of this food. Eat it yourself." True to the instructions from the

brahmana, the king began eating it. But the brahmana prevented the king from eating it and said thus: "I have never seen an individual like you. While you prepared this food killing your son, I went about burning the city towers. You weren't emotionally upset. Pardon me. This was only to test you."

As they were conversing, the king was puzzled to see his son coming and standing before him. He looked more beautiful, more divine and powerful than any other mortals.

The ministers and other subjects asked the king why he had acted thus. He said, "I thought it was the right thing to do." Thus did the King show his respect to the brahmana who visited him; he was none other than the Lord himself.

[Note: This practice of respecting the brahmanas unconditionally was in vogue in the olden days. They were highly respected because they were benevolent]

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## 77. Takshaka, the Snake and Kasyapa the Brahmin

King Parikshit was Abhimanyu's son. He ruled his country for several years and earned fame.

Once while hunting in the forest he became fatigued and thirsty after chasing animals for a long time. As he was about to find water and take rest, he saw a sage sitting nearby in deep meditation. Without in the least recognizing that he would be disturbing the sage, he spoke to him commandingly: "Bring me some water." When there was no response from the sage, the king angrily threw a dead snake he found nearby in the sage's neck and went away from there.

The sage's name was Samika. He had a brilliant son named Srngi. The son reacted against the king as his father had been insulted while in meditation. He didn't wait for his father but cursed the king himself thus: "The snake Takshaka would bite and kill you on the seventh night from today." Having come to know about it, the king kept it a secret. In his kingdom, he handed over all the responsibilities to his ministers and others; commanded all the door-



keepers to guard the palace carefully and not to allow anyone unless and until their visit was important. Scholars proficient in tantras and mantras were called for.

One such scholar to visit the king was a brahmana named Kasyapa who lived in one of the villages in the kingdom. He was interested in getting money from the king. While he was on his way to the Kingdom, he met Takshaka the snake, disguised as a brahmana. The brahmana enquired where Kasyapa was going. On coming to know of his purpose, he intended to stop him. He laughed and said: "Hey, brahmana. I am a snake. I am going to the palace to do my duty of killing the king. No powers of your mantra or tantra would work. Go back."

Kasyapa said: "Hey Takshaka. I can bring the king back to life."

Takshaka: "Alright. Let me test your power."

So saying Takshaka turned a tree into ashes. Within no time, the tree was restored to its freshness and greenery by Kasyapa. Realizing the true powers in him, Takshaka feared he wouldn't be successful in killing the king. Therefore he hit upon a plan to drive away Kasyapa from the Kingdom.

He promised to give Kasyapa whatever he desired - wealth, ornaments, etc. He reasoned out to him that king Parikshit's life was at an end. Reflecting thus on the reasons given by the snake, Kasyapa decided to go back to his village.

The snake then entered the king's palace on the seventh night and bit him to death. The curse from Srngi came true. Also Kasyapa was successful in gaining gold and silver.

[Note: In olden days, the curses put by the brahmanas or rishis could never be reversed nor be taken back. Therefore people generally approached them with humility and never insulted them at any time].

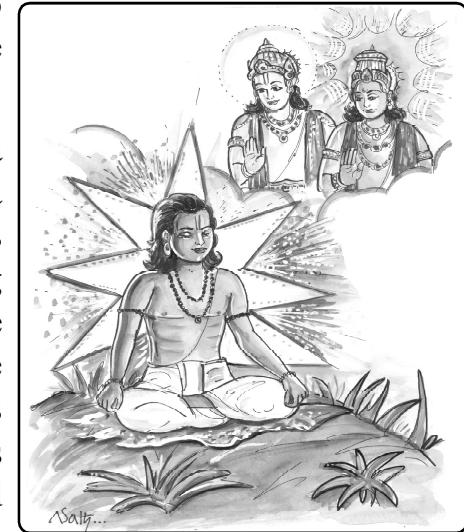
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## 78. Resolute Dhruva

King Uttanapada belonged to the race of Manu Svayambhuva; he had two wives named Suruci and Suniti. While Uttama had the privilege to be born as a royal son to Suruci, Dhruva was born to Suniti, a low-caste woman.

One day Dhruva observed Uttama sitting on the lap of his father and being fondled lovingly; He too desired to be fondled. Nay! This was not to be; he was insulted, ridiculed and scolded by his step-mother; the royal queen Suruci accused him of wishing to ascend the same place as that of his brother. She reprimanded him saying that he was not entitled to the royal throne.

Upon hearing these harsh words, Dhruva hurriedly ran home and narrated to his mother of what had happened. Though she was troubled in mind by such a treatment meted out to her son, she later pacified him and said, "Do not grieve, child. Suruci has rightly spoken. We are suffering the consequences of our past life. "She advised him to pray to Lord Vishnu.





Dhruva who still felt disturbed in mind, decided to move away to a remote place and pray to Lord Hari. He vowed to himself and his mother that he would attain such an exalted rank as none had ever reached and would be respected by one and all in the three worlds. He believed his mother would behold his glory.

In the thick of the forest, he met such great rishis as Marici, Atri, Pulastya, Kratu, Pulaha and others. Bewildered at beholding a kshatriya boy of young age feeling dissatisfied with life, they enquired him of his problems. Dhruva narrated to them what had happened and said to them, "I do not wish to attain anything high such as power nor any dominion. I aspire to win a place which has never been attained by anyone before." They promised to help him and advised him to seek the shelter under Lord Hari, referring to Him as Vishnu, Janardana, Achyuta, the Supreme Soul, the Supreme Brahma, etc. After paying his humble respects to the rishis, he asked them what prayer is to be meditated upon to receive his favour. "Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya" was the sacred phrase suggested by them. Then he departed to the banks of river Yamuna called Madhuvana and began his prayer in earnest.

The influence of Lord Hari was such that the celestials and other rakshasas failed in their attempt to disrupt the penance. The Lord appeared to be pleased with Dhruva's prayers. Dhruva said, "Let my mind always remain devoted to you alone. I wish to attain the highest goal in life." Lord Hari bestowed

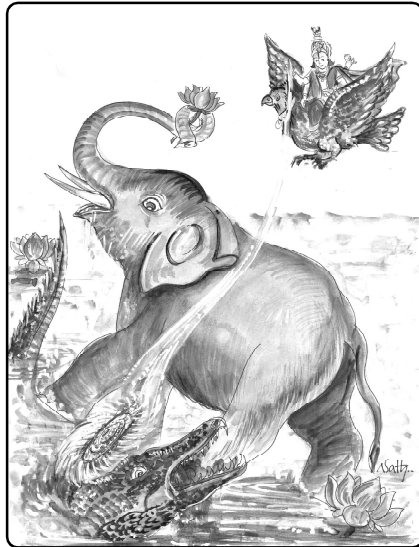
upon him the supreme status which none has attained so far. He spoke thus: "You shall attain the exalted station of the stars and the planets; a place above those of the sun, and the moon, enduring for a period of a Kalpa. Your mother shall be a bright star abiding near you for a similar period."

Thus Dhruva, having attained Lord's grace, resides in an exalted position as the steady star called Dhruvanakshatram.

