

THREE FAMOUS TALES

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M.A., I.C.S., F.R.S.L.
BAR-AT-LAW

G. V. K. SWAMY & Co.

EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHERS
KUMBAKONAM

All Rights Reserved

[Price As. 16]

KABEER PRINTING WORKS
195, HIGH ROAD, TRIPPLICANE

PREFACE

The three tales in this book are from the Āitareya Brahmana, the Mahabharata, and ancient Indian folk-lore respectively. All the three are arresting, and are of profound interest in their own way.

In the twilight between barbarism and true higher civilisation, human sacrifice was almost universal in all countries. India was one of the earliest to abolish it and to write a powerful story about it. After having done it, it evolved a theory of human sacrifice unique in the world, namely, sacrifice of oneself for a principle or person, like that of Sibi for saving a dove, and of the Bodhisatva for feeding even a starving tigress. Nay, it did an even more astonishing thing. It changed the unattractive Harischandra, backing out of his promise by an inglorious purchase of another's son as substitute, into the sublime Harischandra of the Puranas, disdaining to go back on his word and sacrificing himself, wife and child on the Altar of Truth.

The tale of Nala and Damayanti is one of the noblest of love stories. The famous Irish poet and critic AE (Russell) told me, when I met him in his Dublin home on Christmas Eve 1932:—"Damayanti's story has thrilled me more than Sakuntala's. Oh, the unforgettable scene when, at her bidding, the immortals sat there shadowless, with unwinking eyes and unfaded garlands, with their feet not touching the earth, and with no trace of perspiration on their foreheads".

Bimbisara's story is also a gripping one, showing the tenderness of parental love existing in one who had himself become virtually a parricide in his lust for power, the repentance which came at last, and that irony of life which so often intervenes and thwarts our best intentions, as it did Ajatasatru's.

A. S. P. AYYAR.

CONTENTS

Preface

1. Human Sacrifice Stopped
2. Nala and Damayanti
3. Bimbisara

HUMAN SACRIFICE STOPPED

King Harischandra, of the famous line of Ikshvaku, was very sad as he had no son. His queen, Chandramati, was even sadder. So, when the sage Narada visited him one day, the king told him about the secret sorrow which was eating into his heart.

“Pray to Varuna¹” said Narada “He may grant you a son though he will exact hard conditions.”

“I am willing to put up with any conditions” said the King “He shall have the costliest offerings.”

“He may not be satisfied with any other offering; he may demand the sacrifice of the son himself.” said Narada.

“How horrible!” exclaimed Harischandra, “Human sacrifice has not been heard of for generations.”

“But, he is an old and conservative god, unlike Indra who is content with the lower animals and is fast becoming his dread rival.”

“What will I gain if I agree to this monstrous sacrifice?” asked the King.

“Some people think that it is better to have

1. A Vedic god.

loved and lost than not to have known what it is to have a son at all," said the sage.

"Is there any way of making Varuna relent, finally?" asked the King.

"Who can say? You can count on my help, though it is mighty little that I can do. But, I would advise you not to entertain false hopes from the very outset. Varuna is, indeed, a hard task-master" said Narada.

"Why does he exact such hard terms?" asked the King.

"He thinks that he is only taking back what he himself gives, and that there is nothing wrong in this."

"But, a human sacrifice! How horrible!" exclaimed Harischandra.

"To you and to me it is horrible, as death seems to us to be such a terrible and gruesome event. To Varuna, the ancient and immortal god, the giving and taking are just the same; birth and death are alike; so he may not look at this with our eyes" said Narada, "Now I must be off," and he left, after setting the ball rolling for ending human sacrifice in India.

Harischandra consulted his queen that night. Both of them finally resolved to pray to Varuna and obtain a son even on the hard terms mentioned by Narada.

“ Oh thou who holdest heaven and earth apart, and causeth the golden ‘ swing to shine above, hewing a path across the sky with thy dart, grant me a son, and take from me any vow ” prayed Harischandra. Varuna appeared. He granted the prayer on the explicit condition that he would sacrifice the son to him.

Queen Chandramati had a son the next year, resplendent like the sun, the very embodiment of beauty and charm. The delighted parents named him Rohita, and performed the innumerable auspicious ceremonies, and made the numberless gifts, usual on such occasions. The whole country rejoiced at the birth of the prince.

In the midst of this universal rejoicing, Varuna appeared before the King and said “ Sacrifice the son to me, as promised.”

Harischandra replied “ Let the ten days of birth pollution pass. No one can be sacrificed who is not ceremonially pure.”

“ Be it so ” said Varuna.

Ten days passed, and he came again, and made the dread demand.

“ Let all the teeth appear ” said Harischandra, “ No animal can be sacrificed till the teeth appear.”

2. The sun. The sun is golden, and is compared to a person swinging in the sky.

Varuna left, but returned again after all the milk teeth had appeared.

“Let the milk teeth fall, and the real teeth take their place,” said the King, “Teeth must mean only permanent teeth, and not milk teeth.”

Varuna went, but came again as soon as the milk teeth had all fallen and the real teeth had taken their place.

“Let the boy be initiated in arms” said Harischandra “Then alone will the sacrifice of a Kshatriya³ prince be wholly proper.”

“So be it” said Varuna “But, do not hope to put me off even then.”

Rohita was duly initiated into the warrior’s profession when he had completed the age of sixteen. Then, taking him inside his private audience hall, Harischandra told him, with tears streaming down his cheeks, about his impending sacrifice to Varuna, and begged of him to agree to it as there was no other way out.

“Why should I agree to be sacrificed for keeping your silly promise?” asked Rohita “No father is entitled, under our laws, to sacrifice his son except for his country, as in war. Simply to have the pleasure of boasting that you too had a son, you made this promise to this ancient and blood-thirsty

3. Kshatriyas are the warrior caste.

god. He has no right to demand the sacrifice from me, as I had no part or lot in this promise. Let him do what he likes with you for breaking your unholy pledge. I do not want your kingdom or property, so that Varuna may not say that, having taken your assets, I should also take on your liability. I am departing with only the bow given to me by my maternal uncle."

So saying, he took the bow and left for the wilderness, guided by Indra, the powerful god of rain and the rival of Varuna's exclusive claims to be the lord of all the waters.

Varuna, deprived of his promised sacrifice, and powerless to do anything to Rohita, took revenge on Harischandra by causing a terrible kind of dropsy of the belly. The belly swelled enormously. For six years, during which Rohita wandered, Harischandra suffered the tortures of hell from this terrible affliction. Nothing could quench the thirst from which he was suffering, and his belly was distended like an enormous balloon, making it impossible for him to appear in public. He had no sleep or rest or peace of mind, and felt his life a burden. He heard Varuna's jeers "Now you see how an unfulfilled promise can drag you down" dinning constantly in his ears. Finally, he was on the point of death. He sent a pathetic letter to his son as follows:—"I am about to die. But, far from trying to live, I am

only anxious to die as early as possible, and to get rid of this infernal disease. You will succeed me as King shortly. But Varuna will not allow you to reign in peace till he has been given the human sacrifice he demands. In response to the piteous entreaties of myself and your mother, he has finally agreed to accept a suitable Brahmin boy as a substitute for you if you can get one. Offer any amount of wealth, and get the substitute, and come here with him, and save our race, the famous line of Ikshvaku, from extinction."

Rohita went on eagerly searching for a Brahmin boy. No one was willing to offer his son as a substitute. One said "My son is as valuable to me as you are to your father." Another remarked "What a Kshatriya are you that you quake before death and seek to put an unwarlike Brahmin in your place!" A third asked "Who wants your wealth in exchange for his son?". A fourth said "Harischandra has an enormous belly filled with water. You have an enormous purse filled with pelf. Neither of you will succeed in fooling others." A fifth queried "You fool, can't you see that a crow's young will be as dear to it as a swan's is to the swan?". A sixth said "When you find a father ready to barter his son for your pelf, know that the time of universal destruction is at hand, as righteousness is at an end." A seventh remarked "If

you are brave, sacrifice Varuna to the other gods, and rid the world of this inhuman deity," Rohita wandered about, hearing such replies, and without any sign of approaching success.

Then, one day, to his surprise, he met a father who was willing to accept his offer. This was the Brahmin Ajigarta who had three sons, Sunahpuchchha, Sunahsepa and Sunolangula. He was extremely poor and greedy. For years it had been his ambition to own a cow, and he had not realised it yet though he had reached middle age. When offered a hundred good cows in exchange for a son, he cried out "Leave the eldest, for performing my funeral ceremonies when I am dead, and take one of the other two."

"Don't take my last-born one!" said his wife clinging to Sunolangula.

So, Rohita took the middle one, Sunahsepa, who was unclaimed by either parent, like the unswept middle portion between two houses in a street, or like the No-Man's land in war, and gladdened the heart of Ajigarta with the gift of the coveted cows.

Then, taking Sunahsepa, and also his parents in order to prove their consent to the sacrifice, Rohita went to Ayodhya⁴ and told his father everything. Harischandra asked Varuna for permis-

4. Harischandra's capital.

sion to substitute Sunahsepa for Rohita. Varuna agreed, remarking "A Brahmin is better than a Kshatriya." The King then prepared to perform the sacrifice with Sunahsepa as the victim. Viswamitra was the *hotri*, Jamadagni was the *adhvaryu*, Agastya was the *Udgatri*, and Vasishta was the *Brahma*⁵ for this unique sacrifice.

Nobody was willing to tie up this human victim to the sacrificial post, as a doubt was felt whether such a sacrifice was proper in the changed times, when the victim could not be restored to life, as in the days of old. Ajigarta volunteered to do this, if given a hundred cows more, adding, "I have already allowed him to be sacrificed, and he will surely be sacrificed as the only alternative is Rohita. So, why not I myself do this, and gain something more for the family?". He was given a hundred more cows by Harischandra, and he tied the boy to the sacrificial post, Viswamitra alone shouting "Fie unto you who call yourself a Brahmin!" The sacrifice proceeded, and the sacred fire was taken round Sunahsepa preliminary to his actual slaughter. After this was over, the victim had to be slaught-

5. The hotri, adhvaryu, Udgatri, and Brahma are the four priests necessary at a Hindu sacrifice. The hotri recites hymns from the Rig Veda; the adhvaryu recites ritual passages from the Yajur Veda; the Udgatri chants hymns from Sama Veda; and the Brahma represents the Godhead.

ered. No one was willing to use the sacrificial knife on him lest sin should take hold of them. Ajigarta once more volunteered his services and offered to slaughter his son himself if given another hundred cows, adding "When I agreed to give him for sacrifice, it was equal to slaughtering him myself. So, I may as well get something more for his family by completing the gift." Harischandra accepted his offer at once, though Viswamitra exclaimed "What a sacrifice is this, with this Brahmin callously killing his own son for the sake of wealth!"

