

RAMAYANA

PART 2

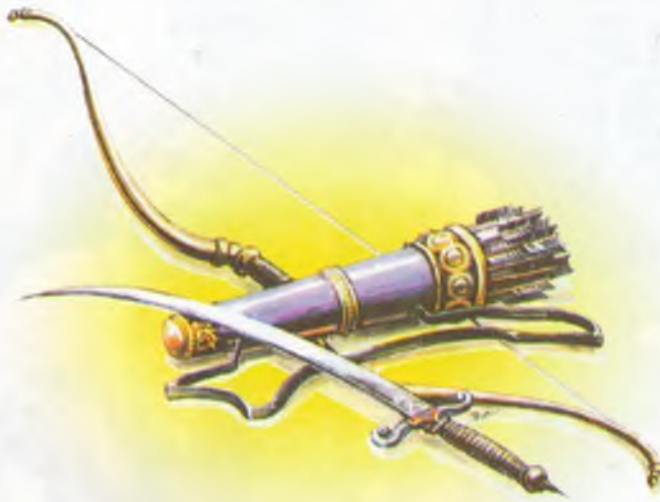


DREAMLAND

RAMAYANA

PART 2 CHILDHOOD EPISODE-II

Retold & Edited By:
T.R. Bhanot



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J-128, KIRTI NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110 015 (INDIA)

Phone : 011-2545 5657, 2510 6050 Fax. : 011-2543 8283

e-mail : dreamland@vsnl.com

www.dreamlandpublications.com

At a short distance from the boundaries of Ayodhya, there was a forest in which the Sage Vishwamitra's hermitage was situated. There, the Sage used to perform Yajnas in the company of other ascetics and hermits. But the Rakshasas (the demons) had grown very powerful. Two of them, Mareech and Subahu, used to disturb the sages by desecrating the altars.

When the ascetics and sages could no more tolerate the undesirable intrusion by the Rakshasas, they requested Vishwamitra to do something. Assuring his fellow sages, Vishwamitra decided to approach Dasharath, the King of Ayodhya. Next day while, Dasharath was in his court, a guard came and said, "Your Majesty ! Sage Vishwamitra has come to meet you."



King Dasharath was alarmed at the news of Vishwamitra's arrival. He looked towards Sage Vasishtha. The Sage said, "Don't worry. Let us hope Vishwamitra's visit proves auspicious. Please go and welcome him." -Acting upon the advice of the family priest, King Dasharath, at once, went out of the palace to receive Sage Vishwamitra. He touched the Sage's feet and said, "Your pious presence has made Ayodhya a holy place." Then, the king led him to the court and offered him a seat near Sage Vasishtha.

When Vishwamitra had taken the seat, Dasharath said with the folded hands, "What service can I render?" "The Rakshasas create trouble and do not let us perform the 'Yajnas'. They throw bones and filth into the sacrificial fire."



Sage Vishwamitra further said, "We, the sages and the ascetics, want you to provide us with protection." Dasharath replied, "Stop worrying, Your Holiness ! I shall send my soldiers who will kill any Rakshasa who comes near your Yajna altar." He also said, "If required, I myself shall go there. You may rest assured."

"No, your soldiers will be of no help. Send Rama and Lakshman with me. Then, everything will be set right," said Vishwamitra. King Dasharath was put in a dilemma. He got nervous and said, "How can these two boys fight those numerous Rakshasas ?" "You are free to refuse if you so desire," said Vishwamitra. Saying this with anger, Vishwamitra got up to leave.



When Sage Vasishtha saw that Vishwamitra was annoyed, he pleaded with him not to get agitated. He requested him to take his seat and said, "Please be calm."

"Please ask Dasharath not to, argue but to do as I say," said Sage Vishwamitra. Sage Vasishtha said to King Dasharath, "O King ! Don't be a slave of blind love and ignorance. Let Rama and Lakshman accompany Sage Vishwamitra to the forest. They will be gaining something there."

Dasharath's fears were removed. He at once called Rama and Lakshman there and, handing them to Vishwamitra, said, "Please excuse me. I was mistaken. Now, onwards, they will be at your service till you so wish."