\* \* \*

## 79. The Elephant and The Crocodile

Trikuta was a bright, high and beautiful mountain with many peaks glittering on all its sides. The waves from the ocean of milk hit the mountain. One of the peaks that stood on one of the sides was Trituma; below this in the valley was a beautiful lake. The wives of the devatas and other celestials frequented this lovely place. In and around the banks of the lake lived swans, cranes, fish, tortoise, crocodiles and other wild animals. The pond was also filled with scented trees and flowers. The echo from the surrounding caves threatened the lions living nearby, which roared repeatedly as though in answer to the echo.



Once the king of elephants Gajendra along with his herd of male and female elephants and their young ones visited the lake. The male elephants sprayed water with their trunks excitedly over their females and young ones. They quenched their thirst and enjoyed splashing the water.

Alas! It was at such an hour that the leg of the king of elephants was suddenly seized by a crocodile

who felt angered at being disturbed in the waters. Gajendra never foresaw such a danger. Alarmed at being in the grip of his enemy, he tried all means to get released from the agony. The other elephants tried to rescue him but in vain. The cow-elephants remained helpless.

The struggle continued for a long time. Gajendra began losing his physical as well as mental strength. The crocodile, on the other hand was gaining strength and vigour because it was in its own habitat, i.e. water. The elephant king understood his own situation as well as the fact that the other elephants were helpless. He said to himself: "As I and these creatures have failed, it must be the will of Providence. I shall have to seek shelter under the supreme god." Therefore, he started praying to Lord Hari. On hearing the pitiful appeal of the elephant, Lord Vishnu hurried from his abode Vaikunta.

As Lord Hari descended from Heaven on his vahana, the Garuda, the elephant plucked a lotus flower, held it high with its trunk, offered it to the Lord and addressed him: "O Lord, I bow unto thee." Sri Narayana, the Infinite, in the presence of other gods sent his disc which severed the head of the crocodile.

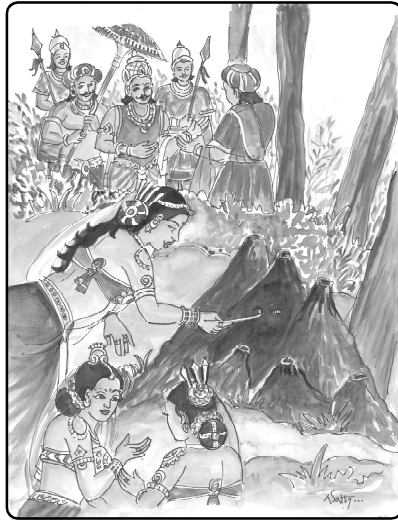
Thus it was how Gajendra attained the Lord's feet. (moksha)

In their previous births, the crocodile was a Gandharva who incurred a curse for pulling the leg of a rishi in a tank, and the elephant, a pandya king who insulted sage Agastya.

## 80. Sukanya and Rishi Chyavana

Once there lived a king by name Saryati. He belonged to the Suryavamsa (line of Surya). He had many daughters; the most beautiful among them was Sukanya.

One day the king along with his retinue went to the forest. Sukanya, accompanied by her maidens also joined her father. They began moving in different directions. While moving about enjoying the scent and beauty of the flowers around, Sukanya came near the ashrama of rishi Chyavana. She noticed two spots of light that shone like fire-flies in an ant-hill. It was unknown to her that rishi Chyavana was in deep meditation inside the ant-hill since long. She picked up a blade of grass and pierced it into the hole out of curiosity; there came a shrill voice from inside; alas! Chyavana had lost his sight.



The next moment, the king and his soldiers who were at a distance found themselves afflicted with a disease. The king immediately thought someone had disturbed the rishi in his penance. He came running towards the asrama; saw Sukanya and other maidens there; he enquired who was responsible for this to happen. Sukanya confessed to have disturbed the rishi

unknowingly. The king ran to the rishi and asked him for forgiveness. But the rishi seems to have spoken reasonably questioning the king as to who would look after him now that he was blind.

Afflicted with the disease and suffering from it, the king returned to the palace; that night his thoughts reflected on various measures that could be taken to be released from the curse and to find a solution to the rishi's problem. He visited the rishi the next day again. He offered many servants of his to help the blind man in his austerities. The rishi refused the help and to the shock of the king, asked him to give his daughter in marriage to him. But the daughter was young and beautiful whereas the rishi was old; moreover the king was very fond of her; without giving an answer to him, the king returned to his city again.

Thereafter in the palace, Sukanya observed her father's anxiety and worry; she came to know the truth from the servants; she willingly accepted to get married to the rishi. Accordingly the marriage was performed. Then she stripped herself of all the costly dresses and ornaments and went to the asrama to lead a life of simplicity and austerity.

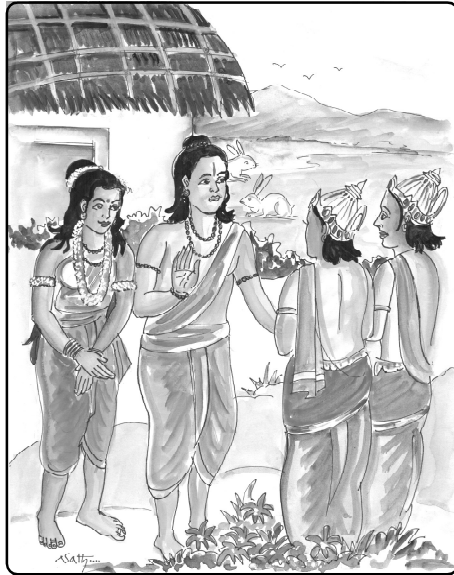
Now, the king and his men were relieved from the disease.

Sukanya in the asrama, fed and looked after her husband devotedly. She attended to all the needs and comforts her husband required.

\* \* \*

## 81. Sukanya and Asvini Kumaras

One day Sukanya, the wife of rishi Chyavana went to the river, as was her habit, to bathe and collect water. There she met two brothers. They claimed they were Asvini Kumaras, the sons of Surya and were the physicians to the Lords. Charmed by the beauty of the woman, they enquired who she was and why she was leading such a life in the forest. She replied to them: "I am the daughter of king Saryati. I am married to rishi Chyavana who lives in the asrama nearby." Shocked on hearing this, they said to her, "Lo! Lady of such beauty; the rishi cannot satisfy the pleasures of a royal woman nor can he afford to provide for her needs. Take one of us as a husband." Aghast at such words, she spoke, "Sirs, you say you are the sons of Surya. But your words do not establish such a fact."



Surprised over the resolve in the lady to preserve her chastity, the two brothers wished to grant her a boon. Being the physicians of the Gods, they offered to restore youth and beauty in her husband. But the

woman, they said, required passing a test. The two brothers and rishi Chyavana would go under the waters in a river. When they come out, they would look alike in figure, age and luster.

Sukanya wished to seek advice from her husband about what had been proposed by the Asvini Kumaras. So she took them to her asrama. When the rishi heard about it, he was only too happy and agreed to the conditions. It was then that they all moved towards the river; the rishi went into the waters first, followed by the celestial brothers. When the three emerged from the water simultaneously, Sukanya felt it unbelievable and found it difficult to choose her husband. She was baffled. Her constant and sincere prayers to goddess Devi helped her out from the problem. She succeeded in recognising rishi Chyavana as her husband.

