

# *Bāla Kāṇḍa*

## *Boyhood of Rāma*

Vālmīki asked the foremost among sages, Nārada: "Who is there in this world who is of good nature, powerful, righteous, alert in action, truthful in speech, firm in resolve, exemplary in conduct, devoted to the welfare of all beings, learned, skilful, with a pleasant presence, self-controlled, with anger overcome, resplendent and free from jealousy, of whom even the gods are afraid when he is angered?"

Delighted, the sage Nārada narrated in brief the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa, after extolling the glories of lord Rāma who was the one person that matched the description implied in Vālmīki's question. "Rāma is the peer of lord Viṣṇu! And in his nature he is like the ocean, the Himālayas, mother earth, the god of wealth and dharma himself." Nārada recounted the story of Rāma.

After the narration, Nārada went his way. Vālmīki, accompanied by his disciple Bharadvāja, went towards the Tamasā River for his noon bath and ablutions. Just then he saw a hunter mercilessly kill a male crane while it was sporting with its female companion, and heard the female's heart-rending cry. Overcome by pity and angered by the hunter's heartless cruelty, Vālmīki uttered a curse; "For this sin, you will lose your peace of mind for countless years." Regaining his composure at once, Vālmīki regretted the curse (which had taken the form of a verse couched in delightful metre) and countermanded the curse saying: "It shall be a verse and not a curse." Yet, the mystery that even he could lose his temper and thus risk losing the merit of his asceticism intrigued him.

Thus musing, he returned to his hermitage. There he beheld the divine Brahmā, the creator. Vālmīki worshipped the creator. Divining the ascetic's mental state, Brahmā said: "The metre in which you uttered those words, O Vālmīki, will bring you great blessings. In the same metre sing the glory and the story of Śrī Rāma; elaborate on what Nārada has already told you. All the details concerning the story of Rāma will be revealed to your vision; nothing that is expressed by you will prove to be false. Your composition will be sung by people so long as the sun and the moon shine."

After thus blessing him, lord Brahmā departed for his own realm. Immediately thereupon, Vālmīki began the immortal epic, the Rāmāyaṇa, in the same style in which he had uttered his first verse which was directed to the hunter.

#### *Bāla 3-4*

Vālmīki entered into deep meditation and in his super-conscious state he actually saw all that took place in the past, as clearly as he would see a fruit lying on his palm. The entire story unfolded itself in his consciousness, in all its details, even as to what the characters in the story said or thought, and how they laughed or behaved. And, the narration flowed from his lips in the form of an exquisite poem, and though its central theme is the detailed exposition of dharma and mokṣa (liberation), it also deals with prosperity (artha) and pleasure (kāma), and it delights the mind as much as it enlightens the soul. The story that thus unfolded covered from the birth of Rāma to his coronation and his later reign as the monarch. It consisted of twenty-four thousand verses.

Vālmīki wondered: "Who is that intelligent man endowed with almost superhuman memory who will commit the whole poem to his memory and pass it on to posterity?" At that instant, Kuśa and Lava entered his presence and bowed to him. They were the sons of Rāma and Sītā, born in Vālmīki's own hermitage, after Sītā had been banished from Rāma's court and had taken the asylum of Vālmīki's hermitage. Kuśa and Lava were his own pupils, and foremost among them. Unto them Vālmīki committed the epic poem, the entire Rāmāyaṇa which embodies the great story of Sītā, calling it Paulastya Vadhaṃ as it deals with the conquest of Rāvaṇa or Paulastya.

The two boys quickly memorised the entire epic. They were endowed with melodious voices; and they were masters of music. In appearance they naturally were the very images of Śrī Rāma. One day they recited the epic in an assembly of sages and saints, who were all enchanted by the music and transported by the sublimity of the epic itself. They exclaimed that Vālmīki's portraiture of the story of Rāma kept it alive for all time, and that it was so vivid that to listen to it was to see it all over again. They rewarded the two boys with suitable presents.

Thus encouraged, the two boys travelled, narrating the divine story wherever they went. They reached Ayodhyā, the capital of Kosala over which Śrī Rāma ruled. Here, too, they were warmly received by the people. Their fame reached Rāma's ears. He invited them to his palace, received them with due honour (the honour due to ascetics and sages) and seated them in his court. He then said to his brothers: "Listen carefully to the epic poem that these two young boys are going to sing."

Thereupon, the two boys began to sing the story, as commanded by Śrī Rāma, in a style befitting the dignity of the poem; Rāma himself was in the audience and soon his mind was absorbed in the narrative.

### *Bāla 5-6*

Kuśa and Lava said:

The sublime story that we are about to narrate is of the descendants of the great king Ikṣvāku among whose ancestors was the famous Sagara. It is known as the Rāmāyaṇa. Listen without prejudice, as we relate the story from the very beginning.

There is a mighty kingdom known as the Kosala on the bank of the holy river Sarayū. Its capital is Ayodhyā, a city which was built by the Vaivasvata Manu himself, the first ruler of the earth during the present world-cycle. This vast city is twelve yojanas (over ninety-six miles) long and three yojanas (over twenty-four miles) wide. It is a powerful and prosperous city. The city is well planned and laid out, surrounded by an impassable moat. In it are embassies of kings who pay tribute to the emperor; and in it are traders from many countries of the world. Its roads are clean and wide; and its faultless water-supply system provides good and sweet water

for all its inhabitants. It has seven-storeyed buildings decorated with precious stones and it is resplendent like a celestial body. It is protected on all sides by mighty and faithful warriors who make it utterly invulnerable.

In that foremost among cities, the citizens are happy, devoted to righteousness, learned and wise, truthful, contented with the wealth they have and therefore free from avarice. No one in that city is poor or destitute. No one is ignorant or cruel. Everyone leads a well-regulated life of piety and charity. Everyone has faith in God and the scriptures; and every member of the twice-born communities is well versed in the sacred lore. Narrow-mindedness and pettiness are unknown in that city. The brāhmaṇas are zealously devoted to the study of the sacred texts, to a self-controlled life free from desire and hate and to the promotion of righteousness in the world. And, the members of the other three communities (the rulers and warriors, the farmers and businessmen, and the servants of the people) follow the leadership of the brāhmaṇas.

