

Chapter 4 – Bibhishana’s Wrath & Kaikeyi’s Svayamvara

One night Bibhishana stealthily entered the royal sleeping chamber of King Dasharatha and noticed the reposing effigy. He pulled out his sword and with a mighty stroke beheaded the effigy. He was so overpowered by the love for Ravana that somehow he gathered the courage to enter the sleeping chamber silently, but after striking the effigy, he was overwhelmed by terror. He did not wait there even for a moment to check whether he had actually beheaded the king or the effigy. The effigy was hollow within and filled with the red colored liquid lac. When Bibhishana beheaded the effigy, his sword dripped in the red colored liquid lac that resembled blood. He thought his task was accomplished, and was overjoyed. He decided to leave for Lanka at once. When the news of Bibhishana’s entry in the royal chamber reached to the ministers, they immediately rushed to the sleeping chamber followed by Kaushalya and other queens. They wept and rebuked the cruel destiny. Soon the news of the assassination of king spread like forest fire. The subjects wept loudly. The commanders and vassals hurried to the palace. The funeral rites were performed and the effigy was consigned to the fire. The ministers were overjoyed, yet maintained their mournful looks and made sure that no one learnt the secret that King Dasharatha was alive and was wandering in jungles in an ascetic’s disguise. Bibhishana thought that the death of Dasharatha brought an end to his dynasty; no matter what happened, there would not be a child birth in the Surya dynasty. Janaka's daughter alone cannot cause trouble to Ravana. In such situations, it would be futile to sneak into the palace of Mithila and risk the life. He therefore decided to return to Lanka.



King Dasharatha in Kaikeyi’s Svayamvara

Meanwhile King Dasharatha and Janaka reached Uttarapatha. Svayamvara of Princess Kaikeyi was organized that day in city by her parents King Shubhamati and Queen Prithvishri of Kautukamangala nagara. Princess Kaikeyi was ravishingly beautiful and an expert and exponent in fine arts.

"Svayamvara" was a process in which princesses chose the person of her choice for marriage. The eligible bachelors from the surrounding states were invited for the svayamvara. The princess would then select the man of her liking and offer the garland to him. Sometimes, the invited princes were asked to perform a difficult task; and the winner would marry the princess. Reputed rulers like the emperor Harivahana and many other handsome and eligible youth were invited for the svayamvara of Princess Kaikeyi. Since, no one identified King Dasharatha and Janaka because of their disguise as ascetics; they were made to sit in the last row.

Bedecked in the finest jewellery and bridal brocade, Princess Kaikeyi entered the pandal. She carried a garland in her hands and was accompanied by maids. They then began the quest for the prospective bridegroom.

Walking demurely, Kaikeyi would stand in front of every seat. The maid would then introduce the prince seated there, in most ornate language. Kaikeyi would then cast a side glance at the prospective bridegroom. When Kaikeyi waited near a prince, his heart would

flutter and sway in glee; but when she ignored him and walked ahead, his heart would be filled with disdain and gloom. Thus, immersing innumerable hearts in the ocean of gloom, Kaikeyi reached the last row where Dasharatha was seated. She was enamored by his broad forehead, clear eyes that resembled the petals of a lotus lily. Without thinking for a moment, the young princess offered the garland to King Dasharatha.

Many young, strong and noble princes were present there still Kaikeyi rejected them all and accepted an ascetic as her husband. This action of Kaikeyi was not liked by King Harivahana and other nobles present there.

The pandal now turned into a battlefield. Emperor Harivahana and thousands of other princes who were nurturing a dream of marrying Kaikeyi were wrath, when they saw their dreams shattering. They decided to bury their differences and attack the strange ascetic in unison. Kaikeyi volunteered to be Dasharatha's charioteer. Fearless Dasharatha mounted the chariot and began to shower arrows at his enemies.



Kaikeyi charioted the charioteer of King Dasharatha

Dasharatha's chariot moved faster than wind. The brave enemies of Dasharatha began to fall one after another. Finally, those who had decided to teach the strange ascetic a lesson, decided to prostrate themselves at his feet. The noble Dasharatha welcomed them with open arms.

The festivities began. In an elaborated marriage ceremony, King Shubhamati handed over his daughter to King Dasharatha. Dasharatha told his demure bride, "Devi, you have made this victory possible! Kindly ask me for any boon. I am obliged to fulfill it." Kaikeyi replied "I would not demand any boon now. However keep it as a reserve. I shall ask you to fulfill it sometime in the future."