At this time, it so happened that king Saryati arrived there to invite the rishi to attend a sacrifice (yaga) he was to perform. He accused Sukanya of bringing dishonour to the family because he saw her standing beside two young men. Sukanya narrated what had really happened; the king felt happy and relieved.

The celestial brothers returned to the heavenly abode while rishi Chyavana and Sukanya lived happily ever after.

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## 82. King Harischandra, the Truthful - Part I

Harischandra ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya. He was childless for long. On the advice from Lord Narada, he prayed to Lord Varuna who promised to bless him with a child on condition that the king would sacrifice the child at his altar. The king preferred to be blessed with a child than die childless. So, immediately he agreed to the Lord's conditions.

Soon, a son was born to the king. As per the agreement made, the Lord descended from the heavens and demanded the king to sacrifice his son. Each time the Lord appeared, the king kept on postponing the sacrifice. He cited the following reasons: That he would sacrifice his son after one month,



after the child's first tooth falls, after the child begins to grow teeth, after the namakarana (naming ceremony), after the tonsuring of the hair, after the upanayana or thread ceremony and so on and so forth: the last reason given was that the son should undergo a course of study with the guru.

The Lord, though angered, waited patiently for these years; finally one day he arrived and the king said to the Lord, "My son had come to know that he was going to be sacrificed; out of fear, he had run away. I know not where."

The Lord instantly cursed the king to suffer from a disease named dropsy. The king began to suffer much because he did not keep up his promise.

\* \* \*

### **83. King Harischandra, the Truthful - Part II**

Once king Harischandra met Maharshi Kausika in a forest. He lost his way while he was chasing a boar that was creating havoc in the kingdom. The king persuaded the rishi to show him the way to his kingdom. The rishi asked him to first bathe in the river nearby to freshen himself. The king who belonged to the solar dynasty was known far and wide for his qualities of dharma, liberal-mindedness and generosity. The rishi had already heard in the heavens that there was no other king so charitable as king Harischandra. Therefore the rishi wanted to challenge and put the king to test. The plan went thus: "The muni created a boy and a girl out of the powers of Maya: The king has to perform the marriage of this brahmin youth, which was considered to earn more merits than the performing of a Rajasuyayaga." The rishi who was none other than sage Viswamitra himself said to the king, "Give to this bridegroom as gift your entire kingdom, including lands, jewellery and other infantry." The rishi told the king that he himself was going to perform the Rajasuyayaga. The matter didn't end there. Viswamitra demanded that apart from all this, the king has to pay him the requisite dakshina. The king promised to part with every object of his in the kingdom. However all those things were short of what the rishi expected. Observing the king's inability to pay him the required fee, the rishi left giving him one month's time to pay the fee.

Meanwhile the king's wife and soldiers began searching for the king. On the way they were bewildered to see the king on the roads with hair dishevelled and with a pale face. The queen was unaware of the earlier actions and promises the king had made to sage Viswamitra. She gladly informed the king that their son had returned from the forests and handed him over to the father. Later, having come to know about the king's promises to the rishi, she silently followed him, along with her son.

The king said to the rishi, "O rishi, wait for some more days. I promise to pay off your debt within the stipulated time." Viswamitra provoked him and said, "You are left with nothing. How do you plan to pay me off." The king remained dumb. After careful thought he said, "My self, my wife and my son are alive still. At least by selling ourselves off, I propose to keep up my promise rather than dishonour the line of kings before me who believed in truthfulness." At such a moment, his wife expressed her willingness to be sold away as she felt that there was no dharma superior to keeping one's Truth. As though to test their patience, the innocent son cried: "Mother, I feel hungry and thirsty. Give me food." Both the parents looked at each other and grieved over their inability to feed the son. Added to this grief, the rishi time and again appeared to remind the king of the remaining time left.

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### 84. King Harischandra, the Truthful - Part III

The king left his kingdom and moved towards Varanasi, the holy city; while on the roads he announced that his wife was put up for sale. A brahmin came forward and bought the lady, paying the king some amount. As the lady was being led away cruelly by the brahmin, the child cried. The king couldn't bear to see the royal prince suffer the separation from his mother. So, he begged the brahmin to buy the child also. The king lamented and felt sad for this state of affairs. The king began spending time without the queen and the child.



One day the king decided that he too should be sold away. This would be the only way to pay the sage. He felt himself to be a heartless man to sell away his wife and son. On top of all this, he had to face the harshest of realities, viz. that of himself being sold away to a chandala who maintained the graveyard. He said to the king, "Keep count of the dead bodies that arrive. Collect the money from the kinsmen. Pay

my share and take yours." The chandala was none other than Lord Dharma himself.

Days passed by as the king kept on digging graves for the dead bodies and arranging the pyre. One day a lady with dishevelled hair, weeping and holding a child in her arms entered the graveyard. The king could not recognize the lady or the dead body to be his son's. In the conversation that ensued, she mentioned her husband's name to be Harischandra; this gave a rude shock to the king who fell on the dead child and began breaking his head and cried. Then the king's wife recognized her husband and was perplexed to see him in such a place working with dead bodies. The queen was so shocked that she couldn't make out whether it was a reality or dream. She felt sorry that dharma had forsaken them. The king said to her thus: "Let us pray to the God of Death to take us also." But even in such circumstances, the king's thoughts and actions were too truthful and righteous that he wouldn't end his life, without the permission of the chandala, as he felt he was the latter's slave.

It was then that the gods accompanied by the Lord of dharma descended on the scene. Sage Viswamitra too arrived. The god of the gods brought the dead son alive and said to the king, "Go to Heaven, the place of bliss with your wife and son. The celestial car is ready." To this the king replied, "How can I go leaving my

subjects. They were the ones who were with me in maintaining dharma.

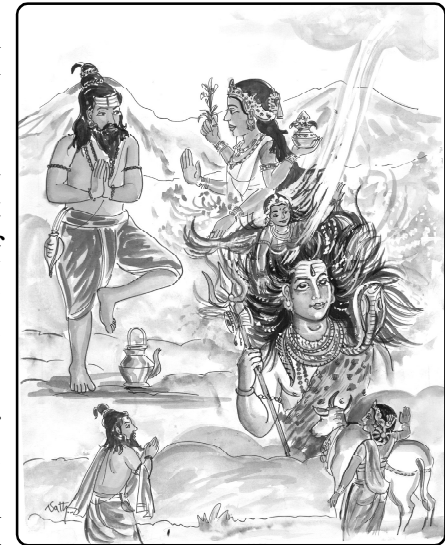
Hearing this, the gods allowed the king and his family to proceed to the kingdom of Ayodhya. There Rohitasva, the son was crowned king. Later the king and the queen, with their dear ones left for the regions of bliss.

Thus Harischandra's name became a symbol for 'Truth'.

\* \* \*

## 85. Bhagiratha's Perseverance

King Sagara belonged to the solar dynasty. He was popularly known for the famous Asvamedhayaga and other such sacrifices he performed. It was on one such occasion that Lord Indra stole away the sacrificial horse from the campsite of king Sagara. When the king came to know about it, he sent his army of sixty thousand children in different directions. Some of them reached the deepest areas of the ocean. One group spotted the horse near the cottage of sage Kapila. Mistaking him to be the thief, a volley of accusations was directed against sage Kapila who became wrathful and reduced them all to ashes.