Seeing his father get ready with the sacrificial knife, and sure of death now, Sunahsepa prayed to the Lord ⁶Prajapati to save him. "You are the lord of all creatures, and the lineal ancestor of men" cried he "Oh save me from this horrible death!" Prajapati expressed his desire that the sacrifice should be stopped, but referred the matter to Agni, as the sacred fire had been circled round the victim. Agni released his claim, but wanted the god Savitar to decide, as the hymns had been uttered, and it was for the god of hymns to release the victim. Savitar released his claim, but referred the matter to Varuna, as he it was who had demanded and got the sacrifice. Harischandra prayed to Varuna :—

6. Brahma, The lord of creation.

“ You have caused the rivers to flow to the sea ; you have made the mighty mountains wrapt in cloud ; you know the course of all the birds in the sky, and fish in the waters, and the path of the wind ; You know each and every secret thing and act ; and must have known long ago the true facts. You who forge the dread fetters for the sinners, but forgive those who repent, pardon my sin. ”

Varuna released his claim, moved by the prayer, and in deference to Prajapati's wishes, but referred the matter to the Viswadevas⁷ whose share in the proposed sacrifice could not be taken away without their consent. The Viswadevas readily agreed to forego their share, adding, “ The question of our share arises only when there is actually a sacrifice. But the person to decide whether the sacrifice, which has been begun, can be given up is Indra, the lord of sacrifices. ” Indra was referred to. He said that Ushas, the goddess of the dawn, was the fittest person to decide as to whether such a sacrifice was appropriate to the changed times. Ushas said with conviction “ Human sacrifices belong to the Sunset, and not to the Dawn. She continued :—

“ Know, human sacrifice
Is from now on a vice,
To be put down by Kings

7. Ten minor deities entitled to a share in all offerings.

Like a Hydra with wings.
 Fathers can't sell their sons;
 Even the middle ones.
 It's forbidden to kill
 Men simply at one's will.
 Sacrifice can go on,
 But with oneself as pawn.
 He who wants others to save
 Must be unselfish and brave.
 The gods who demand blood
 Must obtain it in war,
 But the time is not far
 When war will go, like the flood.
 Give the gods a leaf or fruit,
 Water, flower, stem or root,
 Let your hearts be pure always,
 And keep you firm in God's ways!"

So, the sacrifice was given up, and Sunahsepa was released from the sacrificial post, to his immense joy. Harischandra's belly also reverted to its normal size, and he was free from his fell disease.

Indra said to Sunahsepa "Son, I give you the power to prepare a wonderful oblation called *Anjasava* from *Soma*. Prepare it at once and offer it to the assembled gods and sages with rice and butter as sacrifice. A goat is the only animal to be sacrificed in this age, and even that is not essential."

“Tell us how this came about” asked Sunahsepa.

“I shall” said Indra. “The gods tried an experiment long ago. They sacrificed a man. The *medha*⁸ went out of the man and entered a horse; they dismissed the man, who had become deformed by this, and sacrificed the horse. The *medha* went out of the horse and entered an ox. They dismissed the horse, which had become a white deer, and sacrificed the ox. The *medha* went out of the ox and entered a sheep. The gods left the ox, which had become a *gaval*⁹ and sacrificed the sheep. The *medha* went out of it and entered a goat. So the gods left the sheep, which had become a camel, and sacrificed the goat. The *medha* remained for the longest time in the goat, but, finally, went out of it also and entered the earth. The gods dismissed the goat, which had become a *sarabha*.¹⁰ Then they surrounded the *medha* which had entered the earth. It could not escape, being thus surrounded, and turned into rice. So rice, with clarified butter, is the best thing to be sacrificed in this age. As the *medha* remained longest in the goat, that animal is the fittest to be sacrificed, among the animals.

8. The inner spirit of sacrifice.

9. A stunted short—horned bullock.

10. A fabulous animal having eight legs and reputed to be stronger than a lion.

Human sacrifice has been declared sinful, and distasteful to the gods”

Sunahsepa then prepared the *Anjasava*¹¹ from *Soma*¹², and offered it to the gods with rice and clarified butter. All were pleased, and blessed him. Viswamitra adopted him as his own son. Ajigarta, on seeing what great honour was being accorded to Sunahsepa by gods and sages, went and claimed him as his son. “No, I shall not return to you who did acts which the worst sinner would not have done” said Sunahsepa. “I have been adopted by Viswamitra, who was the first to condemn your act, and will be his son.”

“How can he adopt you without my consent?” asked Ajigarta.

“You have no more claim over me, having sold me for 300 cows,” said his son.

“How can Viswamitra, who has a hundred sons alive, adopt you?” jeered Ajigarta.

“I shall make him my eldest son” said Viswamitra. “Then the thing will be regular, as a man can have an adopted son first, and then any number of natural sons”. Ajigarta was cornered. “You will do anything” said he to Viswamitra “You combine Brahmin learning with Kshatriya courage.

11. A doubly sacred drink offered to the gods at sacrifices.

12. The usual drink offered to the gods at sacrifices.

You made the Sutej make way for the Bharathas when they fled southwards after being defeated by the Tritsus with Sudas at their head. You made Trisanku¹³ stand in the middle heavens though the Dēvas tried to push him down to the earth. But your sons too are like you, daring and obstinate. They may refuse to receive this boy as their eldest brother.”

“I shall see to it.” said Vaswamitra.

Viswamitra then took Sunahsepa with him to his hundred sons, and asked them to accept him as their eldest brother. The first fifty sons would not agree to have this stranger grafted into their family, and as the head of it too.

“He should have obeyed his father, and consented to be sacrificed” said they.

“You obey your father, and accept him as eldest brother.” cried out Viswamitra in wrath.

They persisted in their refusal, while the last fifty sons, with Madhuchandas at their head, gladly agreed to their father’s request, and expressed their pride at having the inventor of *Anjasava* and the favourite of the gods as their eldest brother. As the first fifty still refused, Viswamitra drove them out with the curse “As pride of caste and love of privileges have prevented you from accepting this

13. This King is said to have become the constellation Southern cross.

favourite of the gods as your eldest brother, on the score that he is a stranger, may your lot be cast among strange peoples of the south, and may your descendants be of low caste!" So the unfortunate fifty wandered forth in the hills and forests of the south, intermarried with the people there, and became the ancestors of the Savaras, Pulindas, Matilas and others. Sunahsepa remained with Viswamitra, as his honoured eldest son, under the new name of Devarata. Human sacrifice was stopped for good all over India, and Ajigarta's name became one of universal reproach and obloquy.

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

Nala, the son of Virasena, became the lord of the Nishadas¹, in the prime of his youth. He was a just and generous ruler, a scrupulous adherent of the truth, and one who put the happiness of his subjects above his own. He was very handsome, and had an uncanny skill in taming steeds and managing horses. Men feared him in war, as much because of the justice of the cause he espoused as because of his known prowess. He was pure in heart, and was the soul of virtue. His only defect was an inordinate love of the dice.

In the adjoining Kingdom of Vidarbha⁴ there lived the powerful king Bhima with a beautiful daughter, Damayanti, born after long years of prayer and as the result of a boon from a great sage. She had three brothers called Dama, Danta and Damana. Damayanti was so beautiful, charming and graceful that there was none to equal her in all the three worlds³.

The wandering heralds who used to go from court to court, singing the praises of brave kings and beautiful princesses, soon got to work. They

1. The Nizam's Dominions. 2. Berar. 3. Heaven, Earth and Paradise.

made Nala fall head over ears in love with Damayanti, by songs of her beauty and charm. They made Damayanti infatuated with Nala by poems and ballads about his bravery and skill in managing horses. So, Nala and Damayanti fell violently in love with one another, though they had not met, and spent whole days thinking of each other.

One day Nala, when sauntering in his palace garden, full of thoughts of Damayanti, saw a herd of golden swans. He chased and caught their leader.

“Don’t kill me or keep me captive” said the King of the swans, “If you free me, I shall do for you what you desire most. I shall go with my friends to Kundinapura, to the capital of Vidarbha, to the pleasure garden of the princess Damayanti, plead your cause with her, and make her fall in love with you”. Nala was overjoyed at this, and forthwith released the bird.

The King of the swans then went with his comrades to Damayanti’s pleasure park in Kundinapura and hopped about the banks of the lotus pond. Seeing these glorious denizens of Manasarovar⁴, the princess Damayanti, who was there with her ladies-in-waiting, desired to catch one of them. The swans scattered in different directions, each pursued by a lady. The King of the Swans led Damayanti

4. A lake in the Himalayas.

on to a lonely corner of the garden, and said "Princess, I have come here to tell you about the glorious Nala, King of the Nishadas. He is verily a King among men. He has no equal among men just as you have none among women. He is the only fit mate for you. The best should be united with the best."

"Tell me all about him" said Damayanti dreamily, "I should love to listen".

"Nala is beautiful like the god of love, virtuous like the lord of Dharma, brave like the god of war, rich like the god of wealth, and generous like the god of gifts" said the swan. Damayanti whispered "He is already the lord of my heart. But who knows his mind?".

"He is dreaming of you night and day, and has sent me now with a message of his undying love for you and firm resolve not to seek the hand of any other" said the swan. Damayanti exclaimed joyously "You have made me happy, oh bird, by this welcome message. Go and tell him that I am waiting for him." The bird then flew back to Nala, told him what Damayanti had said, made his heart rejoice, and flew away with his comrades to his Himalayan abode.

Damayanti began thereafter to brood over her lover. She lost her appetite and sleep and her zest in games and moonlight walks, and sat in solitude

for hours, heaving long sighs and gazing wistfully at the sky and the moon. Her ladies-in-waiting reported this to the King and Queen. The King consulted his ministers and wise men. They told him, with one voice, "The princess is past sixteen. The time for her *swayamvara*⁵ has come." Nature, oh King, brings about this kind of unrest and vague longings at the change of the seasons, in trees, birds, mammals and men."