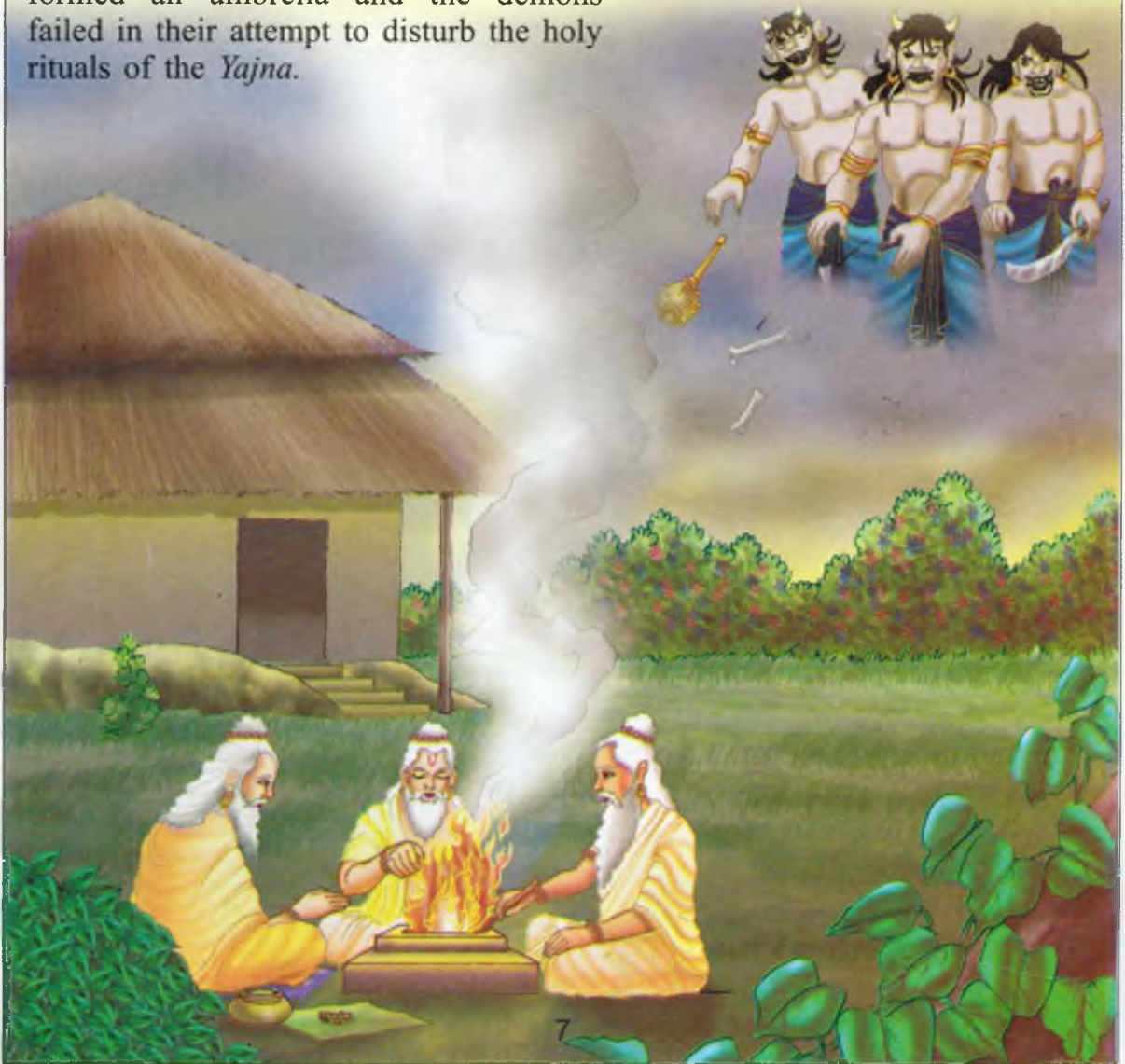


While on their way to Vishwamitra's hermitage, they were attacked by Taraka, the wicked She-demon. Rama immediately killed Taraka with an arrow, shot from his bow.

In the hermitage, the Sage trained the two brothers in the use of divine weapons. After that training, they were fully prepared to fight the demons. Rama said to Sage Vishwamitra, "Respected Sir ! Now you may proceed with the performance of Yajnas without any fear."