Grieving over the loss of his sons for many years, one day the king sent his grandson Amsuman to search for the sacrificial animal. After a long search, he found the horse in sage Kapila's abode. There was also a heap of ash nearby. When the sage observed Amsuman's anxiety to take away the horse he said; "You can drive the horse home. You could also bring your uncles back to life, if you could make the holy



Ganges wash the ashes or just touch the heap of bones of your dead uncles."

Instantly, Amsuman determined to bring the holy Ganges down to the earth.

He reached the deep forest and began his penance in earnest. Goddess Ganga appeared before him after a long time and was willing to grant his desire. But she made it known to him that there was a problem; when she comes down from such a great height it would cause danger to the earth with its overflow. She informed Amsuman that the only man who could control the flow was Lord Siva. So the goddess advised him to get the blessings and favour from Lord Siva.

Amsuman who later became popular as Bhagiratha, again went into deep penance. It was only after years of endurance and struggle that Lord Siva appeared before him. He controlled the flow of Ganga onto the earth by holding Ganga in his matted locks of hair and allowing only a narrow stream to flow. As the water flowed down the land slowly in a stream and touched the ashes, the sons of king Sagara rose up alive. They were later lifted to heaven.

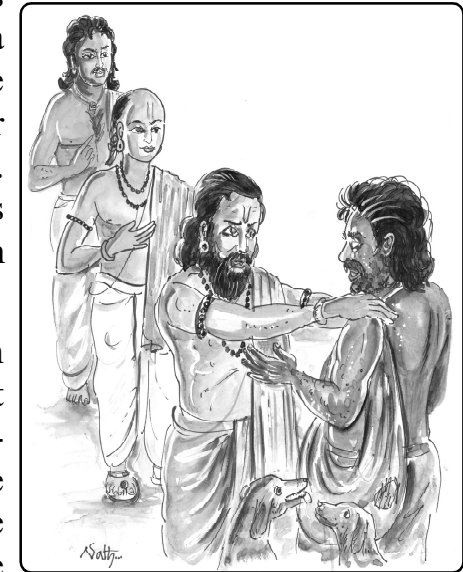
Bhagiratha thus became noted for the perseverance with which he was able to accomplish the desired task of bringing alive his uncles.

\* \* \*

## 86. Rantideva

Sankriti was a descendant of Bharata who had two sons named Kuru and Rantideva. The latter was well-known for his qualities of charity and passion. He endured pain and hunger and depended on chance sometimes for his livelihood. He spent a calm, contented life and sought neither pleasure nor luxury. The family members too shared with him the gains and losses.

Once he went on a fast for forty-eight days. On the forty-ninth day, as chance would have it, the family had enough rice and milk to feed themselves. When he and his family who were trembling with hunger and thirst were about to break the fast, a brahmana came begging for alms. Rantideva was only too happy to offer him the food first. After he left, the family sat down again. This time, a Sudra (a low caste man) disturbed him. The third one to disturb them was a man who came along with a number of dogs. He and the dogs received all the hospitality due to a guest. Now a glass of water was all that remained with Rantideva. This would be



just sufficient for one man when a man of low status approached him.

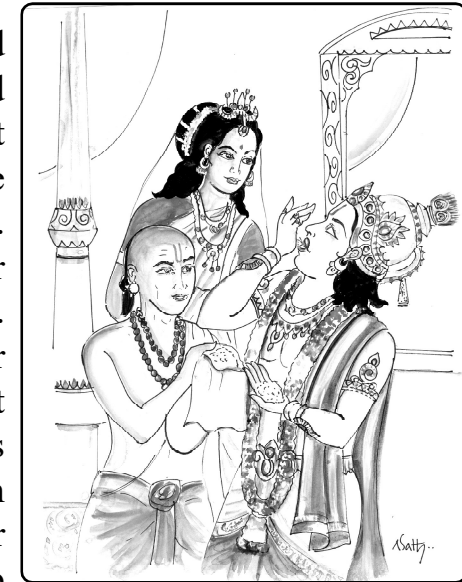
Rantideva who for himself felt neither disturbed nor angry, only prayed to god that he desired to have the capacity to relieve the pains and sorrows of his fellow beings. All those persons who partook of the alms shared by Rantideva were none other than Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra sent by Lord Hari himself to test Rantideva's qualities of endurance and patience. The three of them appeared before him and blessed him. The other family members and all those who followed in Rantideva's footsteps were also blessed by Lord Narayana.

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## 87. Kuchela

Kuchela was a poor brahmin. He was also known by the other name Sudhama. He was a classmate of Lord Krishna when both had education under the sage Sandipani. Sri Krishna later lived in the kingdom of Dwaraka.

Kuchela lived with his wife and children in abject poverty. So, his wife once thought of a plan. She approached her husband and said. "Lord Krishna is your friend. You are a great devotee of Him. He is a Kubera. He is known to be charitable and for rendering timely help



to the needy people. Moreover it is said that he cannot see his devotees suffer. Meet him and beg for alms."

Kuchela being a self-controlled man never raised his arms in begging. So he hesitated; but later agreed. Thus did he set off to Dwaraka with a small bundle under his arms. When he reached Dwaraka, the city looked elegant and beautiful. There was greenery everywhere. People were seen moving about the city with cheerful faces.

Kuchela arrived at the gates of the palace and was surprisingly received by none other than Lord Krishna himself. He embraced Kuchela, and washed his feet; later fed him with fruits and drinks; offered him a special seat. Rukmini also joined the Lord in honouring the guest. In the conversation that ensued between them, the Lord recalled an incident of their childhood days.

Kuchela was overjoyed. On the other hand, he was reflecting on how to appraise the Lord about his poverty and ask for help. Just then, the Lord said suddenly: "Kuchela! What present have you brought for me? Anything that is given with love, I accept. It may be a leaf, a fruit, a flower or water." Kuchela who didn't bring anything for the Lord, bent down his head in shame. However, the Lord took no time to grab the bundle from under Kuchela's arms. The cloth was also torn here and there. Kuchela's wife had placed a little pounded rice in Sri Krishna's cloth bundle. Sri Krishna took a part of it and put it in his mouth. When he was about to have it the second time, Rukmini stopped him. This was because she knew the result that would arise with one gulp taken by Lord Krishna.

Kuchela on his part didn't seek his help. He stayed overnight in Dwaraka and left for home the next morning. As he neared his village, he couldn't see his house in the street. Instead, he saw a big mansion surrounded by a garden which was filled with flowers and fruits. The birds flew here and there chirping

happily. He was welcomed by his wife and children who wore rich garments and jewellery. This was the result of Sri Krishna having had a gulp of the pounded rice. It was thus that Sri Krishna came to the rescue of Kuchela and blessed him; he lived happily ever after. Anything, however small it might be, if offered with devotion to Sri Krishna, is said to give him great satisfaction and happiness.

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## **88. Ikshvaku and His Devoted Wife**

King Ikshvaku belonged to the solar dynasty. He ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya. Lord Rama was born in the line of rulers of this dynasty. King Ikshvaku's wife was Sudeva, the daughter of the ruler of Kasi.