So Bhima sent his heralds far and wide requesting all the Kings and princes of India to attend his daughter's *swayamvara*. They came from all over the country in hordes, in their golden chariots and decked in their best clothes, ornaments and garlands. Kundinapura was filled with the clatter of their horses and chariots, and the trumpeting of their war elephants.

In the pre-occupation with Damayanti's *swayamvara*, the Kings and heroes even forgot to wage war with one another and attain Indra's heaven by dying while doing deeds of unforgettable valour. Indra was wondering at the non-arrival of such heroes. Narada, the great sage, told him that all the Kings and heroes had no time for war as they had their hands full, preparing themselves for the *swayamvara* of Damayanti, who was more beautiful

5. A ceremony at which a princess used to publicly choose her husband from among the assembled suitors.

than any other mortal maiden or even celestial nymph. Indra was curious to see this wonderful maiden, and was possessed with a desire to marry her, if possible. So too, Agni, the lord of fire, Varuna, the lord of the waters, and Yama, the lord of the dead, all of whom had been with Indra during Narada's discourse. For, all knew that what Narada said would be absolutely true.

The four gods set out for the *swayamvara*. On the way, they met Nala who too was proceeding to Kundinapura on the same errand. Seeing them, Nala saluted them, with his customary piety, and wanted to know if he could do anything for them. They made him promise to do the thing they would mention. Suspecting nothing, he agreed. They asked him to plead to Damayanti their cause. "How can I do so, when I too love her, and want to plead my cause? Pray excuse me, oh ye gods" said Nala.

"Remember your promise, and do as we say. Else, for ever be dishonoured as the breaker of your word" said Indra "Truth, oh King, is surely greater than any woman, however beautiful".

"I bow to the holy ones" said Nala "and shall carry out their behest. But how can I enter the closely guarded women's apartments, and meet Damayanti?" "I give you the power to enter unseen" said Indra, "go"

With a heavy heart, Nala entered the apartments of Damayanti, unseen. She saw him, and her heart began to throb within her with suppressed excitement, for she thought that this must be only Nala, from the descriptions given by the heralds of his personal appearance and bearing. Still, to be perfectly sure, she asked "Who art thou shining like a celestial? Speak quickly".

"I am Nala, King of the Naishadas" said he. At that, she said "Lord of my heart, I have already chosen you as my lord. This *swayamvara* has only been arranged in order to choose you publicly. All that I want is your love in return. I received your message sent through the swan, and rejoiced. Speak freely of your love. My ear is aching to hear your sweet words". Nala's love for her had increased a thousand-fold on seeing her divine beauty and hearing her sweet words of love. But he remembered his pledge to the gods, curbed the words of burning love rising to his lips, and said "Oh fair one, I have come here as a messenger of the great gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni and Yama. They have sent through me the message to you 'Choose for thy husband one of us immortals.' It is through Indra's grace that I have been able to enter here unseen." Damayanti at once uttered hymns of praise to the four gods and said to Nala "I have already chosen you as my lord and husband. So, do thou, without hesitation, love me in return. If

you scorn me and go back on your words sent through the swan, I shall seek death by fire or water or the noose, as I cannot live without you". "Princess," said Nala "you should not offend the gods and bring ruin on yourself and me. What am I, Oh divine beauty, but like dust under your feet, compared to the lord of heaven, or the lord of fire, or the lord of the waters, or the lord of death? So, choose one of the immortals for thy lord, and thou shalt have robes free from dust, garlands which never fade, chariots which move with the speed of lightning".

"I am but a poor mortal and am not fit to be the bride of a god" said Damayanti, "So, I am quite content with you whom I have already chosen. Won't you plead your own cause?".

"I can't" said Nala. "The motto of the King is 'Truth above everything'. I have pledged my word to the gods to plead their cause, and, so, cannot plead my own. Oh, princess, out of love for me, yield to my prayer, and choose one of the gods, and enable me to keep my promise."

"Your promise was only to plead their cause to me. You have done it, oh sinless one, and are discharged. It is for me to choose whom I please, whether god or man. No one, not even the gods, can dictate to me about it. I have already chosen you. Tell the gods this from me, and ask them

to excuse me. Let them also attend the *swayamvara* if they like, and I shall choose you in the eyes of all the gods and men. That will free you from all blame. I see now that your truth is equal to your beauty, and my love for you is increased tenfold, if anything that was already full can become greater”.

Nala returned and told the celestials Damayanti's reply. Then the four gods assumed Nala's form and entered with him through the great golden arch, into the vast chamber where the *swayamvara* was to be held. Hundreds of Kings and princes were already there, seated on their thrones in their best dress, ornaments and garlands, and putting on their most attractive smiles.

At the auspicious hour, Damayanti entered the great hall, with bridal garland in hand and attended by her principal lady, Bhadra. King Bhima and the high priest asked her to choose her partner for life, and prayed to the gods to guide her choice aright. Damayanti saw, to her astonishment, five kings exactly like Nala sitting in the front row, and did not know how to pick out the real Nala. In her confusion, she prayed to the four gods to help the course of her true love. “Ye upholders of truth and *dharma*,” prayed she “I have pledged my heart irrevocably to Nala through the swan. I must keep that vow ever, and you must help me. How could I have chosen Nala in my heart without you gods

having destined it to be so? I pray you, therefore, to assume your divine symbols so that I may know and choose my Nala." The gods were pleased with her piety, faith and constancy and love for truth, and assumed their divine symbols. They sat there shadowless, with unwinking eyes and unfaded garlands, with their feet not touching the earth, and with no trace of perspiration on their foreheads. Nala, of course, sat with his feet touching the earth, with his forehead covered with sweat, with his eyes staring and winking, and with his garland showing signs of fading, and, sure enough, his shadow could be seen plainly. Damayanti humbly thanked the gods, went up to Nala and put the bridal garland round his neck amidst the blare of trumpets and sound of conches.

Bhima and the assembled princes congratulated Nala. The gods too were pleased with his glorious upholding of his pledge to them even to the extent of not revealing by any sign that he was the real Nala. Indra said to Nala and Damayanti "Oh, happy couple, we four are very glad at your union. Damayanti, your preferring Nala to us, immortals, has shown your unshaken devotion to the man you have chosen, and we rejoice. Nala, your keeping your pledge to us at all costs shows that you will keep your marriage pledge to Damayanti unto death, and we rejoice." Then the gods gave boons to Nala.

Indra gave him the power to see the godhead in his sacrifices, and, after death, the attainment of heaven. Agni gave him the power of not being affected by fire. Varuna gave him the gift of making floral garlands of superior fragrance. Yama taught him the art of preparing choice foods of exquisite taste, cooked to a nicety. Then the four gods departed, after having been worshipped by Nala and Damayanti, and after blessing them with the enjoyment of a romantic attachment to the very end of their days. Nala said to Damayanti "The least I can do for you, my beloved, who has preferred me to the immortals, is to love you till death with a love which knows no diminution and to show that my marriage vow will be kept like my vow to those gods"

On their way back, the four gods met Kali, the lord of this iron age, and Dwāpara, the lord of the previous age, hurrying to the earth. "Where are you going?" asked they. "To Damayanti's *swayam-vara*, to woo the most beautiful of all maidens" said Kali and Dwapara.

"She has already wed Nala, rejecting even us" said the gods. Kali flew into a wrath and said "For preferring a mere mortal to immortals, she shall be ruined along with the mortal she preferred." "Don't say so, Kali" said the four gods "We freely allowed her to marry Nala, and gave him our boons."

“But she ought to have waited for us” said Kali, “I shall bring her and her husband to ruin, biding my time.”

“Kali, desist from these foolish and unjust plans” said the gods “They will only bring you to grief and make your name execrated on earth”, and disappeared.

But Kali, the wicked one, was only rendered more wrathful by their words. He told Dwapara “I cannot control my wrath, like these gods. They are ageless and timeless, and take things calmly. You and I are limited by Time, and must act accordingly. I shall enter Nala’s body and make him gamble away his kingdom and desert his wife, You enter the dice and make them loaded.”

Nala and Damayanti left Kundinapura after the marriage festivities were over, and went to the land of the Nishadas. They lived there most happily for twelve years. Twins, a boy and a girl, were born to them. They were named Indrasen and Indrasena, and grew up beautiful, healthy, strong and intelligent, and were dearly loved by their parents. Nala was ruling his kingdom in an exemplary fashion, and all his subjects adored him.

The evil Kali was all this while watching for an opportunity for entering Nala’s body, but could not find any for twelve years, as Nala was scrupu-

lously observing all the ceremonial rules. But, at the end of that period, one day, Nala accidentally left a small portion of his right foot unwashed before performing his evening ablutions. In that twilight hour, Kali saw his long-looked-for opportunity and entered Nala through the unwashed portion of the foot, and took possession of his inmost soul. He sent word through Dwapara, to Nala's cousin Pushkara, a wastrel and a gambler and a mean hypocrite with hidden aspirations to usurp the kingdom, to challenge Nala to a game of dice, promising to aid him and to get for him the kingdom.

Pushkara challenged Nala accordingly. Nala possessed by Kali, eagerly accepted the challenge. That night began the games with the dice. The evil one, Dwapara, entered the dice. In game after game Nala lost large sums of money, costly cars, chariots, fine robes and ornaments. But, with every loss, Kali made the demon-possessed Nala's eagerness for the game only more pronounced. He staked jewel after jewel and lost them all. The games continued for days. Damayanti saw this with consternation. She went and implored Nala to desist from the games. Nala would not even reply. The ministers waited to see him and implore him to desist. Nala would not even reply to Damayanti's message that they were craving for an audience. The citizens assembled in their thousands outside

the gates of the palace, and wanted to interview their king and ask him to desist. Damayanti went and implored her husband to see them. He would not deign to reply, and Pushkara jeered at her calculation and cowardice. The citizens and wise men went away saying, "Nala is not himself; some demon has entered him. There is no use telling him anything. Who can avert Fate?"

Finding the situation hopeless, Damayanti asked the royal charioteer Varshneya, to take her children to Kundinapura before it was too late, and then to go and take service wherever he wanted and to await better times.