It was over such a kingdom and in such a city that the famous king Daśaratha ruled. He was himself learned in the Vedas. He was as mighty as he was wise. He was in truth a royal sage, a sage who happened to occupy a throne. He led an austere life, his mind and senses fully controlled. From Ayodhyā the capital city (its name itself significant viz., invincible), made impregnable by its strong gates, made resplendent by its lovely houses and inhabited by thousands of people, the lord of the world, Daśaratha, governed the kingdom as Indra rules the heaven.

#### *Bāla 7-8*

The king Daśaratha had eight ministers. Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva were his preceptors. He also had other counsellors.

The ministers were endowed with noble qualities of statesmanship. They were affluent and modest, powerful and self-restrained, majestic and truthful. They were courteous in their manners and a smile always played upon their lips. They were strict but never lost their temper even when provoked. They were tactful, but they did not swerve from the path of truth. They were just: they did not hesitate to punish the guilty even if the latter were their own sons, and they did not persecute even an enemy who was not found guilty. They ensured that

the state coffers were full, but did not resort to unrighteous means to achieve this end. While meting out punishment, they invariably took into consideration the weakness or the strength of the guilty. Their conduct earned the approval of the preceptors. They were famous and powerful, and their reputation for statesmanship and wisdom travelled even to foreign lands.

Though the king was so righteous and though he was eager to have a son and heir to the throne, he was not blessed with a son. One day the king said to himself: "Why should I not perform the horse-rite in order to earn the blessing of a son?" He had his preceptors and priests immediately invited to his court.

The king said: "Though I enjoy all the blessings in this world, yet I do not have the blessing of looking at the face of a son and this makes me sad. In order to earn that blessing, I consider that I should perform the horse-rite. May you be pleased to make this possible!" The preceptors applauded this idea. They advised that a good horse be released and its safety ensured. They asked for the ground on the northern bank of the river Sarayū to be got ready for the sacred ritual.

The king thereupon decreed that all this should be done forthwith. He entrusted the care of the horse to a noble prince. He ensured that the preliminary rites connected with the horse-rite be duly performed by the priests so that there might be no flaw in its conclusion, as otherwise, the performer of the rite would forfeit his prosperity. The ministers and the priests got busy immediately with their allotted tasks.

The king then announced his intention to his wives: "Undergo the necessary consecration along with me," said the king. And when they heard this, their faces blossomed like lotuses at the end of the winter season.

### *Bāla 9-10*

Minister Sumantra said to the king:

The following story was originally attributed to Sanatku-māra, who prophesied the birth of four sons to you. He further prophesied as follows:

The sage Kaśyapa has a son known as Vibhāṇḍaka who will beget a son called R̥ṣyaśṛṅga. This latter will constantly dwell in the forest, devoted to the service and the holy and only company of his father. And therefore R̥ṣyaśṛṅga will

observe brahmacarya in both its aspects: physical continence and also the spiritual transmutation of the whole being. Having never set his eyes on members of the opposite sex, he will possess the innocence of ignorance.

During the same period, a mighty king called Romapāda will be the ruler of Aṅga. And, the kingdom will suffer from a severe drought as the fruit of the karma of the king and his subjects. The king will seek the counsel of the learned brāhmaṇas who will proffer the only solution to the crisis: "If you will bring the young sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to your kingdom and give him Śāntā, your adopted daughter, in marriage, the gods will be pleased and send abundant rain."

But who could lure the mighty sage away from his father? The king will entrust the task to the brāhmaṇas. The family priest will suggest to the king: "Let the best among your courtesans be employed to achieve the royal purpose." The king will consent. A bevy of the most beautiful young women will go to the forest where the sage will live. By the will of benign providence, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga too, will happen to notice their presence outside the hermitage. He will invite them to the hermitage where he will duly worship them as guests should be worshipped. They, in their turn will give him some fruits and take leave of him, for fear of incurring the displeasure of his father.

Their touch, their fond embrace and their company will arouse in the young innocent a desire for their further company. Very soon he will leave the hermitage and trail after the courtesans. Lo and behold, as he enters the kingdom of Aṅga, there will be the most welcome shower of rain.

The king will receive the young ascetic with due honours and immediately beg of him to confer a boon: "May your father be not angry with us nor curse us!" And this will be granted. The king will lead the young sage into the inner apartments and there will give his adopted daughter Śāntā in marriage to the sage. The glorious sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga will thus spend his time in the company of his wife Śāntā.

#### *Bāla 11-12*

Minister Sumantra continued:

The sage Sanatkumāra further prophesied as follows: "A descendant of Ikṣvāku, king Daśaratha by name, will cultivate

the friendship of king Romapāda. The former will one day approach the latter with the request: 'I have no sons O king. Therefore, please let Ṛṣyaśṛṅga be asked to conduct a sacred rite so that I may be blessed with a son.' In response to this request, Romapāda will depute the sage to conduct the sacred rite through which Daśaratha will be blessed with sons." I pray that the needful may speedily be done to persuade the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to come here and preside over the sacred rite you have undertaken.

Forthwith, the king Daśaratha, with the permission of his preceptors and priests, sought the presence of the holy sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Having reached the forest hermitage, he met king Romapāda in the company of the sage. Romapāda received Daśaratha with great joy, delight and respect. After spending a few days in the hermitage, king Daśaratha prayed to Romapāda: "Let your daughter and her sage husband come to Ayodhyā, to bless the sacred rite I am about to commence." Romapāda conveyed this request to the blessed couple who immediately consented.

All of them left the hermitage. King Daśaratha despatched fast messengers to Ayodhyā to convey to the citizens the glad tidings of the sage's visit and to ask them to give him a royal welcome. The delighted citizens celebrated the sage's entry into the capital with a festival. The sage and his wife enjoyed the royal hospitality for some days.

On the advent of spring, king Daśaratha approached Ṛṣyaśṛṅga with the prayer that the sacred rite may be commenced. The sage issued the necessary instruction. The king summoned his preceptors and priests and said. "I wish to perform the horse-rite in order to obtain the blessing of a son. And, I am sure that by the spiritual power of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, I shall have my wish fulfilled." The priests and the preceptors applauded the king's words.

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga thereupon instructed as to the proper manner in which the sacred horse should be released and the ritual ground should be prepared. The king, on his part, requested the priests to ensure that the rite be conducted without the least flaw: for the least flaw in its conduct would have contrary results. And the priests responded suitably and got busy with the preparation for the sacred horse-rite. Having thus personally

ensured the proper performance of the rite, the king Daśaratha retired to his own apartment.