Once the king went to the forest along with his family members. When he was in a hunting mission, he observed a wild boar moving away with its family. The boar in turn saw his enemy. The boar felt that it would be a cowardly act to run away instead of facing the enemy. Sensing danger to him and his family, he asked his wife and children to hide in a cave. But the wife refused such an option. She was willing and ready to join him in the fight against the hunter.

Thus resolving to fight, the boar along with its members mounted atop a hill and began the fight. On one side, Sudeva helped her husband; on the other side, the boar's wife also did her duty of saving the children and helping the boar. Finally, the boar was killed. Yet the fighting continued, with the boar's wife not willing to retreat. However, later she and her children were also injured in the fight.

Sudeva approached the sow (female boar) and sympathized; she came to know from her that their family was suffering a curse and only from an Ikshvaku they would be redeemed. The sow requested Sudeva to part with some of her religious merits so that she could be redeemed from the curse and join her husband.

Sudeva asked: "Why is it you ask me so?"

The sow said: "Because you have gained fame like a woman devoted to her husband.

Feeling happy about what the sow had said, Sudeva blessed and granted the sow her wish. The sow regained her husband and lived happily ever after with her family.

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## 89. Kapotatirtha

Here is a story narrated by Lord Mahadeva (Siva) to goddess Parvati about the importance of a holy place known as Kapotatirtha.

The water of river Sabarmati flows to the east in Kapotatirtha. A big banyan tree grows in this place, spreading its large branches over a wide area of land. The roots fall to the ground. Many birds live happily in its branches. Among the birds, there was a pigeon that was living happily with its young ones. He was devoted to Lord Vishnu. One day, it so happened that there came a hawk as a guest to the area. The hawk said to the pigeon: "O bird! Offer yourself as food to me. I am hungry. Today is the twelfth day of the brighter half of the month. It is special to Lord Vishnu. I have come to you. If you refuse, I would curse you." The pigeon did not hesitate and offered himself to the hawk because he was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu.

This action of the pigeon was praised by the gods in Heaven. The place became holy. The pigeon went to the abode of Lord Vishnu for having surrendered himself to the guest.

So it is said that whoever bathes in and drinks the water flowing in river Sabarmati and worships Lord Siva here would get rid of the sin of killing a brahmana. It also acquired a name as a place for the living people to offer worship and food to their dead ancestors.

The message given is: "Always worship a guest. You will be liberated from this material world."

\* \* \*

## 90. Susarma

In a conversation with Lord Vishnu, once goddess Lakshmi desired to know the greatness of the Bhagavadgita which he had created, when he appeared as Lord Krishna.

The Lord said: "O beautiful lady, whoever studies a chapter or a part of it, a verse or half a verse of the Bhagavadgita, would be liberated from the sins." The Lord narrated the anecdotes from the life of Susarma, a Brahmana.

Susarma was born in the family of brahmanas. Yet he was wicked and evil-minded. He did not chant hymns nor did he follow brahminhood; he never prayed to god nor entertained guests. Besides all this, he indulged in cruel deeds such as eating flesh, drinking liquor and enjoying the pleasures with women.

One day while he was roaming, he came near a sage's hermit; there he was bitten by a deadly snake and died; after undergoing torture in the hell, he was born upon the earth again, this time as a bull; a lame man engaged him for his livelihood. He made him work hard; once he fainted and fell to the ground. Men surrounded him. Fortunately on that occasion, one lady parted with her religious merit; she was a prostitute. Yet he continued to live a hard life for some more time without knowing he had received some thing good. Later he died. Due to the religious merits obtained thus, in the present birth, he was born in a

brahmin's house in the next birth. He remembered now his former existence; he went to the prostitute and told her who he was and desired to know from her why he was born in a brahmin's family this time. She took him to a parrot and said : "Everyday I used to listen to this parrot. My heart was purified and so I had passed on my religious merit to you when you were in distress." The two went to the parrot to know the details. The parrot then narrated a story of her former existence. The parrot spoke:

"In my earlier existence I was a learned man; but I committed various sins. So, in my next birth I was born in a group of parrots. In the summer season, while I was flying with my flock hither and thither, a great sage put me into a cage and kept me and others in the hermitage. Everyday the sage and his sons used to recite the first chapter of the Bhagavadgita. I too began learning it and recited it. Alas! a fowler stole this cage and sold me away."

After hearing these stories, Susarman gave up all wicked deeds and listened to the lines from the Bhagavadgita everyday. The bird was also released from its sins.

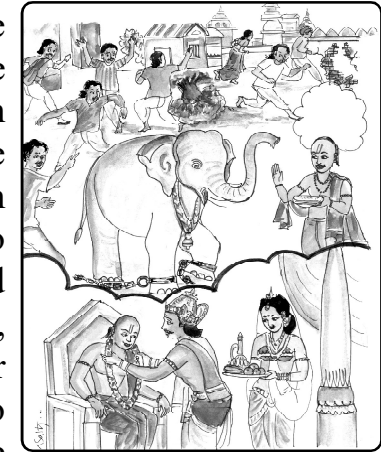
The Lord now said to goddess Lakshmi: "Such is the importance and effect of reading or listening to the first chapter of the Bhagavadgita. For such people worldly existence will not be difficult to cross."

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## 91. Khadgabahu and the Elephant

Once there lived a king named Khadgabahu in the city of Surastrika. He had an elephant named Arimardana. The elephant looked majestic and shone like the moon.

Once at night, he broke open the chains by which he was tied to a pillar and ran amok in the streets. The mahout of the elephant ran this way and that trying to control its anger and movements. This mahout, with the help of other mahouts tried all means to discipline and control the elephant and reduce the chaos and confusion created in the streets.



The king hastened to the place as soon as he heard the news. He arrived there with his soldiers who were skilled in the art of bringing the charged elephants under control. The people ran helter skelter; they moved away to a distant place to watch the fierce elephant. They protected their children. At such a time, the attention of the people turned towards a brahmana who entered this confused area, unalarmed.

He was reciting some verses from the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita. However well the mahout and other citizens warned him about the ferocity with

which the elephant moved and attacked, he remained calm. He moved past the elephant after touching its trunk. To the citizen's surprise, the elephant came under control and the brahmana was in no way harmed.

The king who watched all this in amazement and wonder went near the brahmana and saluted him. He said: "Oh brahmana! You have risked your life. How did you get that courage? What were you muttering to yourself? Which god do you worship?"

The brahmana said: "Sir, I was reciting verses from the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita when I came here. This I do every day. I owe the power in me to God."

The king with due respect invited the brahmana to his kingdom and presented him with valuables, gold coins and other gifts. Since then, the king began learning from the brahmana.

Many days passed. One day the king went out of the city; he intentionally let loose an elephant and moved like the brahmana unconcerned about the dangers he might have to face, all the while reciting the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita. Just as in the brahmana's case, the king also passed by the wild elephant without a spot of injury caused to him.

Since then, the king gave up all the pleasures of the world; he made his son the heir-apparent and began leading a spiritual life.

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## **92. Markandeya and the God of Death**

Once there lived a great rishi, Mrkandu. He was childless for a long time. He began performing penance to obtain the Lord's grace. Contented with the severe austerities performed by his devotee, Lord Siva appeared before him and said, "Mrkandu, great is your penance. Ask for a boon." Mrkandu desired to have a son. The Lord replied: "Do you desire to have a son who would be wise, virtuous and knowledgeable and live for only sixteen years or do you prefer a long-lived son with no such qualities in him?" Mrkandu chose the first of the two options.