After he had departed with the children, she made a last appeal to Nala to desist. He would not reply to her repeated entreaties. Nor did he even chide Pushkara for saying to him "Oh, don't stake the kingdom in consideration of which she married you." Damayanti felt humiliated, and retired to her apartments in despair.

Nala was dice-mad. He finally staked his kingdom too and lost. "What else have you to stake? Ah, there is Damayanti. Let us throw the dice for her" said Pushkara. At these words, Nala, though possessed by Kali, saw visions of the *swayamvara* and his being preferred by Damayanti to the immortals. His heart was rent in twain. He realised the utter folly of which he had been guilty

in entering into this gambling match. But it was too late to do anything. He left the palace with but a single cloth, followed by Damayanti with but a single garment, and went outside the city gates. Pushkara became king and issued an ordinance prohibiting the giving of food or drink to them on pain of instant death. So, not a soul dared to offer their ex-king and queen anything, not even words of sympathy or encouragement.

For three days and nights, Nala and Damayanti remained outside the gates drinking only water. The wicked Pushkara had insisted that they should remain outside the city for that time, so that he might be crowned in peace, and the prize won in the match really secured. When this period was over, Nala and Damayanti left the country to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

After some days of wandering, feeding on wild fruits, roots and herbs, they went through a mighty forest. Nala was very hungry. Just then, he saw some birds with an extraordinarily beautiful plumage sitting on the ground. He said to Damayanti "I shall gently throw my cloth over these unsuspecting birds and catch them. They will serve for our food for some days, and their plumage will be worth much." So saying, he approached those birds slyly, and threw his cloth over them all. But the birds rose into the air with the cloth before he could reach

them, and shouted out to him "Oh, foolish King, we are the dice you played with. We have come hither to take away even your cloth, and leave you naked, and thus complete our joy."

Nala told Damayanti "See how misfortune has surrounded me on all sides, due to my own folly in not listening to any one of you, and going on with that gambling. I am helpless to do anything, because I am dying with sorrow at the terrible hardships which have overtaken you, fair one. If you were safe, calamity will be faced by me like a man, and will be overcome at last. So, pray, for my sake, go to your parents in Vidarbha, and wait there till I retrieve my fortunes. Yonder is the road leading to Kundinapura. Many merchants and caravans pass that way. Any one of them will take you to your father's court eagerly, hoping for a great reward, or to win your father's favour, or even from common goodness.

"What words are these?" asked Damayanti "How can I leave you in this miserable state, deprived of kingdom and wealth? When the evening falls, and sad thoughts come, I must be by your side to solace you with loving words. When you are weary with wandering, I must be there for you to lay your head on my lap and take the much-needed rest. A loving wife is the greatest medicine in the world to her sick husband. If you want me to go to Kundina-

pura, you also come with me, and both of us shall live there till the evil days pass. My father and brothers will honour you, as they did before, and will render you the necessary aid to regain your kingdom."

"No, I cannot come there. Never should a son-in-law go to his father-in-law's house as a suppliant. It was all right when I was rich and powerful. Now it is impossible. But, a daughter can always seek her father's asylum," said Nala.

"I must only follow you. Never shall I leave you willingly. My place is where you are. Do not our scriptures say 'The house is where the husband is, and the wife never dreams of willingly leaving the shadow of her lord'? That is why I sent away our children to my father's court, as they were minors, but remained behind and witnessed all the humiliation you suffered at the hands of that mean Pushkara" said Damayanti.

"Darling, I make a last appeal to you to do as I say. There is no harm in a wife's leaving her husband for her home at her husband's behest." said Nala.

"Do you not want me to be with you, beloved?" asked she "You were telling me that without me you cannot live for a single day."

"That is still true, darling" said he "But I have now to look at the thing unselfishly."

"How does the question of selfishness or

unselfishness arise? Are not husband and wife one?" asked Damayanti.

Nala saw that further argument was useless, and resolved to achieve the object by a ruse. So he said "I shall not request you any more, as your mind is made up on the point."

She kissed him and said "Darling, now that we have only each other, and nothing else, let us not think of separating. What if the birds took away your cloth? Perhaps it was only to make you walk along with me dressed in half of mine?" And she wrapped one half of her long saree round her husband, and playfully dragged him along.

At dusk they reached a wayside rest-house. They lay down there, on the bare ground, hungry and thirsty. Damayanti was so weary and worn-out that she soon slept soundly. Nala, prompted by Kali, decided that the only way of making Damayanti leave this fruitless wandering, which was sure to end soon in her premature death, was to desert her in that inn that night when she was sleeping so soundly. It cost him many a bitter pang to resolve finally to desert her whom he had loved so well. "Often, we have to part with our dearest ones for their own protection," said he to himself "Just as we do in war. And no better place can be found to leave her than this inn at the cross roads of great trade routes, one of which directly leads to Vidarbha.

Once she is sure that I have deserted her, she will naturally go back to her father, as she should. Duty is bitter, like castor oil and gall nuts, but it leads the way to better things."

So, cutting away half her saree, he wrapped himself in it, and left Damayanti, saying "See to what a state I have brought her! She who slept on the softest beds filled with the finest silk cotten, lies now on the hard ground like a wandering gipsy! Ah, how trustingly she sleeps, and with what an angelic smile! Every morn she gets up with a refreshing smile! But, tomorrow! May the gods, and her own virtue, protect her from all harm!" A dozen times he turned back, after going a few steps, to have another look at his beloved. Each time the parting became even more bitter. Finally he said to himself "If I continue to turn back like this, I shall never be able to leave her, and we shall be exactly where we were before. Oh, no, Nala, act like a soldier discharging an unpleasant duty, and go." And he ran from the spot at his topmost speed, like one haunted, till he was in the thick forest and far away from the inn.

Damayanti woke up at midnight, after a long slumber, hungry and weary. She was surprised to see herself alone in that forest inn. She called out "Beloved!" thinking that Nala might have gone out for a moment. When her call evoked no response,

she became terrified, and called out "Oh King of the Nishadas, where are you? Lord of my heart, where are you?" Still, there was no response. She laughed to herself, and said "I know, my lord is trying to scare me by hiding himself, and wants to see how I would behave. I shall soon find him out." She searched hither and thither in the inn and under the trees, shouting out "Oh, there you are!", but only echoes of her voice came back. Often she thought that she saw Nala's form hide itself behind a copse or tree, and shouted out "Ah, I have found you out. I saw you go into hiding," but when she went to the spot she found that she had been deceived by the shadows, and that there was nothing there.

Finally, she realised that Nala had deserted her, and her grief knew no bounds. She cast herself on the ground and wept inconsolably. Every scene of tender joy and poignant sorrow in her past life passed through her mind, the swan's message, Nala's mission, the *swayamvara*, the boons of the gods, the wonderful happiness for twelve years, the birth of the two children, their sweet ways, the evil days of the gambling match, the utter ruin, the disgrace, the exile, the previous evening's conversation, and, finally, this desertion. She cried out in agony "May he who causes Nala to suffer endure even greater misery than he, and may his name be execrated for ever!"

Distracted with grief, knowing not what she

was doing, she rose and ran through that forest like a mad woman, in that dark night, looking for Nala. Long she ran thus, aimlessly, and lost her way in that dense growth of trees, shrubs and creepers. Then, when it was dawn, she fell against a huge python which was coiled up anxious to secure its prey. The serpent coiled itself up round her fair body with intent to crush her to death and then eat her up. In horror and terror, she cried out "Oh, Nala, save me from this monster! Where are you, my beloved? This serpent will kill me presently. Then, who will be there to comfort you in your sorrow?"

Hearing her cries, a savage huntsman, on his early morning round for game, went to the spot, saw the python, and, with an arrow aimed with unerring precision at its head, killed it. Then, seeing lovely Damayanti, whose perfect figure was easily discernible owing to her wearing only half a saree, the hunter was filled with a burning passion for her. He addressed endearing and improper words to her and tried to fold her in his arms. She said to him "Go away. You have saved my life, and I am loath to do you harm. Don't approach near me again lest you perish from the curse of a chaste woman!"

"I fear not your curse, my fair charmer" said he "I keep and enjoy whatever prey I catch" and

rushed to embrace her. Damayanti's eyes blazed forth fire, and she said "If it is true that I have never thought of another man but Nala, may this man, seeking to outrage my modesty, fall down dead!" Immediately, the lustful hunter fell down dead, like a tree smitten by lightning.

Leaving his body, Damayanti marched on through that dreadful forest full of trees, shrubs and thorns and wild beasts. A tigress was near a pond. She cried out to it "Oh tigress, have you seen my lord? If so, tell me where he is. If you have not seen him, eat me up and save me from this anguish which is withering my body!" The tigress got scared by her voice and appearance, and ran away from the pond into the depths of the forest.

Presently, the queen reached a holy mountain where sages were doing penance. She approached the sages and enquired of them about Nala. They said "Oh gracious lady, your bad time has still much to run. But we foresee the day when Nala will be freed from sin and will be restored to his kingdom and reunited with you." Before she could ask for any more details, the sages had disappeared, with their fires. "Is it a vision or is it a fact?" said poor Damayanti to herself, but felt in her heart of hearts that what she had heard must come true.

After much more wandering, she came across a big caravan with many merchants and valuable

merchandise on elephants, camels, donkeys and pack bullocks. On seeing this beautiful woman clad in but half a saree, and looking like a veritable maniac, the merchants at first took her to be a goddess or demoness of the forest, and implored her to do them no harm. She reassured them, told them that she was the wife of a prince, and asked them whether they had seen her husband, giving his description. They said "No" To her further enquiries they said that they were going to Chedi, the kingdom of Subahu. As Subahu was her mother's sister's husband, and his daughter, Sunanda, would be about her age, though she had not met any of them since her marriage, she resolved to go with these merchants to Chedi and remain with Sunanda as her lady-in-waiting without disclosing her identity till she could trace Nala. The merchants allowed her to join their caravan.

That night the caravan halted on the banks of a beautiful lotus lake in the middle of the forest. After a refreshing bath and meal, everybody slept without fear. In the middle of the night, a herd of wild tuskers in rut smelt the tame female elephants and charged the caravan in search of mates. The wildest confusion ensued. Many men and animals were gored or trampled to death. All the remaining merchants ran helter-skelter and sought shelter, leaving their merchandise. Damayanti too woke up

from her sleep on hearing the uproar. She succeeded in escaping, and was going to join those merchants who had escaped. But she heard them crying out "That maniac was no human being, but a demoness who has brought about this destruction on us. We must catch hold of her and stone her to death." Fearing that these deluded men would stone her to death if she went near them, she fled from the spot, exclaiming "Oh, what sins have I committed in the past birth that I lose my kingdom and husband, am separated from my children and relatives, and am even taken for a demoness!"