*Bāla 13-14*

A year had gone by: as enjoined by the scriptures, the king was ready to commence the horse-rite. Humbly he approached his preceptor Vasiṣṭha and said: "You are a dear friend to me, my supreme preceptor, too: you alone can bear the burden of the proper execution of this rite." The sage Vasiṣṭha immediately assumed charge.

At Vasiṣṭha's behest, a whole new township sprang up on the northern bank of the holy river Sarayū with ritual pits, palaces for royal guests, mansions for the officiating priests, stables for horses, elephants and so on, wells and markets, all of them properly equipped to supply the needs of the numerous guests expected to grace the occasion. Vasiṣṭha personally instructed: "Every house should be well provided with food and other necessities. Ensure that the people of all the communities are nicely fed and attended to, with respect—never without respect and reverence. No one shall show the least disrespect or displeasure, leave alone anger, towards the guests." All those in charge humbly accepted the charge. Vasiṣṭha asked Sumantra to invite the princely neighbours, the kings of neighbouring kingdoms as also those afar, to attend the sacred rite. Very soon they began to arrive with rich presents for king Daśaratha. Everyone concerned reported back to Vasiṣṭha that the duty allotted to them had been accomplished. Once again, Vasiṣṭha warned them: "Serve and give all that is necessary to our guests, but give with respect; do not serve with disrespect or playfully; disrespectful service destroys the giver."

At the conclusion of the year of consecration, the sacred horse had also returned. With Ṛṣyaśṛṅga at their head the priests now commenced the horse-rite, which proceeded in strict accordance with scriptural injunctions. In fact, the priests in their eagerness not to let a flaw creep in, exceeded even the scriptural demands in the performance of the rite. There was no flaw in the rite, the mantras were correctly recited and the ordained procedure was strictly adhered to. Vasiṣṭha had said: "Give, give food and clothes to all," and those in charge literally fulfilled this command. All the guests were thoroughly satisfied and blessed the king. The various beasts through whom



the different deities were to be worshipped had been brought to the hall. The horse itself was richly decked and worshipped by the queens. Delighted that the horse-rite had concluded without an obstacle, the king gave away the land to the priests who, however, returned it to the king and accepted more useful monetary gifts from the king. They were all highly pleased.

The king fell at the feet of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and the sage reassured the king that his wish would be fulfilled.

### *Bāla 15-16*

The holy sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga contemplated deeply for a few minutes and then said to king Daśaratha: "I shall perform a sacred rite prescribed in the Atharva Veda, adopting the method of the perfected heavenly beings, for the sake of securing the boon of progeny for you." As the sage commenced this sacred rite, the gods and the siddhas (demi-gods) descended upon the hall of worship in their ethereal forms. They worshipfully addressed Brahmā the creator as follows: "Lord, relying on a boon you had conferred upon him, the demon Rāvaṇa is oppressing all of us. According to that boon he cannot be killed by gods, demi-gods and demons: and so we are powerless against him. Even the natural elements function in obedience to him. Pray, find some means of putting an end to our tormentor."

The creator was sorely distressed to hear this and replied: "Rāvaṇa, proud and haughty that he was, only prayed that the gods, demi-gods and demons should not kill him: he held man in such utter contempt that he did not include man in the list! Hence, he can only be killed by a human being." As Brahmā said this, the lord Viṣṇu descended upon the scene. The gods now turned to him in heartfelt prayer: "Lord, we lay the burden of our misery upon your shoulders. Pray, incarnate yourself as a human being and destroy this Rāvaṇa who is an enemy of the world; who is invincible by gods. All of us—gods, demi-gods, demons, sages and hermits seek your refuge for protection: you are indeed the supreme refuge for us all." The lord Viṣṇu assured them that he would do the needful.

Lord Viṣṇu quickly decided that he would become the son of Daśaratha, at the same time fulfilling the wish of the gods. The lord at once became invisible to them all.

At the same time, a divine being emerged from the sacred fire, holding in his hands a golden bowl containing pāyasaṁ (a preparation of milk and rice). He said to king Daśaratha: "I am a messenger of Viṣṇu. With this sacred rite you have propitiated the lord. This pāyasaṁ which has been prepared by the gods is capable of conferring the boon of progeny upon you; take it and give it to your wives." Saying thus, that messenger disappeared into the sacred fire. King Daśaratha at once gave the pāyasaṁ to his wives. Half of it he gave to Kausalyā, half of what remained he gave to Sumitrā, half of the rest to Kaikeyī, and what remained he gave again to Sumitrā. Such indeed was the potency of this divine pāyasaṁ that all of them instantly shone with the radiance appropriate to the presence of a divine being in their wombs.

*Bāla 17-18*

Brahmā, the creator, commanded the gods: "Project part of your energies into the mortal world so that mighty beings may be born of you, in order to aid the Lord."

Thus commanded by the creator, the gods begot through vānara-women offspring mighty, powerful and strong and with the form and the external appearance of their celestial parent. Hanumān, the offspring of the wind-god, was the cleverest and the ablest of them all.

A year had rolled by. At the end of the twelfth month after quaffing the celestial pāyasaṁ, on the ninth day of the lunar (bright) fortnight in the month of Caitra (April-May), Kausalyā gave birth to the resplendent Rāma, the Lord of the universe, adored by all, who was indeed the manifestation of one half of lord Viṣṇu. After this, Kaikeyī gave birth to Bharata who was a quarter-manifestation of lord Viṣṇu. Sumitrā gave birth to twins Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna, who, together formed the other quarter of lord Viṣṇu.

This was an occasion for great rejoicing not only in Ayodhyā and in the kingdom of Kosala, but in the celestial realm, for the Lord incarnate as the son of man would put an end to the reign of terror of the demon Rāvana. The citizens gave the fullest reins to their eagerness to celebrate the event.

The preceptor of the king, Vasiṣṭha, christened the four sons Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna, and also lavished gifts upon all, on behalf of the king. Lakṣmaṇa became an

inseparable companion to Rāma; they were one life in two bodies, and without Lakṣmaṇa Rāma would not even go to sleep. Even so, Bharata and Śatrughna were dear to each other.