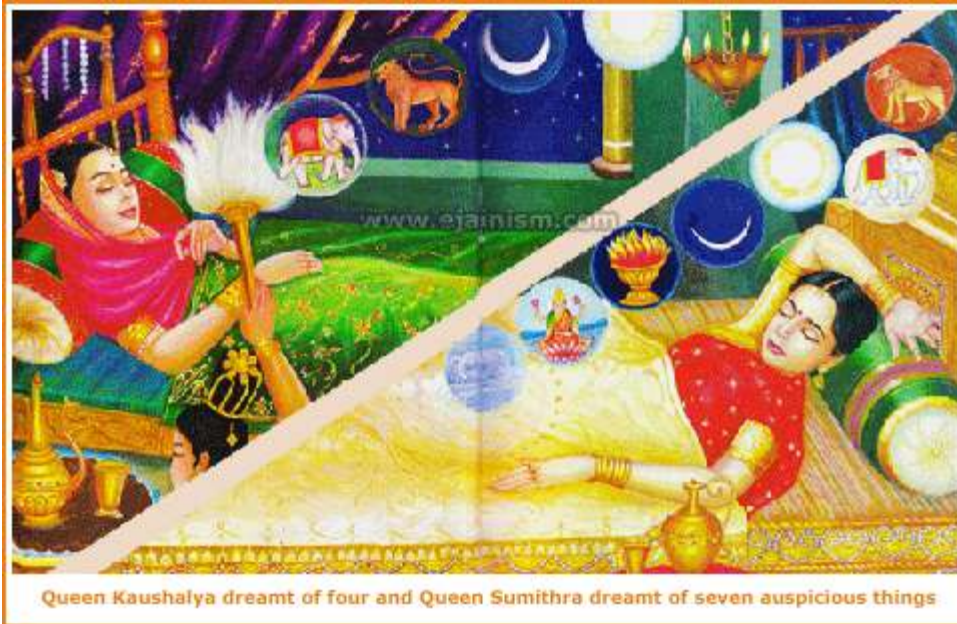
Dasharatha with his valor defeated those innumerable nobles who were gathered for the svayamvara. They now became his vassals. With his new army, Dasharatha moved towards Rajagrihi. He then vanquished the emperor of Magadha and established his rule over Rajagrihi. Then he dispatched his messenger to Ayodhya and asked his three queens to join him at Rajagrihi. Queens rushed towards Rajagrihi to meet their beloved husband. Though Dasharatha was too eager to return to Ayodhya, he decided to postpone his return journey, for the shadow of Ravana was still hovering over Ayodhya.

Chapter 5 – Birth of Shri Rama & Shri Lakshmana

While Dasharatha and his queens were enjoying their stay at Rajagrihi, a noble soul from the fifth celestial world descended into the womb of Queen Kaushalya. As a result of this, in the last hours of night, Queen Kaushalya dreamt of an elephant, a lion, a moon and a sun. Confused, she told about her dream to King Dasharatha. King Dasharatha overjoyed hearing

this. He told Kaushalya, "Devi, a woman who sees these four auspicious signs delivers Baladeva, the best amongst men. Your virtues in the past reincarnations have made this thing possible." Kaushalya too was overjoyed hearing this. Then onwards, she remained very alert for the wellbeing of her baby.

In due course Queen Kaushalya gave birth to a son whose complexion resembled a white lotus. The king rejoiced exceedingly at the sight of his first son. Earlier the baby was named Padma which means a lotus. Later on he became famous as the most illustrious Rama. The overjoyed Dasharatha generously gave donation to the poor and received their blessings.



The citizens of Rajagrihi broke into spontaneous revelry. They began to dance, sing and play melodies. They sprinkled water mixed with saffron, musk and sandalwood paste on each other. They distributed sweets. Every home was decorated so beautifully that soon Rajagrihi surpassed the divine cities

Alkapuri and Amravati in grandeur. The inhabitants of these cities felt pangs of jealousy, but they too overcame it and began festive in their own domains.

After sometime, the soul of an affluent deity left his abode and descended into the womb of Queen Sumitra. She dreamt of an elephant a lion, sun, moon, fire, Lakshmi and ocean. When she asked the interpretation of this dream to King Dasharatha, he was elated. He said, "Blessed indeed is your womb, for, you have conceived a son, who would be the master of three great lands. He would be a vasudeva." When Sumitra heard this, she was overjoyed.

In the due course, she too delivered a baby boy having a bluish complexion. Earlier he was named as Narayana, but later he became famous as Lakshmana. This time there was greater celebration and revelry. King Dasharatha organized Snatramahotsava, and eight types of pujas in the abodes of Lord Arihanta. The prisoners were released from jails.

The children began to grow up like a growing moon. Initially, the children slept most of the time but as they grew up, they won every heart with their innocence and impish pranks. Their flawless complexion, radiant faces, curly hair had a magnetic appeal. The children were always found playing with one vassal or the other. Blessed indeed were the parents and everyone else who played with these children, for they weren't ordinary children. They were the souls who were to walk on the path of emancipation.