In the morning she found some Brahmin ascetics going to Subahu's court, and joined them. When she reached Haiheya, the capital of Chedi, a crowd followed her, struck by her beauty, her scanty clothes, dishevelled locks and wild looks. The queen of Subahu saw her from her mansion, and said to her daughter Sunanda "Ah, look at her! She has the grace of a queen, and virtue is writ large on her face. She is the fittest person to be your companion." Sunanda replied "I too like her. Mother, methinks, she resembles you a little." "Me!" said the queen "Impossible! Anyhow, let us get her at once."

So, Damayanti was sent for and asked to give out her story. She merely stated that her husband had fallen on evil days and had left her and that she

would be desolate with grief till she was reunited to him, She would not reveal his name or status or country. "Be here as the princess's chief lady in waiting" said the queen, "and we shall seek out your husband in due course. Help the princess to adorn herself," and pushed towards her some very costly jewels set with flawless gems of great value. Damayanti handled them without surprise, or the least trace of covetousness, and the queen, pleased, said to herself "Whoever she is, she has seen far better days, and must have handled many jewels like these, though she has none now" and decided to engage her at once. Damayanti agreed to be the chief lady of princess Sunanda on three conditions. "I must not be given leavings of food. I must not be asked to do menial service. And, lastly, I must not be asked to speak to any men other than the Brahmins deputed to seek out my lord" said she. "So be it" said the queen, confirmed more than ever in her opinion that that this stranger was an exalted personage overtaken by misfortune.

A day after Nala had left Damayanti he was going sadly and wearily through the forest, grieved at having left his beloved, anxious for her fate, and feeling doubts about the wisdom of his having deserted her. Then he saw a huge forest fire, and a voice crying out pathetically "Oh, Nala, thou hast come. Rescue me speedily from this torture."

Nala rushed into the flames fearlessly, owing to the boon he had got from Agni, and found a great serpent in the midst of it." I am the immortal Karkotaka, the King of serpents" said the snake, "I was cursed by Narada, whom I once deceived in my folly, to suffer this anguish till you should come along and rescue me." Nala took the serpent out of the fire to a cool spot outside. Karkotaka said "Now, Nala, walk nine steps, and I shall give you something." Nala walked nine steps, and, at the end of the ninth, Karkotaka bit him ferociously on the heel of his right foot. The terrible poison made Nala instantly into a blue-black ugly dwarf. "What a gift is this!" cried out Nala, horrified.

"Don't be alarmed, oh King" said Karkotaka. "Even serpents don't harm their benefactors. I have bitten that wretch Kali who will suffer from the terrible effects of my poison till he leaves you. I have changed your form so that you may take service under Rituparna, the King of Ayodhya and the greatest master of dice in all the worlds, as his master of the horse, without fear of your identity being discovered, and learn from him supreme skill in dice in exchange for your skill in horsemanship. Here is a robe. Wear it and think of me whenever you want to resume your own gracious form, and you will immediately resume it." And the serpent departed.

Nala went to Ayodhya, as directed, and saw

Rituparna and demonstrated his skill in the management of horses and in cooking, and got appointed immediately as his master of the horse under the name Vahuka. He had as his comrades there Varshneya, his former charioteer, and Jivala. Every evening, sitting alone, Vahuka would sing a doleful song:—

Where's she now, that faithful wife,
 Does she live, or has she died,
 Wearied with toil, sick of life?
 Has she forgiven that fool
 Who deserted her and sighed?
 Is she safe from beast and man,
 And free her own life to rule,
 Or is she under some ban?

Jivala went and asked him one day "What is this song about, Vahuka?"

"There was once a man who loved his wife dearly, but, when misfortune overtook him, and his wife too insisted on following him, instead of going to her father's house, he deserted her in a forest, the fool, and then used to sing this song every evening," said, Vahuka. "As I liked the tune, I too took to it" "A queer fellow this Vahuka" said Jivala to Varshneya, "Why does he make himself sad by singing this song which does not concern him? But I suppose many men are like that."

King Bhima and his queen were greatly grieved

to hear about Nala's losing his Kingdom to Pushkara and going into exile with Damayanti. They brought up the two children lovingly, and sent Brahmins in different directions all over India to search for Nala and Damayanti, promising princely rewards in case they succeeded in their mission. One of these Brahmins, Sudeva, went to Chedi. A great festival was in progress at the court of Subahu. Sunanda was there with Damayanti attending on her. Sudeva, who was a great friend of Damayanti's brothers and had seen Damayanti often, identified her easily, though she had become thinner, darker and sadder since he had last seen her. Approaching her, he said "Oh lady, your parents, brothers and children are all anxious to see you. They have sent Brahmins in different directions to search for your husband."

"How are my parents? And the children?" asked Damayanti, with tears, recognizing Sudeva. Sunanda went and told her mother "Mother, the identity of my lady-in-waiting will soon be known. A Brahmin is telling her about her parents and children, and she is shedding tears." The queen went to the spot at once with Sunanda, and asked Sudeva "Reverend sir, who is this lady?"

"She is the princess Damayanti, daughter of King Bhima of Vidarbha, and queen of Nala, King of the Nishadas." said the Brahmin.

“What! my sister’s daughter! Impossible!” said the queen.

“I am certain of it” said Sudeva “She had a dark mole, between her eyebrows, like unto a lotus. Though covered with dust, I can still discern it faintly. I can also identify her easily by her appearance, though she is now pining for her husband and is like a moon under eclipse, or a dried-up river, or a lotus in parched-up soil.”

“I too remember that mole well. I was present at her birth in the court of my father Sudaman in the Dasarna country. But I don’t see it on her forehead,” said Sunanda. She then wiped the dust from the spot, and, lo, the mole was clearly seen like the moon emerging out of a cloud. The queen and Sunanda embraced Damayanti, and the queen said to her “Daughter, why couldn’t you have told me the truth from the outset? Should you have waited till a stranger told me? Forgive us for not treating you with the respect due to a beloved daughter.”

“What have I to forgive, mother?” asked Damayanti “You have been a mother unto me, and Sunanda has been more than a sister. Only the longing to see my beloved children makes me desire to go from here, where I have met with so much love and kindness.”

The King of Chedi sent Damayanti to Kundinapura with costly dresses and jewels and

escorted by a strong guard. King Bhima and his queen and Damayanti's brothers and children received her with great rejoicing. King Bhima gave Sudeva a village and an allowance and a thousand cows as a token of his gratitude.

Damayanti told her mother "Now we must find out and bring Nala here by some means or other. Else, I shall die of grief". The queen told King Bhima about this, and he sent Brahmins all over India once more. Damayanti called them all before they went and said to them "Wherever you go, recite these lines over and over again:—

'There was a husband once,
 Oh, he was such a dunce!
 He cut his wife's garment
 And with half of it he went,
 Leaving the wife he loved,
 With lamentations loud.
 Daily she weeps for him,
 As if her heart will break,
 Her eyes are always dim
 With tears shed for his sake.
 Has he forgotten his love,
 And his solemn marriage vow?'

Don't reveal who you are, or who sent you. Find out every possible detail about any man who replies, and especially what he is, where he lives, what special accomplishments he has, and his appearance

and antecedents. Of course, don't bring any such man here till I tell you."

The Brahmins went to the different countries. One of them, Parnada, went to Ayodhya. He repeated the set verses in Rituparna's court, casually, like a man reciting a bit of poetry to himself, and no one responded. When he went out and passed the royal stables, repeating the verses, Vahuka, who was alone there, heard them and replied with emotion :—

“ Birds robbed him of his dress,
 So he took hers in distress ;
 He left her for her good,
 Though it was in a wood.
 There is no need for tears,
 Or for unfounded fears.
 Sorrow affects fickle hearts,
 Noble wives defy its darts,
 And, free from anger, blame him not,
 Whom potent Fate has neatly caught.
 Lives of Sacrifice they lead,
 And, in Heaven, get their meed.”

Parnada asked him “ Sir, may I know who you are ? ” “ I am master of the horse of King Rituparna. My name is Vahuka ” was the reply.

Parnada left him, and, soon, by discreet enquiries, found out that Varshneya and Jivala were his associates. He ascertained from Jivala that

Vahuka was extremely skilled in managing horses and could cook viands to a nicety. To a question "What is his country? When did he come here?" Jivala replied:—

"Nobody knows which country he comes from. He came here only two and a half years ago, and is every evening singing a song about some woman deserted by a friend of his in a forest because misfortune overtook him, and he wanted her to go to her parents' house, but she insisted on following him! Queer fellow, but a nicer companion you cannot find. The song too is fine, though sad, and, indeed, he sheds tears when he recites it." At Parnada's request, Jivala recited Vahuka's song, adding with a laugh, "Fancy his reciting this song of his friend's desertion of his wife day after day! I rather think he loved the woman himself." Parnada too laughed heartily, and left, saying "There is no accounting for the ways of men and women." His questioning of Varshneya yielded no additional results.

Parnada returned to Vidarbha and told Damayanti all about Vahuka. She thought that it must be Nala in disguise, from the reputed skill in horses and in cooking viands, the song he was singing daily, the reply he had given Parnada, and the time of his going to Rītuparna's court, and her heart beat fast. But Parnada's description of him

as an ugly black dwarf with misshapen limbs prevented certainty on the point. Nala was remarkably fair, tall and handsome, with faultless limbs and long arms. How could he have become that Vahuka described to her? Damayanti pondered for a while, and said to herself "The five marks of identification obtained so far cannot be a matter of mere coincidence. Perhaps, some god has given him a boon conferring the power of changing his form at will, like the boons granted to him by the gods at our marriage. Anyhow, I must probe further into the matter." She sent Parnada away with a rich reward.