All of them grew up into intelligent and wise young men, learned in the scriptures, exemplary in their conduct and devoted to the welfare of all. The king was supremely happy to see them thus grow into young men.

At this time, the sage Viśvāmitra came to Ayodhyā. He sent word through the guards at the palace gate to the king Daśaratha of his desire to meet the king. Daśaratha ran forward to receive the holy sage who was a Rājaṛṣi (because he was of royal descent) and had later become, by dint of great austerity, a brahmaṛṣi (equal to a brāhmaṇa-sage). The king worshipped the sage who warmly embraced the holy men in the royal court. The king then offered to do whatever lay in his power to serve Viśvāmitra, and this offer greatly pleased Viśvāmitra.

#### *Bāla 19-20*

Viśvāmitra was thrilled to hear the king's noble words, and he further fortified the king's noble intentions by saying: "There is no one in the world who is your equal, O foremost among kings! You have a glorious ancestry and, in addition, you have the sage Vasiṣṭha himself as your preceptor and spiritual guide." The sage continued: "I have undertaken the vows connected with the performance of a sacred rite which is being interfered with by a couple of demons. I could easily deal with them myself, but the vows prevent me from giving vent to my anger. Hence, I pray, send with me your son Rāma for the protection of this sacred rite. In my care and with his own prowess he will be able to do the needful. I assure you that the two demons are as good as dead, for I know the matchless might of Rāma, as even Vasiṣṭha and the other sages do. I need him only for ten days and nights, and it is imperative that the sacred rite be completed within that time and not be prolonged by interruptions."

When king Daśaratha heard this he promptly fainted, and regaining consciousness after a few minutes, he spoke falteringly to Viśvāmitra: "Rāma is hardly sixteen years of age; I do not see that he is qualified to fight, especially with demons. Tell me what I should do. I shall send you my vast army. I

shall myself come with you and fight the demons, but without Rāma I cannot live even a few minutes. He is but a child and is incapable of assessing the strength of the enemies. After a long, long time I have been given this precious son as the gift of the gods; how can I even think of parting from him. Nay, I shall come with my army to fight the demons."

Viśvāmitra reiterated his demand in the following words: "There is a mighty demon called Rāvaṇa, a descendant of Pulastya. He himself does not personally interfere with sacred rites, but he sends two other demons, Mārīca and Subāhu, to disturb them, and they throw filth, blood and flesh into the sacred fire. It is against such foes that I seek the help of Rāma, for only he can restrain these demons."

Greatly disturbed in mind to hear this, the king replied: "Oh, no, even I cannot face the mighty Rāvaṇa in battle. But if it is only to deal with Mārīca and Subāhu, I shall come with my army, but I can in no circumstances send my beloved son Rāma. You are indeed a renowned sage and you know dharma: therefore kindly show mercy upon us. Do not ask that I send Rāma with you. If you like, I shall come with you. If that is not acceptable to you, kindly forgive my inability to do anything in the matter."

### *Bāla 21-22*

In great anger, the sage Viśvāmitra said to king Daśaratha: "How disgraceful and how unworthy of a king, that having promised you go back on your own word! This is unworthy of the glorious clan you belong to. However, if that is your decision, I will go; enjoy the ignominious life!"

Seeing this, the sage Vasiṣṭha intervened and said to the king Daśaratha: "O king, you are descended from an unbroken line of the most righteous monarchs. It does not behove you to swerve from the path of truth. If you should break your promise to the sage Viśvāmitra, you would lose all the merit that you earned by the performance of the great religious rites. The sage Viśvāmitra is a pastmaster of the marshal arts. He has at his command all the most deadly missiles (astras) which he has acquired directly from lord Śiva himself. Moreover, he can even invent new and more deadly missiles. It is not as if he is afraid of these demons. He can surely deal with them; but he is asking for Rāma for the good of Rāma himself!

Therefore, do not hesitate to accede to Viśvāmitra's request; thus would you be fulfilling your own promise."

These words reassured the king who immediately regained his composure and self-confidence and made up his mind to send Rāma with the sage to protect his rite. He sent for Rāma, embraced him fondly, kissed the crown of his head and blessed him. The family preceptor Vasiṣṭha blessed Rāma, too, with sacred Vedic texts. Even nature blessed Rāma. As Rāma and the inseparable Lakṣmaṇa set out to follow the sage, there was a gentle breeze and a shower of flowers from above.

It was a sight for the gods to see—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with warlike weapons slung on their shoulders walking with the stern ascetic Viśvāmitra. While they were still walking along the southern bank of the holy river Sarayū, the sage addressed them: "Rāma, without the least loss of time I shall initiate you into mysteries of Balā and Atibalā (strength and supreme strength); when you acquire these, you will not be subjected to fatigue, to fever, nor will your lovely form undergo adverse change. Nor will the demons be able to overpower you even in your sleep, if you have these mysteries."

After the necessary preliminary purification, Rāma received the divine mysteries from the sage; and immediately he shone with a new brilliance. The three spent that night on the bank of the holy river Sarayū, and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa rendered the sage all the personal service that a disciple is expected to render the preceptor.

#### *Bāla 23-24*

At dawn the next day, the sage lovingly awakened the princes and all three of them offered their morning prayers. The two princes devoutly saluted the preceptor, ready to do his bidding. Led by him, they continued their journey and soon reached the confluence of Sarayū and the holy Gaṅgā, where they beheld several hermitages. The princes were curious and the sage said to them: "Cupid was endowed with physical form in days of yore. Lord Śiva was once engaged in breathtaking austerities on this very spot; and Cupid sought to distract the Lord. By a mere 'huṁ'-sound, and with the fire that emanated from his eye, the Lord destroyed the body of Cupid who thenceforward became bodiless. Where the limbs (aṅga) of his body were shed became known as Aṅga-territory.

These hermits who are devoted to their austerities here are the followers of lord Śiva."

While fording the holy river near the confluence, Rāma heard a roaring sound in the water. Viśvāmitra allayed his curiosity again with the following story: "Near Mount Kailāsa there is a lake known as Mānasa Sarovar, because it was born of the mind of Brahmā. This river Sarayū is so called because it flows from that Sarovar. The sound you heard is caused by the force with which that river rushes to meet the holy Gaṅgā. Offer your salutations to the holy rivers at the confluence, O Rāma."