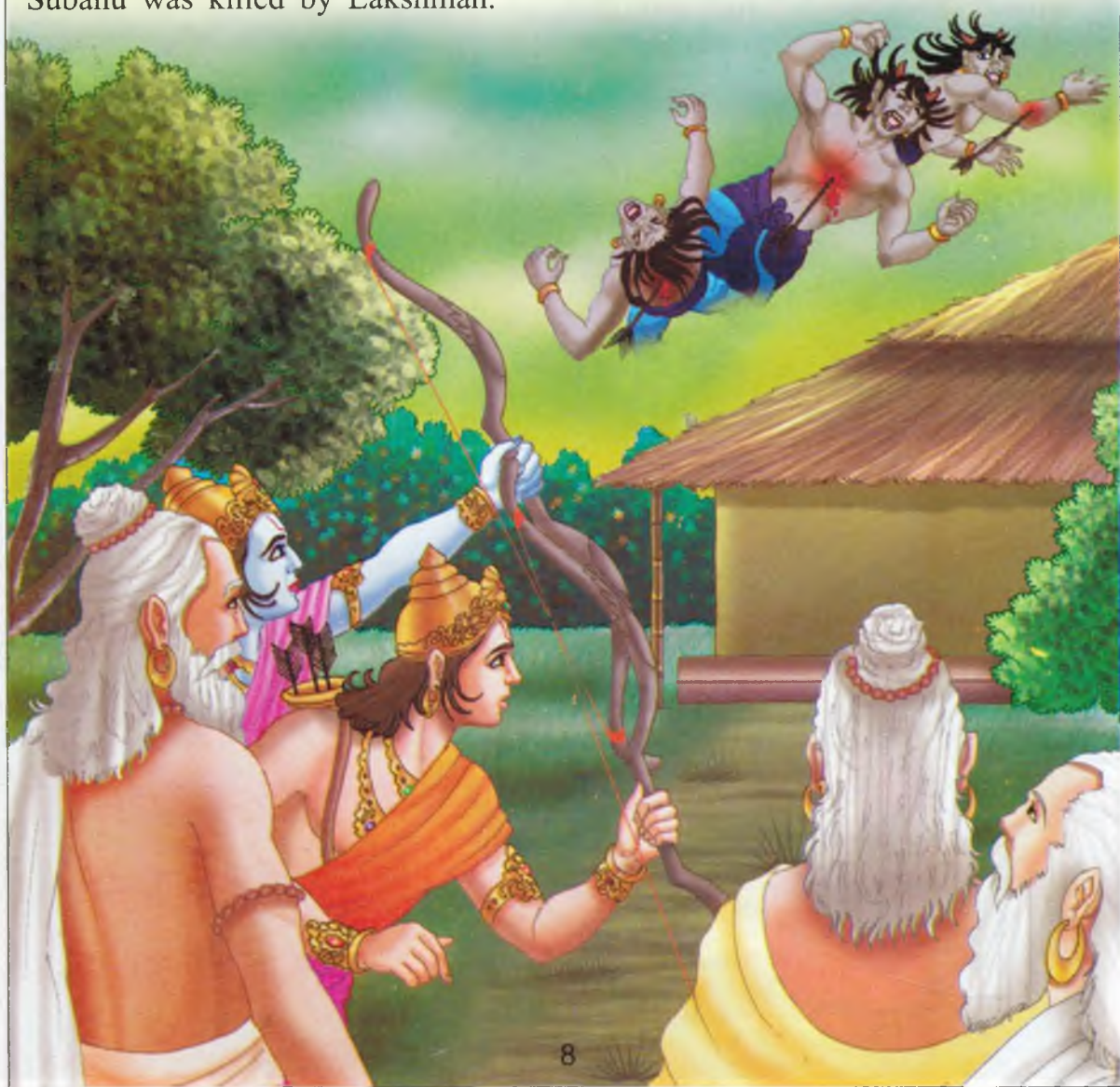
"May God bless you with a long life !" said the Sage. He got busy with the rituals, along with his fellow ascetics and hermits.

The news of Taraka's killing made both Mareech and Subahu mad with rage. They reached the Yajna site to desecrate it. As usual, they began throwing flesh and bones of dead animals in the sacred fire. Rama at once shot an arrow which rotated above the sacred altar with such a speed that it formed an umbrella and the demons failed in their attempt to disturb the holy rituals of the *Yajna*.



On the sixth day of Yajna, Mareech and Subahu again came there with a large number of their followers. They were determined to desecrate the holy site of Yajna. Rama and Lakshman were standing alert to guard the place. When they saw Rakshasas throwing filth and bones towards the sacred fire of the Yajna from above, Rama lost temper. He said to Lakshman, "The Rakshasas will not mend their ways unless punished."