Then she went and told her mother everything and said "Mother, I cannot live without my lord any longer. I am almost certain that this Vahuka is my lord in disguise. But it is impossible to be quite sure of it till I see him and verify some more details. So, if you want me to live, send Sudeva, without telling father, to Rituparna's court to say that, on not hearing of her lord for years, and not knowing whether he was still alive or not, Damayanti was going to have her second *swayamvara* the next morning, at sunrise, and that King Bhima was inviting all the Kings and princes once more to his court to take their chance. Rituparna would be anxious to attend. This we know by his keen disappointment on the previous occasion.

And, in his anxiety to reach here in time, he would ask Vahuka to drive his chariot. None but Nala can cover the distance from Ayodhya to Vidarbha in a night. That will be one crucial test. Others we will devise after Vahuka comes." The queen, out of love for her daughter, agreed.

Sudeva was sent to Ayodhya accordingly, and announced the fact of the second *swayamvara* of Damayanti to Rituparna. Rituparna was most anxious to attend, but how to reach Vidarbha in a night? Varshneya was a good charioteer, but quite incapable of achieving this feat. So, he called Vahuka and implored him to do it if he could possibly manage it, telling him the reason also. Vahuka was stricken with grief at this fickleness of Damayanti whom he had considered to be inflexibly constant. He had also some doubt whether it was not a trick on her part to get him to Kundinapura. But, would Bhima, a stickler for forms and dignity, play such a trick on Kings by announcing a second *swayamvara* which was not to take place? On the other hand, it was impossible to believe that Damayanti, who had preferred him to the immortals, would be so devoid of constancy as to resolve to marry another, especially when she had also two children, whom she adored. He was tortured by these conflicting conclusions, and found that he would have no peace till he found out the truth.

“By obliging this King, I shall also be serving my vital need” said he to himself. So he told Rituparna. “Yes, I can manage it.”

Then he went and got the steeds and chariot ready. Rituparna got in, and Vahuka drove the steeds which galloped with lightning speed. The top one of the many robes Rituparna kept by his side blew away in the wind. He said to Vahuka “Stop the chariot for a little while. My man will go and bring it.”

“That is impossible” said Vahuka “We have come by now five miles from the spot where it fell”, and drove on. Rituparna wondered greatly at this rare art of driving at such speed. Anxious to show that he too was not without some unique secret art, he pointed out to Vahuka, as they drove on, the faintly-seen branch of an approaching tree in blossom, and said “There are 587 flowers and buds on that branch.” “How can you say that from such a distance?” asked Vahuka.

“Because of my being an expert in dice and in numbers” said Rituparna, “Count and satisfy yourself if you have any doubt.” Vahuka stopped the chariot and counted the flowers and buds on the branch, and found the number correct. “How wonderful!” said he. “Not more wonderful than your ability to drive horses so fast” said Rituparna, “I envy that skill, and you this.”

“I shall teach you my art, and you teach me yours” said Vahuka. “Agreed!” said Rituparna eagerly “I shall teach you mine at once. You can teach me yours at your leisure, as you will be with me for some time.” And he taught Vahuka the secret of infallible success in dice and in the theory of numbers. Vahuka counted the leaves and flowers of many other distant trees, and Rituparna confirmed the correctness of the figures he gave.

The moment Vahuka had mastered this art, his love for gambling left him, as he knew that he would win always thereafter, and that, the element of chance had gone, and he did not like to get the property of others with no risk at all of losing his own. As soon as he lost his passion for gambling, the evil Kali had to leave him since he had no more defect to fasten on. He whispered to him “Go aside, oh Nala, and vomit out the terrible poison of Karkotaka and let me also out. I am leaving you.”

Nala went into a somewhat distant grove, as if for some need, leaving Rituparna and the rest in the chariot. He then vomitted out the deadly poison of Karkotaka, and Kali with it. Kali resumed his shape, and wanted to slink away. Vahuka was about to curse the wicked one when he cried out “Don’t curse me, oh King. Damayanti’s curse has already cost me three years of excruciating torture by Karkotaka’s poison. Take pity on me, oh noble

one!" Nala said to him "Go away in peace, oh wicked one! It is with you a case of irresistible impulse: you cannot help being wicked any more than the gall nut can help being bitter. The Time Spirit and my *Karma* work themselves out through you. So, you are not responsible." Kali thanked Nala and went away, saying "They who praise Nala and Damayanti, and Rituparna, the royal sage, and Karkotaka, the lord of serpents, will soon see Kali flee from them, sad, beaten and weary."

Nala watched the evil one go crest-fallen, sad and weary, and said to himself "One would think that I could hope for better days hereafter, as this monster has left me. But my worst days are apparently yet to come. Damayanti is going to choose another partner! Kali, why did you go now, instead of remaining for a day more and rejoicing over my crushing misery yet to come?" Then he returned to the chariot and resumed the journey. They reached Kundinapura the next morning at dawn, but found, to their astonishment, no preparations for a *swayamvara*, and no signs of other Kings. "Perhaps that is because it is a second *swayamvara* and is intended to be done quietly" said Rituparna to himself.

News reached Bhima about Rituparna's arrival. The astonished King at once met and welcomed the King of Ayodhya to his city, and enquired of him what good fortune had brought him to his city so

unexpectedly. Rituparna, very courteously, covered his surprise and confusion, and replied "Simply to see you, my old friend." Bhima thanked him, and had suitable arrangements made for his accommodation, but said to himself "He would not have come all this way for a courtesy visit. We shall ascertain his real object later."

Damayanti had heard the sounds of the hoofs of the horses driven by Vahuka, and had found them to be exactly like the sounds produced when Nala drove his horses. She had also seen the old horses of Nala, kept in the stables by Varshneya when he left the children and went away, prick up their ears and neigh and grow restless as if they too had scented their master's presence by those sounds. She sent her maid, Kesini, to visit Vahuka and ascertain about his cooking. She had also instructed her to drop a lot of faded flowers in the kitchen to be used by him and watch what became of them when he threw them away. Kesini did so, and found, to her surprise, that when Vahuka took up the flowers to throw them away they had recovered their freshness. She slyly watched Vahuka and found that he was cooking without water or fire. She went and told Damayanti all this.

Damayanti said "Go and bring stealthily a morsel of food cooked by him." Kesini did this. Damayanti tasted it and said "Certainly it is my

lord. No other could have cooked it so." As a last test, she sent Indrasen and Indrasena with Kesini and asked her to send them into the kitchen alone, and to observe what Vahuka did. The moment Vahuka saw his children, so fair, so innocent, he embraced them and shed tears. They too were moved. Kesini then went in and asked "Why are you embracing them and shedding tears?" "Excuse me" said Vahuka "I have two children resembling them. They reminded me of my children, and I was overcome."

Kesini went and told all this to Damayanti. Damayanti told her mother everything and said "Now I am certain that it is my lord. So we must call him and question him. Get father's permission."

The queen went and told the astounded Bhima everything, and took his permission for Damayanti to see Vahuka privately. Vahuka was sent for through Kesini, and was ushered into Damayanti's private drawing room. On seeing Damayanti darker, thinner and sadder than he had last beheld her, owing to her having kept to a spare diet in pursuance of a vow to do so till she was rejoined to her husband, and the old half-garment worn prominently over her clothes, he could not restrain his grief, and burst into tears. "Speak" said Damayanti "Was it just to leave me in that dreadful forest, unprotected, after having vowed to protect me

for life at marriage?”. “Your chastity, I knew, would protect you from every harm, as it actually did” said Vahuka, “Why are you so much darker, thinner and sadder?” “Even the sun and the moon become dark during an eclipse. The night too is dark when there is no moon” said Damayanti, “Say that you are indeed Nala before I call you ‘husband’ and embrace you.”

“I am indeed that haples Nala” said Vahuka “but tell me, before you embrace me, why you became so fickle as to think of a second *swayamvara* despite all your vows and promises.” “My second *swayamvara*, my beloved, was to be with you, to symbolise the reunion after three years of separation” said Damayanti, “If Vahuka turned out to be Nala, as I suspected, I would have chosen Nala again, as now. Else, I would have consigned myself to the flames and joined you in any event.” At this, Nala’s doubts, which had begun to be rapidly dispelled by the absence of preparations, and Bhima’s query to Rituparna, vanished completely. He put on Karkotaka’s robe, resumed his form in a moment, to the great joy of his wife, and embraced Damayanti with warmth, and told her his whole story since his separation from her.

Bhima and his queen and sons were called in and told the news, and rejoiced greatly. Indrasen and Indrasena were also called in and shown their

father. They gazed at him with wonder and admiration, and he was never tired of fondling them. Rituparna too was called in and told the news. "I suspected half as much" said he "when I saw Vahuka's skill in driving the horses, and saw no preparations at all here for any *swayamvara*. Oh, I am so glad." Then, turning to Nala, he said "Brother, forgive me for treating you as my servant. Forget all my faults of commission and omission." "There are none" said Nala, "The Kings of Kosala have a reputation for treating others with maximum consideration, and you, my friend, have carried on that tradition to the letter." Rituparna smiled and said "But, don't forget to teach me the art of managing horses". Nala said "I will not. I shall teach the whole art to you soon."

The next day, Nala taught Rituparna the secret of driving horses as if they were harnessed to winged chariots. Then the grateful King of Ayodhya returned home, saying to the apologetic Bhima "I have thoroughly enjoyed this visit. It is such a joy to see Damayanti re-united to Nala."

Nala went alone a month later with an army to Nishada, and told Pushkara "Gamble now with me, with the Kingdom as the stake. Or fight a duel with me for it. Or let our armies fight for it. Choose any one of these courses. It is said in our laws that a man who wins a kingdom by gambling cannot refuse to

gamble again for it with the loser if he offers sufficient stakes." "And what stakes have you got?" asked Pushkara haughtily, deciding on a gamble where he thought he would surely win, rather than risk a duel with a renowned warrior like Nala, or pit his half-hearted troops against the picked divisions from Vidarbha under Nala's command. "I shall stake my army and all these lakhs of rupees and other treasure here" said Nala. "Most ridiculously low stakes for a Kingdom!" said Pushkara "If you are prepared to stake Damayanti, you will be offering me something worth gambling for." "So be it" said Nala in wrath "provided we stake our lives also." "Agreed!" said Pushkara "Ah, I already foresee beautiful Damayanti becoming my own!" "Cease this chatter, and let us play" said Nala.