Soon they reached a terrible forest which was frightful to enter. Once again, Viśvāmitra explained: "This area was once a prosperous country. In days of yore when Indra slew the demon Vṛtra who was a brāhmaṇa by birth, he had to expiate the sin of having killed a brāhmaṇa. The holy sages and brāhmaṇas performed the ritual of atonement with the waters of the holy rivers. When the impurities had thus been washed away, Indra shone with his native radiance. The impurities thus washed away from Indra were deposited here. Indra was happy to be rid of them and wanted to show his gratitude to the place where they fell away. He blessed this country with prosperity and named it Maladā and Karūṣa.

"The principalities of Maladā and Karūṣa were thenceforth prosperous and wealthy, till Tāṭakā appeared on the scene. This demoness was the wife of the demon Suṇḍa, and they have a terrible son known as Mārīca. Tāṭakā strikes terror in the hearts of the inhabitants of Maladā and Karūṣa and has turned the prosperous and fertile country into a waste and a forest. Rāma, now it is for you to get rid of this demoniacal family and to restore to this countryside the prosperity and the glory that it once had."

#### *Bāla 25-26*

Rāma was bewildered: "How could a frail woman possess such might and such strength?" And, the sage Viśvāmitra told him the whole story of Tāṭakā which is as follows:

"Once upon a time there lived a powerful demi-god named Suketu. He had no children. Desirous of having an offspring he engaged himself in austerities. Brahmā, the creator, was highly pleased with this and conferred the boon of a daughter

upon him, at the same time blessing this daughter with the strength of a thousand elephants. It is just as well that the creator did not bless Suketu with a male child! The girl was as beautiful as she was strong. Suketu gave her in marriage to a demon, Suṇḍa. Of them the terrible Mārīca was born.

“Suṇḍa had been cursed to death by the sage Agastya. Tātakā wished to avenge her husband’s death and rushed at the sage. Agastya pronounced a curse upon Tātakā also: ‘From now you will lose the appearance of a demi-goddess and you will roam about as a terrible demoness.’”

“Do not let the thought that she is a woman deter you. For the welfare of society you have to destroy her. Praiseworthy and non-praiseworthy actions may have to be done by a ruler for the protection of his subjects—even what appear to be unrighteous and sinful actions. This is indeed the eternal duty of those entrusted with the onerous task of administering the state. Therefore, destroy this wicked woman: she does not know what dharma means!”

Rāma at once responded; “My father commanded me to obey you in all respects when he entrusted me to your care. By obeying you, therefore, I shall have fulfilled my duty towards you as well as my duty to my father!” Saying this, he readied his weapon; and the sound that it produced terrified the dwellers of the forest and aroused the suspicions of Tātakā. She rushed towards the source of that sound and when she came into view, Rāma jokingly pointed out that terrible form to Lakṣmaṇa. “Look at this demoness, O Lakṣmaṇa. We shall make her immobile by amputating her arms and legs: I do not feel inclined to kill this woman.” Viśvāmitra roared “huṁ” and spurred the princes on. She showered huge rocks upon Rāma. Rāma replied with missiles from his weapons. She disappeared from view. Viśvāmitra now warned Rāma: “Do not dally with this demoness any more, Rāma. They grow more powerful at nightfall. Kill her quickly.” Though she remained invisible Rāma hit her, guided by sound alone. She fell down dead.

At that very instant the forest shone with its old splendour.

### *Bāla 27-28*

Early in the morning of the subsequent day, the sage Viśvāmitra lovingly spoke to Rāma: “I am delighted with you,

Rāma. I shall therefore give you an armamentarium of the most powerful missiles with the help of which you will be able to subdue all your enemies whether they are earthlings or celestials. Here, take charge of the following foremost among the missiles:

“Dharma cakraṁ (cakraṁ may mean a revolver!), Kāla cakraṁ, Viṣṇu cakraṁ as also the fierce cakraṁ of Indra. I give you the Daṇḍa cakraṁ, as also the missile that has the power of the thunderbolt (Vajra), the Śūlaṁ (of Śiva), the Brahmā-śiras and another known as aisikam which is like a blade of grass. I give you the most powerful Brahmā astram, the all-destroyer, and also mace-like missiles. And, here is the missile of the gandharvas which confuses and stupefies the enemy. These other missiles are capable of putting the enemy to sleep and changing his mood from one of anger to one of peace. I also give you other missiles which can produce a shower of rain or dry up the earth, or generate unbearable heat and scorch the enemy. Also, another missile which produces in the enemy a sort of intoxication and another which will rouse his passion. This missile here has the lustre of a sun and will bedazzle the enemy. I give you all these and many more which are powerful and valuable in war with even celestials.”

Rāma saw all these missiles in front of him. Pleased, he resolved that he would use them only when such use was called for. Saluting the sage Viśvāmitra, Rāma submitted: “Sir, please also instruct me in the art of countering the effect of these missiles”. The sage then instructed Rāma and also Lakṣmaṇa in the anti-missile system. In this connection, again, the sage gave them many more missiles with names that signify the way in which they function—some which can be seen, others which cannot be seen, some with a forward motion and others with reverse motion, some with ten ‘heads’, others with a hundred ‘bellies’, some giving the appearance of burning coal, others appearing like dense smoke. All these missiles and anti-missile missiles were spread out in front of Rāma, awaiting his command; they lay at his feet, as it were, offering their services to him. And, he made a mental note of them and resolved to use them when their use became absolutely necessary.

They had by now reached the verge of the dense forest. Just outside this they saw a beautiful and holy hermitage.



Rāma queried about this and sage Viśvāmitra narrated the following story concerning the Siddhāśrama.

*Bāla 29-30*

The sage Viśvāmitra said: "In days of yore, Viṣṇu himself dwelt here for thousands of years, practising austerities. Lord Vāmana's hermitage, known as Siddhāśrama, is also here. The following happened during the period king Bali ruled the earth and the heaven. Indra and the gods appealed to lord Viṣṇu for help. The demon king Bali performed a mighty rite, at the conclusion of which he would become Indra. Also, at the same time, the sage Kaśyapa had successfully concluded a sacred observance over a period of a thousand years. When the Lord appeared before him and offered to grant him a boon, the sage prayed: 'If, pleased with me, you are willing to grant a boon, then I pray to thee, become my son!' The Lord gladly incarnated as the son of the sage and his wife Aditī. He was dwarfish in appearance. He immediately went over to Bali's house of worship and begged of the king to give him three paces of land. When this was granted, the Lord measured the heaven and the earth with two paces (and thus recovered them for Indra) and with the third he blessed the king by placing his foot on his head. This āśrama (hermitage) which is so called because it removes śrama (physical and mental fatigue) was indwelt by the Lord himself and I, being his devotee, dwell in it now. Come, let us enter the hermitage, for it is yours as well as mine. I shall now commence the sacred rite and I pray, guard it from the demons' interferences."