"Permit me to kill them all," said Lakshman with his bow ready to shoot. "Well ! You will engage Subahu and let Mareech be my victim," said Rama. Saying so, Rama drew his bow and instantly Mareech was hit by the arrow which took and threw him in the ocean a hundred miles away. Subahu was killed by Lakshman.



The Yajna was completed without any further disturbance. A few days later, sage Vishwamitra received an invitation from King Janak of Mithila to grace the Swyamwar of his daughter Sita. The Sage said to the two brothers, "King Janak has asked me to bless his daughter Sita for whose marriage a Swyamwar is being held. I would like you both to go there with me." "We shall be honoured to obey your order," said Rama and Lakshman with humility.

On their way to Mithila, they saw a vacant hut, with a huge stone lying outside it, in the forest. Rama asked Sage Vishwamitra what that was and why the hut was unoccupied. "This is Sage Gautam's wife Ahilya who was cursed and turned into stone by the Sage," said Vasistha.



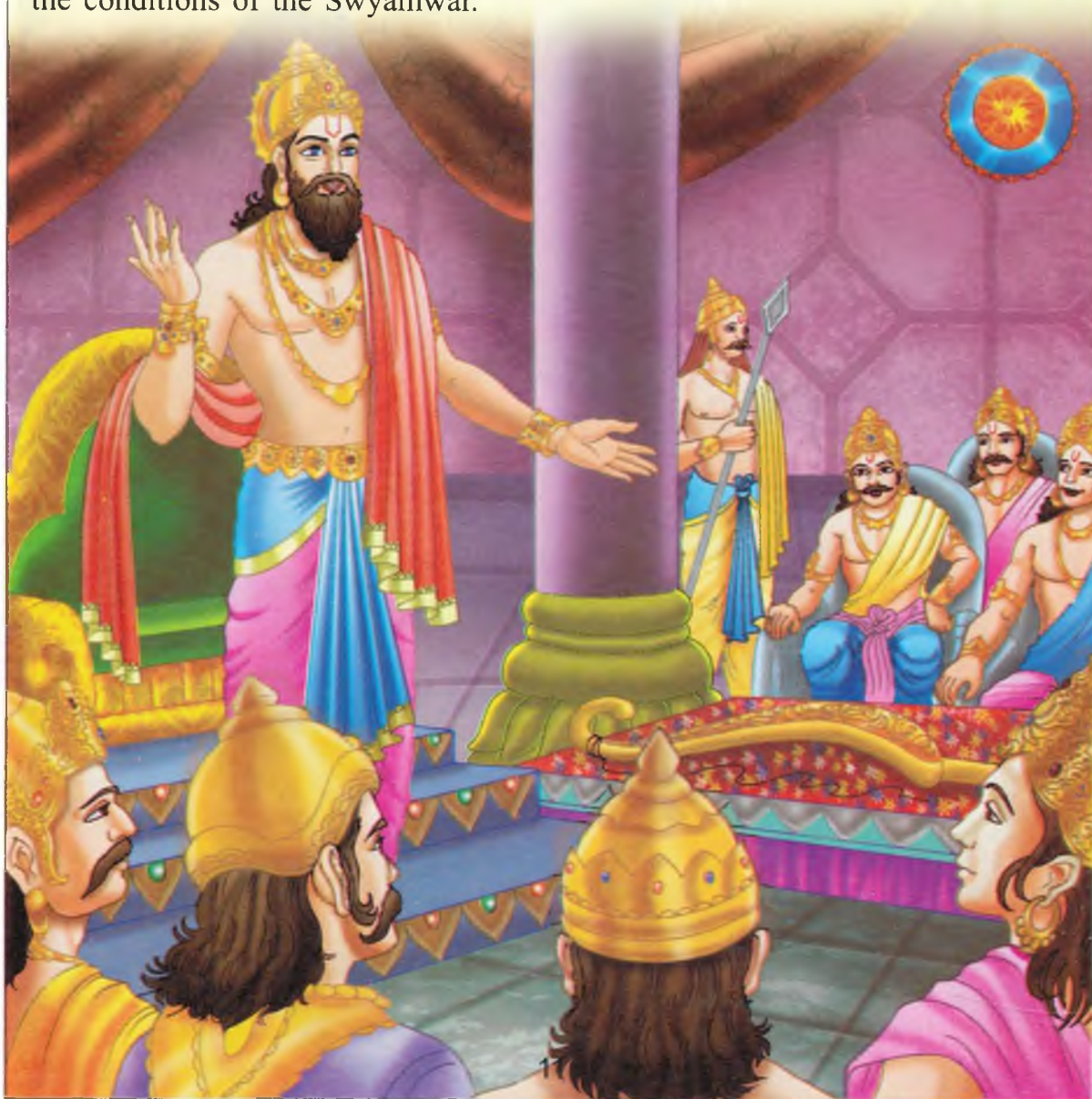
When asked by Rama, Vishwamitra related the story, “Ahilya was an extremely beautiful woman. Once the Moon-god, bewitched by her beauty, entered the Sage’s bedroom in the guise of Gautam, while he was away. Ahilya could not recognise him. While the Moon-god was leaving the hut, the sage Gautam returned. He got annoyed and cursed Ahilya to turn into stone. Since then, she has been waiting for you. Go and liberate her from the curse with the touch of your foot.”