He came home and reported this to his wife. Though they felt happy, they were not without anxiety. In due course, the wife gave birth to a charming son. Many sages visited the hermitage and blessed the child. He was named Markandeya.

As the boy grew up, he was given education in the learning of the Vedas and other sacred lore. Everyone liked him for his pleasing manners. But the happiness of the parents was short-lived as they regretted that he was nearing the age of sixteen. One day the boy noticed the anxiety in the minds of his parents. He questioned his parents, "Why do you look so dejected? What ails you?" They looked at each other hesitating to reveal the truth. Yet they spoke the truth when the boy insisted. Markandeya was in the least worried and spoke to his parents thus: "Do not worry, father. Lord Siva comes to the rescue of his sincere

devotees. Death can be conquered if one sincerely prays to the Lord. I shall strive for it."

Markandeya went to the shores, created a linga there and began his prayers sincerely. Months passed by. On the scheduled day of death, Yama, the god of death was prompt in reaching Markandeya's place. He saw Markandeya in deep prayers; he began drawing Markandeya forcibly towards him. Markandeya opened his eyes and declared calmly to Lord Yama that he wouldn't move from there until he had said his prayers. For him prayers are dearer than his life.

Yama said: "Oh Boy! Thousands of kings and ordinary people have succumbed to death. Nobody can escape. This is the time for you. Come."

Markandeya replied: "You are powerless before the devotees of Siva. You can't disturb me. Go away."

Yama grew outrageous when the boy refused to follow him. When the former was about to drag him, Lord Siva emerged from the linga and attacked Yama who fell at a distance. Markandeya fell at the feet of the Lord.

Lord Siva blessed Markandeya with immortality. Markandeya returned home to the surprise and delight of his parents. The Lord pardoned Yama after which he went back to his abode.

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### **93. King Uttama - Part I**

Puranas speak about a series of Manvantaras or what are termed as periods or ages. Each Manvantara presided over by Manus, which are past, has been described in them. The first Manu was Svayambhuva, followed by Svarochisa, Uttama, Tamasa, Raivata and Chaksusa. The seventh Manvantara or period is said to be the present one, presided over by Vaivasvata. In the following lines you can read an anecdote in the life of King Uttama of Uttama Manvantara. He was born as the son of Uttanapada and Suruci. He was known to be a righteous king and of great repute. As a man of great strength and valour, he excelled others and became as glorious as the sun.

With regard to discharging of his duties, he was impartial and just; in punishing the doers of wrong action, he was like Yama, and in rewarding the virtuous, he was like the moon.

Such a man of fame fell to the weakness of passion. This king Uttama married Bahula, the daughter of Babhru. He was full of affection for this wife. He became so fond of her even in his dreams. And whenever he moved with her or touched her, he would lose his consciousness; in other words he would be lost in her world. But sometimes this lady would speak harsh words to him; or cause physical pain by moving away from him unceremoniously; yet the king neither showed any anger nor disappointment.



However, on one occasion, he offered her a cup of sweet wine in the presence of other assembled princes. Nay! This queen rejected it outright. It was then the king became furious and summoned the soldiers. He commanded them: "O soldiers! Take this lady and leave her in the forests." Acting sincerely upon the orders of the king, not reflecting on whether the action was right or wrong, they left her in a lonely forest.

The queen, on her part, was only too happy to have parted from him.

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## **94. King Uttama - Part II**

King Uttama, after separation from his queen continued his governance for many months in the kingdom without any setback, though he was lost in deep thoughts day and night. One day a brahmana visited the king with a painful mind.

He said "O king! My wife has been forcibly taken away by someone at night when my doors were unlocked. Get me back my wife. You are our protector!"

The king said, "I have never seen your wife. Tell me about some of her features - her form, her age, her character, etc. so that I can try to trace her whereabouts."

Then the brahmana began narrating to him that she was of ugly nature with disproportionate eyes and shrunken face. As to her character, she was harsh and not amiable. To the king, who was still reeling in the pangs of separation from his own wife, this news came as a jolt. Though there was a slight difference in the cases, the problem was the same for both the brahmana and the king viz., separation from their wives. The king retorted rather sarcastically that beauty and character sometime cause unhappiness. He advised the man that a lady without character is to be forsaken. However, the brahmana was not for this judgment given by the king. He made the point clear that a wife if protected, in turn protects the children and that is how the race continues; he also felt that no sacrificial

rites are possible without a wife; if any sacrificial rite is violated, he is bound to fall. These words of the brahmana opened the eyes of the king.

The next minute the people saw the king wheeling off in his chariot towards the forests with a firm mind to return only with the brahmana's wife.

After some time, the king arrived at the hermitage of a great muni. Though the muni hurriedly offered him a seat and words of welcome, later he didn't wish to honour him with special gifts. This is because he came to know through his powers that the king too, like the brahmana has lost his powers of performing sacrificial rites in the absence of his wife; so he has to be considered unworthy of receiving gifts.

Nevertheless, the muni was willing to serve the king at his behest. Forgetting about his own matters, and bent upon returning to the kingdom with the brahmana's wife, the king then narrated the episode of the brahmana's wife who had been stolen away by someone. The muni directed him towards the forests of Utpalavata, and told him that the rakshasa, Valaka had stolen her. The muni spoke to him on the qualities of a husband and wife. If the wife is of bad character, yet the husband must be favourable to her; similar should be the wife's behaviour. He continued to speak thus: "O protector of the kingdom! If you deviate from the course of law, how do you establish others who are fallen from their duties?"

Feeling a sense of shame and guilt, he moved towards the rakshasa's place. The rakshasa explained to the king that he had brought the wife of the brahmana, neither for eating nor for enjoyment. He reasoned out that he had stolen the brahmana's wife because the latter read out mantras for the distraction of the rakshasas; also by separating the wife from the husband, he tried to disqualify the brahmana for the sacrificial rites. The king on his part felt distressed over the fact that he was also not qualified to perform the rites.

The rakshasa was not a demon by nature. So, with a request from the king, the rakshasa with occult powers expelled the bad qualities in the brahmana's wife, made her pure and released her. Thus the king helped the brahmana to reunite with his wife. He too reunited with his wife and lived happily everafter.

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## 95. A Faithful King and A Sincere Servant

Once a king by name Rupsen reigned the kingdom of Vardhaman. Oneday while he was in the court, discussing matters connected to the state, the guards announced the arrival of a man at the gate. The king ordered that the man be sent in.

The man came along with his wife and son. He humbly submitted to the king that he wished to seek a job in his palace because he had no other means of livelihood. Observing that there was truth in what he said, the king immediately appointed him as a guard at the main door of the palace. Months passed by; the man was sincere in his duties. The other servants reported to the King that this man spent most of his income on the poor. The king only felt too happy and allowed him to work permanently in the palace.

Once in the midnight, a weeping voice was heard from the direction of the grave yard. The king came to the main door and asked this guard to find out about it. For unknown reasons, the king followed the servant secretly from behind. The guard found a lady there. When enquired why she was crying, she revealed the shocking news that the king would die the next day. The servant looked this side and that side to make sure no one had heard this.