The princes, too, joyously replied: "Blessed sir, please commence the sacred rite, and we shall abide by thy command." The next morning the rite commenced. The sage Viśvāmitra himself had taken on a vow of silence. Hence, the others instructed Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: "Guard the house of prayer for six days and nights." And so they did, without a wink of sleep, vigilant throughout the day and night.

It was the last night. The ritual fire blazed with unusual brilliance. There was a loud roar in the sky. Like monsoon clouds, dark and turbulent, the two demons appeared in the sky. There was a shower of blood and flesh and all sorts of terrible things. "Lakṣmaṇa, see how I scatter them in all directions," said Rāma and fired the missile known as Śīteṣu

(the cold missile) which hurled the demon Māriça into mid-ocean, a distance of eight hundred miles, as wind disperses clouds. Māriça was not killed. Then with a fire-missile Rāma destroyed the other demon Subāhu. Lastly, with the wind-missile, Rāma dispersed the lesser demons. The rite proceeded to conclusion without any obstacles.

*Bāla 31-32*

Their mission accomplished, the princes slept in the hermitage and woke up betimes the next morning; and after concluding their morning prayers, they approached the sage Viśvāmitra with joined palms, and submitted: "We are your humble servants, O Sage; command us, what shall we do?" The sage Viśvāmitra blessed them and replied: "King Janaka of Mithilā is about to perform a sacred rite and I would like you to attend it along with me. In Mithilā you will also see an extraordinary weapon which has baffled mighty men, gods and demons. It was actually a gift of the gods a long time ago; and since no one has so far been able to handle it, it has been worshipfully put away."

The sage at once got ready to move on. He bowed to the forest and sought permission of the trees: "God bless you, and I am now going from here to the Himālayas." Many sages, beasts and birds also accompanied Viśvāmitra! After a while, however, the sage persuaded the sages and the birds and beasts to return to the forest. The hermits accompanying Viśvāmitra covered some distance before they retired for the night on the bank of the river Sone.

Viśvāmitra said: "Once upon a time there was a king known as Kuśa who was a son of Brahmā, the creator. He had four sons: Kuśāmba, Kuśanābha, Asūrtarajasa and Vasu. Unto them he entrusted the task of protecting the people of the kingdom. The four sons built four cities, Kauśāmbi, Mahodaya (Kanauj), Dharmāraṇya and Girivraja (Rajgir) respectively. These cities were surrounded by hills. The river Sone weaving through those hills was also known as Māgadhi because it flows through Māgadha territory.

"Kuśanābha had a hundred daughters born through a celestial nymph Ghṛtāci. When they had grown up into beautiful young women, the wind-god approached all of them and said; 'I wish to marry all of you. Give up the idea that you are

human beings and attain longevity. Youth is evanescent; especially among humans. Become forever young and immortal, by accepting my proposal.' The girls were distressed to hear this. 'How can we accept you as our husband—you, who enter into all beings? Moreover, our father is our lord and master, nay our god; he alone shall be our husband unto whom our father gives us away.' Offended by this rebuttal the wind-god entered into them all and caused deformity of their limbs (like arthritis).

"Thus they approached their father Kuśanābha with tearful eyes. The distressed king and father questioned them, 'Tell me, pray, who is the cause of this dreadful deformity of your lovely forms?'"

### *Bāla 33-34*

"The girls narrated all that happened, to their father. The king Kuśanābha greatly applauded the conduct of his daughters and said: 'Forbearance is indeed the greatest ornament of women as also of men—the kind of forbearance that you have shown in your conduct towards the wind-god. Forbearance is the greatest gift, the truth, the best form of worship, glory, piety and the support of the world.'

"Soon, the king began to think of giving them away in marriage to a suitable man.

"It was about the same time that there lived a great ascetic by name Chūlī, who had undertaken unprecedented austerities. During this period, he was waited upon and served by a girl named Somadā. The ascetic, highly pleased with her devoted service, said to her: 'I am highly pleased with your service; name a boon.' At once she replied: 'I am unmarried, and I will not marry. Grant me, therefore, the boon of a son through the power of your asceticism.' Highly pleased with this prayer, the ascetic willed that she should conceive and give birth to a son: and the cosmic (Brāhmic) energy brought this about. The son thus conceived and delivered came to be known as Brahmadata (gift of Brahmā), who became the king of Kāmpilyā. It was to this Brahmadata that the king Kuśanābha gave away all his hundred daughters in marriage. During the ceremony, when Brahmadata touched the hand of each girl, her deformity left her and she regained her beauty and charm.

“The king Kuśanābha now prayed for the birth of a son to him. His father Kuśa blessed him saying: ‘A pious son will surely be born to you,’ and immediately ascended to heaven. Soon Kuśanābha was blessed with a son whom he christened Gādhi, in accordance with the wishes of his noble father. That Gādhi is my father, O Rāma; and I am also called Kauśika because I am a descendant of Kuśa.

“I also had an elder sister known as Satyavatī who had been given in marriage to the sage Ṛcika. She was highly devoted to her husband. As a result, when the sage departed from this world, she ascended bodily to heaven, and later descended on earth as a river, the Kauśikī (Kosi), out of the largeness of her heart. As such she continues to be to this day, O Rāma. I was very fond of my sister and so spent some time on the bank of Kosi. After that, I left that spot and came to Siddhāśrama where, thanks to you, I have now successfully completed the most sacred rite.

“Thus have I told you, Rāma, the history of this place. The night is well advanced. It is time all of you retired to bed.”

#### *Bāla 35-36*

Early in the morning, the sage again heralded the dawn and urged the princes to get up and get ready to move on. Crossing the river Sone, the party marched onwards. They saw the holy river Gaṅgā.