As soon as Rama touched the ‘stone’, it regained the form of young beautiful Ahilya. Washing Rama’s feet with her tears, she said, “I was a sinner. You have granted me salvation. No doubt, you are the God-Incarnate.” Having said so, she left for the heaven.



In Mithila, Sage Vishwamitra stayed in a beautiful garden, with Rama and Lakshman. King Janak came there to pay his respects. The Sage blessed him and told him who Rama and Lakshman were.

King Janak himself escorted Sage Vishwamitra and Dasharath's sons to the hall where Swyamwar was to take place. On a dais the grand bow of lord Shiva was placed. Only he could ask for Sita's hand who would tie the string of the bow first of all. Sita was also brought in the hall by her friends and maids. Everyone, present there, was captivated by her beauty. When everything was ready, King Janak asked the Royal Bard to announce the conditions of the Swyamwar.



The Royal Bard proclaimed, "O Brave Princes ! This bow of lord Shiva is not only very heavy but also very hard to bend. Valiant warriors like Ravan and Vanasur have not been able to raise it an inch even. He, who succeeds in tying its string, shall be chosen by Princess Sita as her husband."

Many Kings and princes tried their best but failed in their attempt to fulfil the condition. Those, who boasted of their physical prowess, had to face humiliation. The foolish ones made a laughing-stock of themselves. Those, who were mature and wise, did not try. King Janak began to lose heart at what was happening. He feared his vow would prove an injustice to his daughter. He felt himself a culprit.





Out of disappointment, Janak lost temper. He said, "So many kings and princes, big and small, have come here from different States and Islands. Is it not strange that there is not even a single soul present here who can tie the string to win the hand of Sita, my daughter ? I don't understand the reason for the failure of all of you even to move the bow. I am convinced that this Earth has no brave man left upon it. None must think oneself valiant any more. Now, you may please leave this place. Perhaps my daughter is destined to live and die as a virgin. I curse myself for having vowed to ask for the fulfilment of such an impossible condition. I hold myself responsible for the ill-luck of my daughter. Even gods and demi-gods, present here, appear to be helpless."

At the use of insulting words by King Janak, Lakshman could not control himself and said, "None dares to speak such a language in any gathering where any of Raghu's descendants is sitting. King Janak should have known it. I declare, with all the humility at my command, that, if permitted by my elder brother, I shall spin this universe like a ball. This old bow is insignificant."

Lakshman's lion-like roar created panic amongst the Princes and Kings present there. Rama pacified Lakshman and made him sit down. Sage Vishwamitra smiled and said to Rama, "Get up and tie the string of the bow so that King Janak is relieved of the tension." Rama, after bowing before the Sage, walked upto the dais and attempted to pick up the bow.



When Sita's mother looked at the child-like innocent face of Rama, she was perturbed. She felt that the Sage should not expect Rama to tie the string of lord Shiva's bow ?" "Sita's aunt told her mother, "Don't underestimate the Sages and Ascetics. Gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh are helpless before a small incantation." Sita, on the other hand, was praying to lord Shiva to grant success to Rama by reducing the weight of the bow. Just then, Rama picked up the bow like a toy and drew the string to tie it on the other end of the bow.