At the very first throw, Pushkara lost, and Nala won. "Fool" said Nala "Now you see how vain and deluded were your hopes. The last time you won through Kali's aid, though in your vanity you put it down to your own skill. Now, far from Damayanti's becoming your slave, you have become her slave, and your life is forfeit. Still, I have no intention of being cruel to you or to put on you the blame which justly belongs to Fate and Kali. So I give you back your life and the fief of Suvarnagiri which is the appanage of the younger brother of

the King of the Nishadas." Pushkara was touched by this generosity and prostrated himself to Nala and begged his forgiveness.

"Remembering our parents, I forgive you readily" said Nala "May you live a hundred years, free from lust, anger and avarice!"

Then, Pushkara left for his fief. Afterwards, Nala sent for Damayanti and the children. They arrived in great state with a mighty escort from Vidarbha. Nala and Damayanti were crowned again as King and Queen of the Nishadas amidst the indescribable enthusiasm of the people. Thereafter, they reigned happily over a prosperous kingdom. So happy were they in each other, and in their children and subjects, that the bitter experiences of their exile became mellowed and converted into romantic memories of an adventurous past. Often, they used to sing together the following song :—

" Ah, Love's a wondrous thing,
 It pervades life all through,
 We know now Love has wings
 E'en as the poet sings.
 It's in fields and barns and mills,
 It's in towns and hills and rills.
 In the gloomy forest glades,
 In the great hall of Kings,
 In the hearts of men and maids,
 The voice of true Love rings.

Love's as wholesome as the rain
In-summer's terrible heat,
It's two hearts sharing one beat,
It's two souls not rent in twain.
A man's nothing but a dust bin
When his heart's void of Love's heat.
He's a bundle of bones and meat
Tied up in a bag of skin!
Love's the blossom in Life's vale,
It's seen in many a tale.
It's like Fire : from far away
It burns and asserts its sway!
Let's make Love our guide and star,
And make its glow felt afar !”.

BIMBISARA

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Bimbisara, the Sisunaga King, was reigning in Magadha.¹ He conquered Anga² and made Magadha far greater than ever before. He removed the capital to New Rajagriha, from Old Rajagriha, the uncomfortable fortress capital of Jarasandha,³ and built in the new city 'comfortable palaces with fine parks, gardens and lotus pools. He married Chandrahassa, a princess of Kosala; Chillana, the sister of the Lichchhavi King Chetaka; Nanda, a princess of Kalinga; Bhadra, a princess of the Punjab; and four others from the ruling families of the neighbouring states. He married one of his daughters to Pradyota, the King of Avanti. By these acts, he made erstwhile enemy princes his friends. Then he settled down to a prosperous and peaceful reign. He was by nature a lover of pleasure and ease, and very fond of the society of women. In addition to his eight queens, he had a number of affairs with women in different walks of life ranging from Ambapali, the famous courtesan of Vaisali, to a merchant's widow in Rajagriha. By one of these women he had a son, Jivaka, who later on became one of the greatest doctors of Ancient India. By Chillana he had three

1. Modern Bihar. 2. Bhagalpur. 3. An ancient King of Magadha.

sons, Asokachandra or Ajatasatru, Halla, and Vilhalla. By Nanda he had a son, Abhaya. By Chandrahasa and the other queens he had eleven sons, Prince Kalagada, and ten others. He entrusted practically all the affairs of his Kingdom to his eldest son and heir, Ajatasatru, and immersed himself in a life of pleasure, though still the final orders were his.

He was not ashamed of his gay life. "I have done my duty by my subjects, and I have the right to take my own pleasures" he used to tell his ministers, in reply to their remonstrances at his intrigues with strange women. Naturally of a generous disposition, he was the most liberal of givers. He offered Gautama, the Buddha, his daughter's hand and half the Kingdom, if he would leave off the terrible ascetic life he was leading at Vulture's Peak near Rajagriha, taking pity on his noble features and the supposed loss to the world by the running to waste of a man with so many noble qualities. He was astonished at the polite but firm refusal of his offer by Gautama, and his resolve to save the world by tracing the root of suffering, and finding a way for the cessation of suffering.

"My dear man," he told him, "It is only your imagination, and your way of looking at it, that make you see suffering everywhere. You say you left a prosperous Kingdom and a beautiful wife for

these matted locks, begging bowl and homeless wandering, and yet you complain of suffering as the fundamental fact of existence. It is like a man who commits suicide, and complains of death."

Gautama smiled, and replied "I was not thinking of my own self, but of all humanity."

Bimbisara retorted "Let every man look after himself, and the world will soon be free from suffering.' It is this folly of one man's trying to save the world that increases the suffering by making others forsake all effort and rely on such saviours. "

Gautama asked him "Oh King, you consider yourself happy ; tell me honestly, do you not sometimes feel heart-sick in the midst of your so-called gaiety and happiness ? Is it not true that the voice of sadness speaks amidst the sound of laughter, and that you feel an emptiness when your momentary pleasure is over ? "

"That is so " replied Bimbisara, "That is why I am trying to link up pleasures without interval."

"It is as vain" said Gautama "as trying to secure an elephant with many broken threads knotted together. The threads will snap, and you must know it."

"Yes" said the King, "But what can be done about it ? "

"That is the very thing that I am trying to find out," said Gautama, "the root of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering."

“If you find it out,” said Bimbisara “please come and tell me.”

“I will” said Gautama “but it will take a long time.”

“Oh, that does not matter” said Bimbisara “I rather like it. I am in no hurry, as I am still attracted by my own pleasures. If the truth is found out some years hence, I might have developed by then some of that non-attachment or unselfishness as you call it, and may be, in a fitter mood to appreciate truth.”

The King was very much impressed by the talk, and gave Gautama the use of the royal park, called the Bamboo Grove, for his occupation whenever he came to Rajagriha.

Days passed, and Bimbisara almost forgot his conversation with Gautama, and was again immersed in his own pleasures. These pleasures cost him almost all the surplus revenue of the State, after meeting the expenses of the administration and household. He then heard that a young shepherd of Rajagriha, by name Metarya, who was living in the house of an old woman, had a goat whose dung was gold. All the rich men of the town were after the young man. Eight of them gave their daughters in marriage to him. Bimbisara called him and gave his daughter Asokamathi in marriage to him, and made him a lord of the realm,

on condition of getting some of the gold. Metarya kept the King constantly supplied with whatever gold he wanted.

Asokachandra did not like Metarya at all. He considered this man's help to be directly responsible for the King's neglecting his queens, for the sake of dancing girls and others. He was also put out at Metarya's refusing all help to him.

Metarya had replied, to his imperious demand for gold, "I give only to my friends, on request. I shall never give to anybody on command."

"But you are our subject", said Ajatasatru "and must pay whatever we demand."

"That is not the law in the land of the Aryas."⁴ said Metarya, "The property of the poor man is as safe, under an Aryan King, as his own properties, and King Bimbisara knows it."

"A shepherd lad to defy an Aryan Prince!" said Ajatasatru "This is what my father has brought about in this Kingdom by his feeble rule."

He went and told his father about the insolent behaviour of Metarya, and asked for his formal permission for punishing his brother-in-law. Bimbisara, however, said :—"What has he done, but refuse to give his property to you? I cannot allow him to be punished for that."

4. Noblemen ; the wellborn. Here, it means Indians.

This only made Ajatasatru's anger greater.

Metarya had got his magic goat as a gift from a goddess who had told him 'This goat I give you, with its magic property of laying gold as dung, so long as you are alive and practise *Ahimsa*,⁵ and do not bring about the death of any living thing directly or indirectly.' Metarya had kept his vow strictly, and everything had gone well. He was the simplest among men, and went about the streets *incognito* as an ordinary shepherd. "Fame" he used to say "makes life artificial and unreal, deprives it of its naturalness and sweetness, as *sherbet* deprives water of its true qualities." Ajatasatru was having him watched through his innumerable spies during all his peregrinations, in order to do away with him without coming to grief himself at the hands of the just King and an indignant populace.

One afternoon, Metarya, in the course of his wanderings in the city, went and watched a goldsmith at work. There were some grains of gold by the side of the goldsmith, and a neighbour's peacock, in its search for food, swallowed them and flew away to some distance. The goldsmith, immersed in his work, did not see this, but soon missed his gold, and questioned Metarya, whom he took for a shepherd, as to what had become of it. Metarya

5. Abstaining from inflicting unnecessary injury on others.

would not speak the truth, lest the peacock should be caught hold of and killed, and his vow broken. Seeing him silent, the goldsmith got into a rage, considered him to be the thief, and tied him up. One of Ajatasatru's spies, who saw all this, told the goldsmith "A thief of gold caught red-handed, and not willing to disclose where he has hidden the gold, can be put to death. Such is the law of the Aryas." This advice fell like nectar on the goldsmith's ears. The goldsmith took his hammer and battered the head of Metarya with it. Metarya died, to the great joy of Ajatasatru, who was intimidated of the fact at once. Ajatasatru went and seized his magic goat, and himself gathered its dung the next day. But, alas, it was simple goat's dung, and not gold, as Metarya was dead. Bimbisara observed this, and said "Son, did I not tell you that little profit comes from hankering after another's gold?" Ajatasatru's anger flamed up, and he exclaimed "You loved that Metarya more than you do me. I shall see that I have not to beg from others hereafter or take their permission for every petty act of punishment."

From that day Ajatasatru began scheming with his boon companions to depose King Bimbisara and become King himself.

Bimbisara, though generous in many ways, had one great defect. He was terribly jealous of his wives. A rake himself, he was always suspecting

every movement of his queens. One day, he and his chief queen, Chillana, visited Mahavira, the great Jain Apostle, who was standing naked in pouring rain, in the statuesque posture, enduring the torture of bitter cold and wet. Several days later, on a dark and stormy night, when sleeping with Chillana, Bimbisara heard her cry out in sleep "How will he pass this night?" She was thinking of Mahavira and the dark night and pouring rain, and the thunder and lightning. But Bimbisara thought that she was thinking of some assignation with a lover. "Why else should she say such a thing?" said he to himself. He himself had forgotten about Mahavira, as he had taken it for granted that his lot was to enjoy, and others' lot whatever they got, and had ceased to worry about others.