As usual, Rāma posed a question, for the benefit of the whole assembly: this time he wanted to know the story of the Gaṅgā. The sage Viśvāmitra said:

“Himavān (Himālayas) married the daughter of Meru (the polar ice-cap) who was known as Mena. They had two daughters: the elder is Gaṅgā and the younger is Umā. For the welfare of all the beings of the three worlds (heaven, earth and the intervening space) the gods begged Himavān to give Gaṅgā to them. The magnanimous Himavān, too, acceded to their request. Thus, the holy Gaṅgā ascended to heaven and became a celestial river; later she descended on earth in the form of a purifying stream. The other daughter Umā was given by Himavān in marriage to lord Śiva himself.”

With his curiosity whetted by this brief narration of the sublime story, Rāma requested the sage to expand the narrative

and give the account in greater detail. The sage, too, consented, and gave the following detailed account of the story of Umā, the consort of lord Śiva, and also the story of the descent of the Gaṅgā on earth:

“The lord Śiva had married Umā, the daughter of Himavān. And, they were engaged in enjoying conjugal pleasures for a long period of time. The Lord’s creative energy grew more and more intense; and even the gods were afraid that the earth would not be able to support his progeny. They therefore made bold to interrupt the union of the divine couple, to offer a prayer: ‘Lord, pray restrain your creative energy by your own self-control; the worlds will not be able to bear the full impact of your creative energy. By such self-restraint practised by you and your consort, alone, will the worlds survive.’

“The Lord at once agreed to the proposal. ‘What shall we do with the energy already released?’ he asked. This energy had covered the earth already. The gods sought the help of fire and wind. Fire concentrated the energy which now assumed the form of a mountain, and being blown around by the wind, it spread to a thicket of reeds—and eventually assumed the shape of Kārtikeya (lord Śiva’s son).

“Umā, the Lord’s consort, however, was annoyed by the gods’ interference in her union with the Lord and cursed the gods that they would never have an offspring.”

### *Bāla 37*

“While lord Śiva and Umā returned to their austerities, the gods with Indra at their head approached Brahmā, the creator, and humbly submitted: ‘Lord, the divine being Śiva had granted us our boon, which was to bless us with a commander: this commander can only be born of his energy. Having released this energy, lord Śiva has resumed his austerities, along with Umā, his consort. Pray, consider what should be done.’

“The creator Brahmā replied: ‘Umā’s words cannot be falsified. No god can receive lord Śiva’s energy to give it a body. Here is the heavenly (celestial) Gaṅgā; let the god of fire convey the Lord’s energy to Gaṅgā who will then deliver the son. Gaṅgā will doubtless regard the child to be hers; and Umā will also lavish her affections on him. Thus he will be the beloved of all.’

“The gods then approached the god of fire to accomplish the commands of the Creator. The god of fire in his turn approached the celestial Gaṅgā and prayed that she should carry the Lord’s creative energy. Gaṅgā assumed a form of ethereal beauty. Seeing this the energy melted into her. The god of fire filled her with the divine energy.

“Unable to carry that divine energy for long, the holy Gaṅgā, on the advice of the god of fire, released it on the side of the Himālayas. Where the energy flowed, everything turned into gold. Whatever the energy touched turned into gold and silver of incomparable brilliance; the mere heat of the energy turned objects at a distance into copper and iron. Even its ‘impurities’ became tin and lead. Thus the minerals were created on earth.

“As I said before, the energy was spread among the reeds on the bank of the river Gaṅgā. The gods gathered that energy, which became a boy. The gods ordained the deities presiding over the constellation Kṛttikā to nurse the boy with their milk; hence he came to be known as Kārtikeya. He is known as Skanda because he ‘flowed’ with the river Gaṅgā.

“In a matter of days this divine boy grew mighty in strength and destroyed the host of demons who were harassing the gods. He became the commander of the divine hosts.

“This is the story of the birth of lord Śiva’s son who is also known as Kumāra. He who is devoted to Kārtikeya will enjoy a long life, will be blessed with children and grandchildren and will eventually become one with lord Skanda.”

### *Bāla 38-39*

Rāma, I shall now tell you the story of the descent of Gaṅgā on earth.

One of your own ancestors was the mighty king Sagara. He was without an heir to the throne, though he had two wives—Keśinī, daughter of the king Vidarbha, and Sumati, daughter of the sage Ariṣṭanemi and sister of the divine bird Garuḍa. The king undertook austerities. Pleased with him, the sage Bṛḥgu bestowed upon the king a strange boon: “One of your wives will give birth to one son for the perpetuation of your clan; and the other will give birth to sixty thousand sons.”

In course of time, Keśinī gave birth to a son christened Asamanja; and Sumati delivered an egg (of the shape of a

gourd) from which sixty thousand sons emerged. Sumati preserved them in pots of ghee; they soon grew to be youthful boys. Asamanja true to his name proved to be a wicked boy who had dangerously sadistic tendencies and who revelled in torturing and drowning even young children. Yet, again, his own son Aṅśumān was pious and noble and was greatly loved by the people.

King Sagara resolved to perform the sacred horse-rite. He chose the most holy piece of ground between the Himālayas and the Vindhya, which is regarded by sages as specially suited for the performance of holy rites, and commenced the rite. The sacred horse was entrusted to the care of the valiant Aṅśumān, the king's grandson.

Indra the chief of the gods, disguised as a ghost, however, stole the horse away at a critical point in the rite. The priests exclaimed: "O king, catch hold of the thief and kill him; let the rite proceed to a successful conclusion; otherwise great misfortune will result." The king sent for the sixty thousand sons and commanded them to comb the earth and find the horse; they had his permission even to dig the earth.

The sixty thousand fell to their task. Not finding the horse on earth, they began to dig the earth. Seeing this wanton and ruthless destruction of the subterranean and other life, the gods and demons prayed to Brahmā, the creator: "Lord, life on earth is being destroyed by these sons of Sagara. Aquatic creatures and subterranean creatures are tormented, too. Suspecting that this or that may be the enemy of the horse-rite, and here or there the horse may be hidden, they are doing great harm to living beings."