When Rama tried to bend the bow to let the string reach the other end, it broke into two pieces with a big bang. The sound of the bang was deafening. The hall resounded with its echo. Everybody was forced to put fingers into the ears. All were stunned, but King Janak was very happy.

Rama threw the two pieces of the bow on the ground. Atmosphere of melancholy vanished at once. Musicians began to play upon their instruments and dancing girls started dancing without being ordered, just out of joy. King Janak immediately left his throne and stood before Rama, saying, "O Rama ! You have saved my honour which I had almost lost. I thank you for this. I am proud that Kshatriyas still walk on this earth."



The exploding sound, created by the breaking of lord Shiva's bow, attracted the attention of the great Sage Parshuram of the Bhrigu dynasty. He at once reached the Swyamwar-site and challenged him who had invited his death by breaking the bow. King Janak tried to calm down Parshuram but he would not listen to any argument. He said, "Tell me the name of the person who dared to break Lord Shiva's bow. Otherwise, I shall turn this planet upside down." King Janak kept quiet. Rama said, "O Respected Brahman ! Maybe that person is one of your devotees."

"No, it cannot be. The bow-breaker is my enemy and I shall not let him live any more," said Parshuram with anger.



Angry threats of Parshuram made Lakshman smile. He said, “We do not remember the number of such ordinary bows broken by us in our childhood. But you never lost temper then. What makes you so much annoyed now ? Is there anything special about it ?” “You fool ! Don’t you know you are standing in front of death ? That is not an ordinary bow ; it is Lord Shiva’s bow which no human being can move a bit,” said Parshuram. “We don’t find any difference between this bow and any other one. It was an old useless bow and broke into two pieces at the touch of brother Rama. How can you blame him ?” said Lakshman.

“I am known as the destroyer of Kshatriyas. Shut your mouth and save your life,” retorted Parshuram.



“Great Brahman ! We do not hit a god, a Brahman Saint and a cow. So, do not provoke me,” said Lakshman. Parshuram lost self-control and raised his axe to attack Lakshman. Rama stood in Parshuram’s way with his folded hands. He himself confessed to be the offender. He said, “I am your humble servant.” Then, Parshuram gave his own bow to Rama to draw its string. When Rama did so, Parshuram knew that Rama was not an ordinary man. He bowed before Rama out of respect.



When King Janak found that Parshuram had been pacified, he gestured to Sita's friends to lead her to Rama. Standing before him, she glanced at Rama and put the flower garland around his neck. That indicated her choice of Rama as her husband. Parshuram blessed both Rama and Sita and, hailing Rama, went out of the hall. Gods from the heavens showered flowers on the couple to show their approval and pleasure. Then, Janak said to Sage Vishwamitra, "Please advise me what to do next."

"O King ! Send some messenger to Ayodhya to inform King Dasharath so that he comes here for the solemnisation of the marriage," replied Vishwamitra. Janak at once sent his man to Ayodhya.