He was a man who hated to do a violent act himself. So, calling Abhaya to his side the next morning, he asked him to burn down Chillana's palace with her in it, as if by accident, before he returned, and not to breathe a word of it to Ajatasatru, who was deeply attached to his mother and might easily prevent it. Still, as he had not done such a thing before, he went away on a hunting expedition, just to distract his mind. It occurred to him that he might as well ask the great Mahavira, who was supposed to know the past, present and future, about his wife's conduct. So, he went to him

and asked him, and was told by Mahavira "She is the chastest among women." Mahavira also explained that her words in the night must refer to some poor suffering man in that stormy night.

Bimbisara was convinced of the correctness of Mahavira's opinion, and was conscience-stricken. He hurried back to the palace, exclaiming "Woe unto me! I have ordered the burning down of a chaste woman alive. I was blaming Ajatasatru the other day for his cruel thoughts, but, verily, I am the monster, and he is the angel". Trembling in every limb, he called Abhaya and asked him what he had done, expressing his profound sorrow for his orders. Abhaya replied "Oh. King, I, too, knew Chillana to be the chastest among women, and had no heart to do your cruel behest. But, as I did not dare to disobey your royal command, I asked my mother Nanda to invite Chillana to her palace, and then set fire to her palace. If you had asked me, I wanted to say that I set fire to the palace without going and verifying if Chillana was in, as I cannot enter the harem except in your presence."

Bimbisara was highly pleased, and said "So, the mischief is prevented. Thank God!"

"Not so, Oh. King," said Abhaya "Ajatasatru has heard of all this, and will be presently here with an army of his boon companions and a group of indignant citizens. I and Nanda are entering a Jain

monastery, in order to save ourselves from being butchered by him. Little will the fact of Nanda's saving Chillana at my instance weigh with him. I must leave with my mother before it is too late. Good bye, father", and he left with Nanda.

Shortly after he left, Ajatasatru came with a mighty army of elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry, to the burning palace of Chillana by the side of which Bimbisara was standing, a picture of remorse and despair. "Where is that villain, Abhaya?" roared he. Bimbisara then told him the truth, exculpated Abhaya and Nanda, and took the whole blame on himself. He added "Do with me as you like. I am the arch-criminal." "Bind him and throw him into the old dungeon used by Jarasandha" said Ajatasatru to his soldiers, "His hypocrisy is staggering. His crimes are appalling. He not only makes dancing girls usurp the place of the queens, but wants chaste queens to be burnt alive. This monster is unfit to be an Aryan King."

The whole mob shouted applause, and Bimbisara was taken and thrown into that gloomy dungeon which looked like an ante-chamber to Hell. Rescue from it was impossible, he knew, like other men. To add to his misery, Ajatasatru, after having been crowned King, ordered "Let him be given no food or water, so that by the time he dies of starvation, he may realise the consequences of the crime of

burning a chaste woman alive in the land of the Aryas." "Son" said Chillana "Don't commit the sin of parricide. Even though he be a demon, he is your father, Don't forget it." "Silence!" said Ajatasatru "If sin I commit, it is for your sake. What a dog's life did he lead you, daughter of a line of Kings, and his last culminating act, can even the most depraved wretch outdo it? Your appeal to me as a son will have no effect, as I have to do my duty as an Aryan King. The King does not distinguish between criminals, whether they be father, son or enemy. Our laws say that a man who sets fire to a dwelling house with intent to kill its inmates should be thrown into that very fire and killed. As he is my father, and a King, I simply give him the interval for repentance, so that he, who has misbehaved in this world, may yet attain Heaven by true repentance and just punishment." "Hypocrite!" said Chillana, "Don't talk words of wisdom to cover your deed of sin." But she was powerless to do anything, and, so, retired to her inner apartments in her son's palace, weeping.

For thirty days, Bimbisara lay in prison, ostensibly without food and water. Chillana and Chandrhasa begged hard, and got permission from Ajatasatru to visit their husband once a day. Concealed in her clothes, Chillana took a nourishing meal of cooked beans. Chandrhasa took some

wine concealed likewise. Owing to this sustenance, Bimbisara did not die. To Ajatasatru's expressions of surprise at Bimbisara's managing to survive without food or water so long, Chillana used to reply "The gods will not allow a terrible crime like parricide to be completed."

"Let us see who is stronger, the gods or I?" said Ajatasatru. "Don't blaspheme" said Chillana.

"Why argue with you?" said Ajatasatru, "You have been loving towards me, and I do not want to offend you unnecessarily, though I must do my duty as a King."

The next morning, Ajatasatru was in a very good mood and was sitting with his baby son, Prince Darsaka, on his lap, and taking milk pudding. His queen, Padmavathi, was by his side, watching the scene lovingly. Chillana was also there at a little distance. The baby passed water on his father's lap. Ajatasatru did not, however, take him and put him aside, but continued eating, suffering the inconvenience. He exclaimed to Chillana "Mother, did any father love his son so much?" His mother replied "You monstrous criminal, listen. When I was pregnant with you, I had an irresistible longing to bite your father's lips, and so bit them till blood came. He put up with it for the sake of his unborn son who had been even then predicted to turn out to be a foe, a thing sought to be averted by giving

you the auspicious name Ajatasatru.⁶ When you were born, I abandoned you in a grove of Asoka trees, believing in the prophecy that you would kill your father. When the King heard of my act, he himself went into the grove, and brought you back, saying 'The baby lay there, like a moon among the Asoka trees. You cruel wretch, why did you abandon him, hearing the foolish prophecies of demented men?' He named you Asokachandra, or a moon among the Asoka trees. Before he took you, a dog had bitten off a portion of one of your fingers. That is why you are called *Konika* just as your father was called *srenika*. The King, in the presence of all the crowd, was sucking your aching finger, in order to relieve your pain. To this extent did he love you. See what a return you have given him! And to hear you prating about your love for your child!"

Ajatasatru heard this story for the first time in his life, and was full of remorse. He said "A sorry return I have made to my father! Why did you not tell me this before, mother?" "Because" said Chillana, "I did not think that such information was required to prevent a son from killing his father, till you actually began the scheme, and then did not think that telling it would make any

6. Ajatasatru means "Not an enemy of any one; having no enemy or adversary."

difference to such a monster." Ajatasatru shed tears, and said "Mother, this crime I did partly for your sake, and from love of you, as I thought that you loved me and he did not, and that he was persecuting you despite your deep love for him. I shall at once go myself, knock down his fetters with my own club, and bring him back here, and crown him King, and leave the Kingdom." Chillana's face shone with joy at these words.

Ajatasatru picked up his heavy club, and rushed towards the dungeon. The guards saw him go running, and said to Bimbisara "Konika is coming in a very impatient mood, with an iron club in his hand. We do not know what his object is." Bimbisara said to them "I know what his object is. He has been worrying as to why I have not died in spite of so many days of supposed starvation. So he is coming to batter my head to pieces and then to punish Chillana and Chandrahasa most cruelly for feeding me secretly. I shall defeat him." He took a dose of deadly poison, kept by him always for use in emergency, and swallowed it hastily, saying "He shall escape the sin of parricide even by this", and fell down dead immediately.

Ajatasatru was stricken with grief on going to the spot and seeing his father lying dead. He would not bathe or take food for three days, though admonished by his nobles. Chandrahasa died of

grief at the death of her husband. Chillana committed *sati*. Ajatasatru gave his father a royal funeral, left Rajagriha, unable to live in that city of grim memories, and went and made Champa his new capital.

He was haunted by a sense of sin and guilt. Hearing that the Buddha had come to Rajagriha, after his enlightenment, to preach his gospel of freedom from suffering, he wanted to meet the Enlightened One and attain peace. He requested Jivaka to take him to the Buddha whom he knew very well. One night, Jivaka took the King and his nobles to the Bamboo Grove where the Buddha was. On reaching the grove, Ajatasatru was frightened by the silence there. He asked Jivaka "Surely you are not going to betray me to my enemy, the King of Kosala, or the King of Vaisali? If the Buddha lives here with his 500 followers, why is there no sound? Before you complete your act of treachery, your head shall be off" and drew his sword. Jivaka smiled, and said "King, your suspicions arise only from your nature. Great ones, like the Buddha, love silence, unlike our roistering nobles, who indulge in their follies with much noise. Go to yonder door where the Enlightened One has his abode. Cough gently thrice, and he will open the door." "You want me to go to that closed door alone? What if there is a trap there?" asked

Ajatasatru. "King, has the Kshatriya courage also forsaken you?" asked Jivaka. "Never shall anybody call Ajatasatru a coward" said the King, "But, I shall keep my sword." Then he proceeded to the closed door, and coughed gently.

The Buddha opened the door, and the King was struck by his divine personality and the peace that was not earthly on his face. He forgot his false prestige, and prostrated himself before the Enlightened One, who raised him and seated him by his side. To his own surprise, he found himself uttering "I betake myself, Lord, to the Blessed One as my refuge, to the Truth and to the Order. May the Blessed One accept me as a disciple, as one who, from this day forth, as long as life endures, has taken his refuge in them. Sin has overcome me, Lord, weak and foolish and wrong that I am, in that, for the sake of sovereignty I put to death⁷ my father, that righteous man, that righteous King. I am abandoned by my relatives as untrustworthy, and, so, I stand before the nation. I am fallen, destined to a terrible hell. Whose shelter shall I seek now? Save me, you great hero! May the Blessed one accept it of me, Lord, that do so acknowledge it as a sin, to the end that in future I may restrain myself." "Verily, Oh King" said the Buddha "It was sin

7. Overlooking the mere physical facts, and speaking of the ultimate moral responsibility.

that overcame you in acting thus. But, inasmuch as you look upon it as a sin, and confess it according to what is right, we accept your confession as to that. For that, Oh King, is the corner stone in the Aryan code of discipline that whosoever looks upon his fault as a fault, and rightfully confesses it, shall attain to self-restraint in future."

Ājatasatru was pleased with the words of the Blessed one. He prostrated himself before the Buddha, and said, clasping his feet, "You from all desire are free, and have reached Nirvana's state; your heart is vast like the sea, full of Love and free from Hate; your thoughts and visions soar high above the clouds, in the sky; You have freed me, Hero, from my sin; let me for ever be your next of kin" and left.

The Buddha told the brethren, later on, "This King, Brethren, was deeply affected. He was touched in his heart. If, Brethren, the King had not brought about the death of his father, that righteous man and righteous King, then would the clear and spotless eye for the truth have arisen in him even as he sat here."