#### *Bāla 40-41*

The creator, Brahmā, replied: "Earth is, as it were, the consort of lord Viṣṇu the protector of the universe. The sons of Sagara who thus ravage her and her creatures will surely meet their end at the hands of the Lord who himself dwells on earth at this time in the person of Kapila, the divine sage. The breaking up of the earth, too, does take place in every age: this is nothing unusual. And they who are endowed with vision see that those thoughtless people who are guilty of crimes against the good earth are justly punished." The thirty-three

gods who preside over the natural elements returned to their abodes satisfied.

Sagara's sons could not find the horse, though they had searched everywhere and even dug up the earth. But the king urged them on: "Dig deep down, splitting the very earth into pieces." And so they did. As they went right through the earth, they encountered four elephants that looked like mountains (perhaps the other way round?)—Virūpākṣa in the east, Mahāpadma in the south, Saumanasa in the west, and Bhadra in the north. They paid their homage to each one of these and continued their search. Finally they proceeded in the north-easterly direction. They were frustrated and angry. At the end of the tunnel through the earth, when they emerged into the open, they saw Kapila seated in meditation. They mistook the sage for the horse-thief: for they saw the sacred horse too, peacefully grazing near the hermitage. They shouted in great anger and rushed at the sage. By mere utterance of 'huṁ' on the part of the sage Kapila of incomparable glory, all of them were reduced to ashes.

In the hall of worship, the king was impatiently waiting for the sons and the horse to return. When neither returned, he despatched his grandson Amśumān to find out what had happened. Amśumān took the same routes and met the same 'elephants' (and bowed to them) which reassured him that he would find the horse. Eventually reaching Kapila's hermitage, he saw the horse and the ashes of his uncles. While he was thinking of a suitable way in which to perform the obsequies to the departed, he saw the divine bird Garuḍa who advised him: "Grieve not, O brave one, the destruction of these your uncles by lord Kapila is just and as it should be. It is not right to use earthly water to propitiate their souls. When the divine Gaṅgā is brought down on this earth, and when their ashes are touched by the waters of the Gaṅgā, they will also ascend to heaven."

Amśumān returned to the house of worship and with the return of the horse the king brought the rite to a conclusion. However, he could not devise a method by which the celestial river Gaṅgā could be brought down to the earth. Sagara ruled for a long time and passed away, without accomplishing his cherished ambition of having the ashes of his sons purified by the holy Gaṅgā.



*Bāla 42-43*

On king Sagara's demise, the people lovingly elected Amśumān to occupy the throne. He for his part, engaged himself in protracted austerities over a number of years, in order to bring the Gaṅgā down: but he passed away before the austerities bore fruit. He had a son, Dilīpa by name. After the death of Amśumān, Dilīpa became king. But, he was so stricken with sorrow at the death of his granduncles, that he could not do anything about it. On his death, his son Bhagīratha ascended the throne.

Bhagīratha repaired to Mount Gokarṇa (perhaps Gomukh) in the Himālayas to perform intense austerities with view to bringing Gaṅgā down and also to gaining an offspring. He performed breath-taking austerities. Brahmā, pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and granted him the boon of his choice. And, Bhagīratha chose the two boons he had in mind. "Here is the Gaṅgā," said lord Brahmā, "but only lord Śiva can withstand the impact of her descent upon earth."

Bhagīratha now turned his devotion to lord Śiva. Standing on the tip of his toe for a full year, Bhagīratha invoked the grace of lord Śiva. The Lord, pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and said: "I shall satisfy your noble wish and bear the Gaṅgā on my head."

Soon, the celestial river Gaṅgā descended in all her power and majesty on the head of lord Śiva. The matted-locks of the Lord resembled the Himālayas themselves (perhaps the other way round?). Caught in the coils of the Lord's matted locks, the river tumbled down on her earthly course. The Lord let the river fall into the celestial lake Bindusāra: Gaṅgā emerged from here in three different directions, as seven streams. Bhagīratha rode in his chariot ahead of one of the streams or the main stream. The course of the river, like the course of our lives, was smooth in some places, tortuous in other places, quiet here, tumultuous there; twisting and turning, running straight and even turning back. The waters of the Gaṅgā, touched by the head of lord Śiva himself, are extremely pure. Even they who, on account of a curse, have fallen from heaven are purified by bathing in the Gaṅgā.

Bhagīratha thus led the Gaṅgā on the earth. They passed near the house of worship of the sage Jahnu who was engaged in a sacred rite. The waters of the Gaṅgā inundated the house

of worship. Annoyed at this, the sage drank the entire river which thus disappeared within him. On the intercession of the gods and celestials, the sage allowed Gaṅgā to emerge from his ear! Once again Gaṅgā followed Bhagīratha's chariot. They eventually reached the tunnel made by the sons of Sagara. Bhagīratha reached the culmination of his superhuman efforts: the holy Gaṅgā actually flowed over the ashes of Sagara's sons who were instantly purified and liberated.

*Bāla 44-45*

The creator Brahmā congratulated Bhagīratha on achieving the end of his quest, after overcoming all obstacles by superhuman effort. He decreed that the holy river that Bhagīratha had thus brought on to the earth would henceforth be known as Bhāgīrathī (the daughter of Bhagīratha.) He also decreed that whoever listens to this glorious account of Bhagīratha's unprecedented, superhuman, determined and successful attempt to achieve the task set for himself (viz., bringing the Gaṅgā down to earth) will have all his desires fulfilled, all his sins wiped out, and will enjoy fame and longevity.

Thus the sage Viśvāmitra concluded the story of Gaṅgā. Early the next morning they crossed the Gaṅgā and reached the city of Viśāla. Once again Rāma asked Viśvāmitra to narrate the legends connected with Viśāla. The sage replied:

"During the epoch known as the Satya Yuga, there were two sisters, Diti and Aditi, who gave birth to many powerful children and many pious children respectively. They grew up. And the desire grew in them to be free from old age and illness, to become immortal. Looking at the ocean of milk (the Milky way) in the outer space, they felt that if they could find a suitable churning rod and rope, they could churn that ocean which would surely yield nectar that would confer immortality on them. They then used the Mount Mandara as the churning rod, the serpent Vāsukī as the rope, and began to churn the ocean.

"But the first gift of the ocean was disappointing and distressing: a terrible poison Hālāhala emerged. The frightened gods sought the refuge of lord Śiva. In order to save the gods and the whole of creation, lord Śiva at once drank this terrible poison, as if it were nectar.