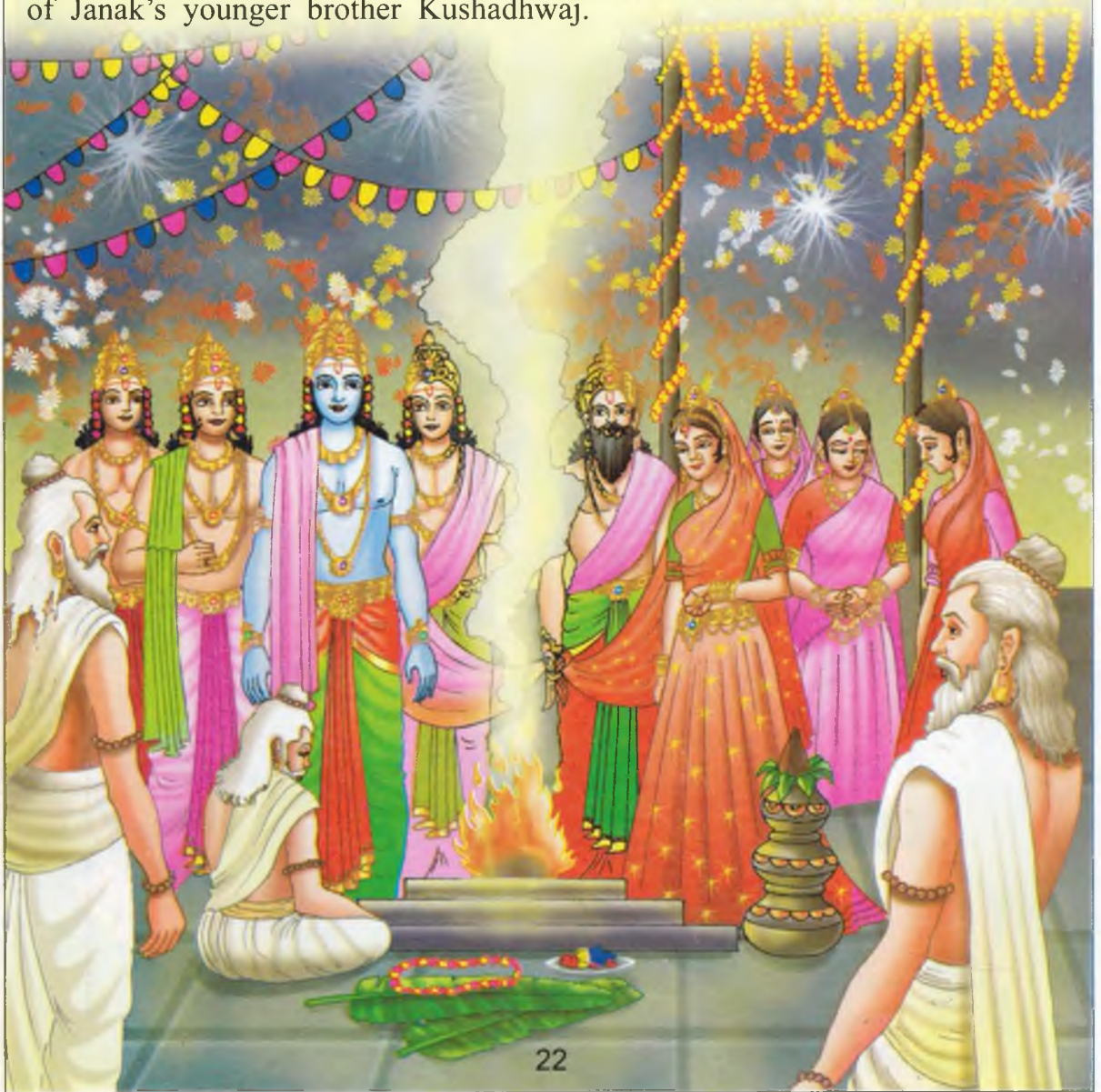


Janak's messenger, after reaching Ayodhya, did not take much time in meeting and telling Dasharath of Sita's choice of Rama as her husband. King Dasharath was very happy and excited. He sent the happy news to his Queens without losing any time. Bharata and Shatrughna came running to their father as soon as they heard of the message of King Janak. Dasharath asked Bharata to make arrangements for taking marriage party to Mithila.

"As you order," saying this Bharata and Shatrughna got busy with the job. Chariots, elephants and horses began to be decorated. King Dasharath with the family Priest Sage Vasishtha, relatives, courtiers and other elites of the city reached Mithila the very next day.