The guard determined to save the king from this misfortune; so he asked the lady the ways and means of preventing this. To this, the lady replied: "If you place your son at the altar of goddess Durgadevi, it

can be averted." The man immediately ran towards his home; woke up his wife and son; he took a knife and cut off the head of his son even as the wife was looking on; the next moment the wife fell dead on the spot due to the shock; the guard too died.

The king followed the guard all the time and saw all this happen; he reflected: "What a sacrifice! Three lives for one!" He was about to kill himself. The Goddess then appeared before him and wished to grant him a boon. The king felt very happy. He said to the Goddess: "I wish to see my guard, his wife and son alive. They have sacrificed their lives to keep me alive." The goddess granted him the boon.

The next day, the king asked the guard about the weeping voice as though he had not observed anything. The guard in order to prevent the king from knowing about the truth reasoned out that it was the voice of a witch. But the king unfolded the whole truth about the servant's actions to the audience in the court; he also made him the king of a state.

The guard's devotion and loyalty to the duty and to the King are unparalleled. He lived happily thereafter.

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## 96. The Efficacy and Sanctity of Performing Satyanarayana puja

Once there lived a businessman. Though he was rich, he was childless. One day he heard about the holy Satyanarayana puja. So, he and his wife Lilavati decided to perform this puja. However, even before they performed the Puja, they were blessed with a beautiful daughter. She was named Kalavati.



The girl began growing up. She was fondly being looked after by her parents. But the businessman appeared to have forgotten the vow of performing Satyanarayana puja. The wife reminded him many times. Everytime he put it away giving the reason that he was busy with work. He pacified his wife that he would perform the puja after the girl gets married. Years passed by. In due time she was married off to a youth named Sankhapati. The businessman started involving Sankhapati also in business. The family prospered well. Lilavati again and again reminded her

husband about the vow. The businessman ignored it even at this stage.

One day he and Sankhapati after completing their business activities in a town in the kingdom of Chandraketu were about to board a boat. The king's guards arrested them suspecting them to be thieves.

Back in the town of the businessman, his house was robbed, the mother and daughter were out on the roads, begging alms in the streets. His wife knew the cause of all this to be the anger of Lord Satyanarayana.

One day Kalavati came near a house where Satyanarayana puja was being performed. She stood outside and watched. She ate the holy food offered by the brahmana. She told her mother about this. The mother said "Kalavati! Your father vowed to perform this puja before you were born; he neglected and postponed it. Our suffering is perhaps due to that."

On hearing this, Kalavati resolved to perform it herself with the help of her relatives and by collecting alms. She had strong faith that Lord Satyanarayana would pardon and bless them. On the scheduled day, she was performing the puja. Surprisingly in the other town, the businessman and his son-in-law were released from the crime and prison. These two men collected all the money they had earned and left for their home town. When they arrived near the shore of their town, Lilavati heard about it and ran to meet them. She had left the puja in the middle unattended.

So again the Lord showed his anger appearing in the form of a brahmin to the two men.

When they were in the boat voyaging towards the town, the Lord in brahmin's disguise sat in the boat. When he enquired the businessman what he was carrying, the latter replied that it was firewood and leaves. But when the businessman opened the baskets, to his surprise, he saw only leaves in them. He realized then the presence of the Lord's powers; he at once begged for forgiveness from the brahmin who reminded him of his vow to worship Lord Satyanarayana. After this, he saw the valuables restored in the basket.

On reaching the shore, he and his son-in-law were received by their wives; they completed the puja and ate the special food offered to the Lord. Thus they were blessed; such is the effect and power of worshipping Lord Satyanarayana.

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## 97. Ganesha and His Features

Lord Siva had thousands of guards; the foremost among them being Nandi. Whereas Goddess Parvati had none. Once she felt the need to have one to guard the entrance to her apartments; thus was Ganesha born when She created him out of clay. This was unknown to Lord Siva for sometime.

Once it so happened that Parvati made Ganesha stand guard near the entrance to her chamber as she wished to take bath. When Lord Siva returned home, he wasn't allowed to enter. Then Siva questioned the young boy who he was to stop him from entering his own house. Whatever reason was given, whoever spoke, Ganesha was firm in his duty. However much Lord Siva tried to persuade the boy, he found Ganesha stubborn. So, being annoyed and angered, he attacked the boy. His guards too joined him. Lord Brahma, Vishnu and other gods arrived.



Meanwhile, Parvati came to know about it; she felt distressed over her son being attacked. In the fierce

battle that went on, Siva cut off Ganesha's head. Parvati was plunged in sorrow; so enraged was she that she warned everyone that the whole universe would be destroyed. Everyone feared because many weapons lay in her power. Rishi Narada and other gods begged forgiveness from Parvati; they also sought from her a solution to the problem. Parvati demanded that her son be brought back alive; and he be respected alike by everyone; further he should enjoy all divine rights. The gods accepted the conditions put by Parvati.

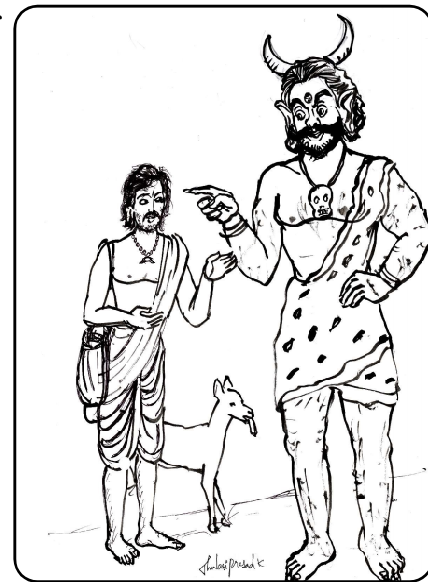
Lord Siva commanded his devas to proceed towards the north direction and cut off the head of any creature they meet first. It so happened that they saw an elephant asleep; its head was cut off; but it had only one tusk. Yet this head was fixed onto Ganesha's body. The Gods infused life into this body and declared that Ganesha was to be worshipped first even before one worships Lord Brahma, Vishnu or Mahadeva.

In blessing the boy, Siva gifted him with qualities of generosity and intelligence, Saraswati with power of speech, Savitri with wisdom and so on and so forth; goddess Lakshmi promised to live wherever Ganesha was to be worshipped. The divine couple Lord Siva and Parvati were happy. Lord Siva, since then accepted him as one of his sons.

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## 98. Chandala and Brahmarakshasa

Once there lived in the beautiful city of Avanti, a chandala, an outcaste. The city was situated on the bank of river Ksipra. But the chandala was truthful and intelligent too. He was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. On the eleventh day (Ekadasi) of every month, he used to observe a fast the whole day; he went to the temple of Lord Narayana in the night; spent the whole night there chanting the hymns of the Lord. In the morning he would go home, eat food after his family had taken food.



Besides this, it was his habit to spend the money he earned for noble deeds and charitable causes.

One day as usual, he went on ekadasi day to the forest to collect flowers to be offered to the Lord in the temple. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, a Brahmarakshasa which lived there stood in front of the chandala. It laughed and said: "I am fortunate today to find a human here. I will kill you and have my fill." But the chandala was in the least frightened by the appearance of neither the rakshasa nor his words. He

only said "Oh, demon! Please kill me tomorrow. I promise to come here again tomorrow. I need to offer my devotion to the Lord this night." Amazed at such a reply the brahmarakshasa stood in silence for a minute; then he let the chandala go and waited at the same place till the next day morning.

Meanwhile, the chandala went to the temple and prayed to the Lord at night; at dawn, he moved towards the forest and appeared before the brahmarakshasa. The brahmarakshasa was awestruck to see the chandala there. He didn't expect the chandala would keep up his promise. The brahmarakshasa understood that here was a man who was truthful in his life. He thought that the chandala must have been a brahmin in his earlier birth. He begged the chandala to give him part of his 'punya' (gifts received due to good deeds done). The chandala said, "Alright. But promise me that you will never attack any one in future in the forest." The brahmarakshasa was relieved of all sins as he had accepted the condition put by the chandala. Since that day, he also could find a place in the heart of the Lord.

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## 99. Valmiki

Sumatisarma belonged to the Bhrgu dynasty. He had a son named Agnisarma. As a youth, he always lived as an offender and acted disobediently towards the elders. After his father's death, he left his noble family members and began constantly looting and robbing the wayfarers who passed through Vidisha vana where he wandered.

Once the seven great rishis or sapta rishis arrived at this forest. Agnisarma engaged himself in robbing these rishis of whatever they possessed. One of the rishis questioned him: "Why are you robbing us thus and harming us? We are rishis and we do not carry any valuables."



Agnisarma said: I want to feed my wife and children.

Sages: Don't you think you are committing sins by looting travellers? By providing food to your family with the valuables looted, you are in one way committing a sin. Are they prepared to share the sins committed by you? Do they know it?

Agnisarma never realized nor thought about the consequences of looting travellers. He went home confused; he asked his wife and children if they were ready to share the sins he was committing. Spontaneous came the reply: "No, we don't want the food earned through committing sins, nor do we hold responsibility for it." The answer came as an eye-opener for Agnisarma.

He went back to the rishis and narrated what had happened at home. The rishis felt happy and instructed him to chant the name of 'Rama'. But he couldn't utter the two syllables 'Ra' and 'ma' in that order; so, they asked him to pronounce the two syllables in the reverse order as 'ma' and 'ra'; when they are pronounced in quick succession, it would result in the name 'Rama' being pronounced, correctly.

From then on, he began practising penances and chanted the Lord's name. He remained a tapasvin for thirteen years after which he became renowned as Valmiki, a rishi. The Lord blessed him with poetic abilities and he became the composer of the great epic, 'The Ramayana'.

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## **100. Kartikeya**

Once the gods and other celestials ran to Lord Siva to save them from the demoniac forces troubling them; especially the demon Taraka who was raging the world with his powers. Lord Siva who is one among the Trinity of gods, is known to be a personification of destruction. So, it was felt that the seed of destruction had to come from him. So Kartikeya was born as the son of Lord Siva and Parvati on the sixth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Margasirsha. He was handsome and full of glory and splendour.

The seed of Parvati's child was not laid in her womb because she and the Lord were disturbed at such a moment. So the boy was born upon the earth in a heap of grass and was brought up by six Kritikas who vied with each other to bring up this child. The child Lord Kartikeya assumed six faces so as to allow the six women to love, care and fondle him as their son. They were wise women of yogic practice and wives of celestial sages. They nurtured him, decorated him with the rarest garments and fed him with the choicest delicacies.

In due course, they sent away Kartikeya to the original parents in Himavat viz. to Lord Siva and Parvati. He was crowned, consecrated by mantras and the sacred thread ceremony was performed on him. Different gods presented him costly, valuable gifts



such as arrows, spears, aerial cars, a royal umbrella, etc. The god of fire presented him with a spear, a powerful weapon. Thus he came to be known as Velayudha. Lord Siva appointed him commander-in-chief of the army of gods. Hence he became Devasenapati. He was also known as Subrahmanya, Kumara and Skanda. Thus Kartikeya was blessed by all gods who readied himself to fight against the demon Taraka. He, along with the other gods set his foot upon the abode of the asuras. (demons)

Taraka himself came there to fight with the gods. The attack from Taraka's side began even before they entered their regions. The two armies roared. Lord Indra riding on an elephant rushed forward. Virabhadra also joined. Once, Virabhadra's trident hit Taraka. He fell down unconscious but regained consciousness later. However, Indra and Virabhadra faced defeat at the hands of the asuras. It was then that Lord Vishnu came forward. Lord Vishnu, Lord Brahma and other gods joined Kartikeya in the fight against Taraka and other demons.

The two armies became invincible at a certain moment. Thousands of soldiers fell to the ground; some had their hands cut off; some their legs. Finally Kartikeya, who led the army, encountered Taraka and after a terrible fight killed him at one stroke with his spear. His spree didn't end there. He went on to kill other asuras like Bana, Pralamba, etc. With the death

of Taraka, the whole universe was freed from danger and nuisance. Everyone in the three worlds celebrated the event.

Lord Vishnu, the other gods and the sages bowed to Siva, Parvati and Kartikeya and returned to their abodes in great delight.

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### 101. Gautama Rishi's Curse

Lord Indra was the Lord of Heaven. He held sway over it and the Earth. Once Lord Indra stopped the rains from falling over the Earth; so people were struck with famine. In one country, many rishis as also the common men suffered. Many of the rishis decided to approach the famous and great rishi, Gautama for a solution; he accommodated all of them in his hermitage and began feeding them.

But the supply in the asrama was getting reduced gradually. So the rishi feared how he could continue to feed them. Then he prayed to Goddess Gayatri. Satisfied with the devotion of Gautama, Gayatri appeared before him and said: "Dear son! What is it that ails you?" Gautama replied: "Holy mother, I have given shelter to many rishis and other families in my asrama. I am afraid I cannot continue to offer them food and shelter; my asrama now looks like a refugee camp. Help me out of this problem." Gayatridevi said to him: "Oh, great rishi! Keep this kamandalu (holy pot) with you. Whenever you desire anything, make a wish. As long as it is with you, you can have no fear." The rishi felt relieved of all burden and returned to his hermitage.

The holy (divine) pot supplied the rishi with food, clothes, ornaments, wealth, etc. whenever he wished. Years passed; everyone lived in happiness. But the very rishis who had sought shelter under Gautama rishi began envying his powers and achievements because

even Lord Narada and other celestials had heaped praises on the rishi's achievements.

So they were planning to insult and bring a curse upon the rishi. With their powers of illusion (maya) they created a cow. It was not a healthy cow. When Gautama rishi was performing a yajna, they sent this cow there. The rishi sympathizing with its sickly looks thought of keeping it in his cowshed and touched it. To the surprise of the rishi, it died as soon as he touched her.

The rishi suspected some foul play. In order to assess the causes, he began praying deeply. This allowed him to trace the evildoers. He cursed the sinners that they would be rid of the powers of reciting mantras and worshipping Gayatridevi. Realizing their mistakes, they begged pardon from him. They were full of remorse. But the rishi directed them to seek the favours from Lord Vishnu and Siva, as the curse cannot be taken back.

Sincere prayers and devotion to these gods helped them to be born again and attain salvation.

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