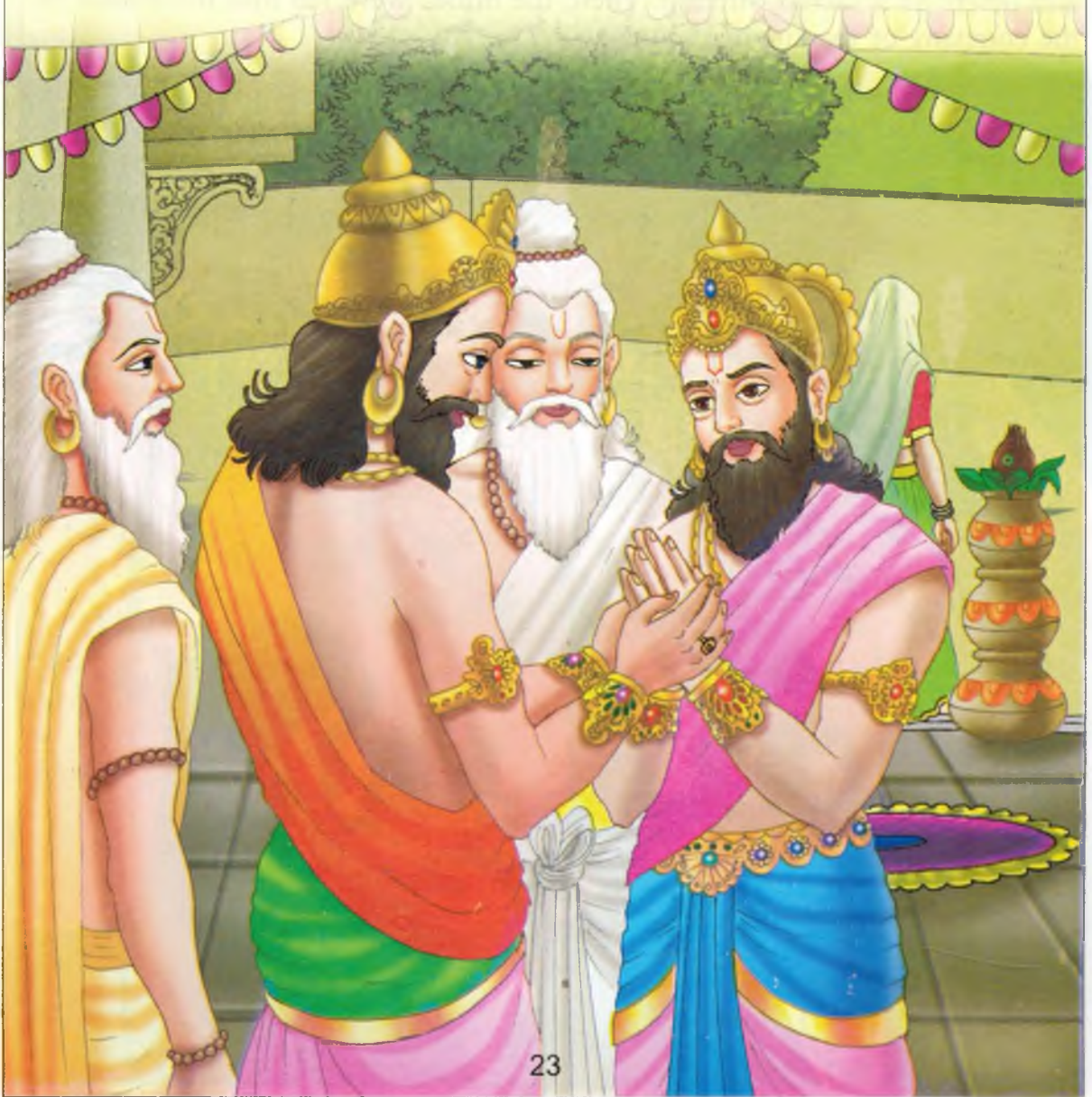


The people of Mithila were over-joyed with the grandeur of the marriage party. The Marriage party was also pleased at the grand reception given to them. King Janak and his relatives welcomed King Dasharath and other members of the party with great respect and enthusiasm. They escorted the guests to the place where marriage ceremony was to be performed. Reaching there, King Janak requested his family Priest Shatananda to perform the ceremony. He further said, "You may please solemnise the marriages of the four brothers at the same altar." Thus Lakshman was married with Urmila, Janak's second daughter and Bharata and Shatrughna with Mandavi and Shrutikirti respectively, the daughters of Janak's younger brother Kushadhvaj.



After the ceremony, Janak gave cart-loads of ornaments, jewels, clothes and other valuables as dowry to his and his brother's daughters. At the time of the departure of the marriage party. Janak got emotional and said to King Dasharath, with tears in his eyes, "O King of Kings ! we feel ourselves fortunate to be bound with you by relation. This has enhanced our prestige. We may be excused for any lapse on our part during your stay here."

"Dear brother ! the truth is otherwise. I think myself lucky to call myself a relative of a noble and saintly king of your status." Then the marriage party left Mithila with the brides and reached the outskirts of Ayodhya.



The entire city had turned out to welcome the king, the princes and the brides. Every house and shop, every lane and square was decorated with flowers and buntings. Everybody was in a festive mood. Before entering the city, Dasharath worshipped Lord Shiva, Holy-Goddess Parvati and auspicious Ganesh, as advised by the family Priest Sage Vasishtha.

Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra were standing at the main gate of the palace, with the golden trays full of flowers, incense and sweets. They were there to receive their sons and their brides. After greeting them, Kaikeyi donated a large quantity of golden ornaments and clothes to the Brahmans and others as a sacred offering. Then, the brides were led into the Palace in the company of the singing women.

