

Chapter 9 – Svayamvara of Sita



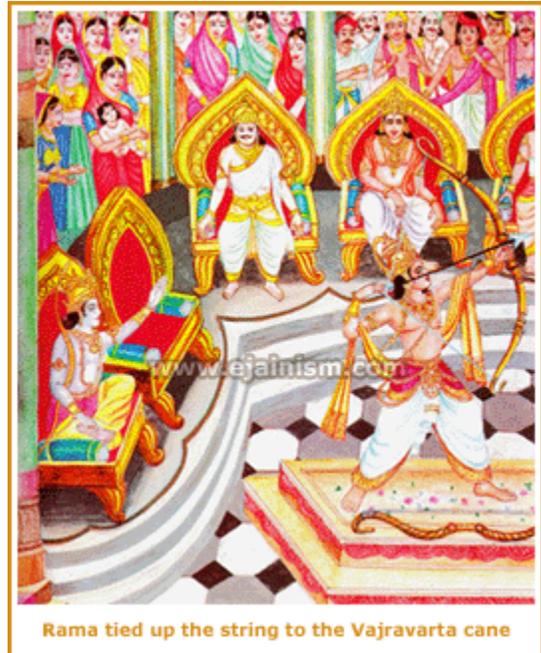
Sita in her Svayamvara

Wearing finest attire and jewellery, Sita entered the Svayamvara's along with her friends and maids and worshiped the auspicious bows. She then stood in a special place reserved for her. She was carrying a garland of the choicest flowers. Bhamandala, who saw Sita for the first time in person thought, "How true was the divine saint Narada when he said that words failed to describe her beauty and most gifted hands too cannot capture her beauty in painting."

The chief gatekeeper of the court announced the conditions to be fulfilled by volunteer princes to marry Sita. He announced that the noble youth who would string any one of the bows kept there will incidentally marry Sita. Young princes then rose one by one and went near the altar, where the bows were placed. But after reaching the altar none of them dared to touch the divine bows because they were surrounded by mighty flames and poisonous cobras hissing menacingly. Chandragati watched these proceedings disdainfully. He was confident that only Bhamandala

would be able to complete this difficult task and finally Sita would marry Bhamandala.

Rama got up from his seat and began walking towards the altar. The hearts of both emperor Janaka and his wife were filled with anxiety. When Rama reached the altar, to everyone's surprise, the flames and the cobras both disappeared. A divine peace and tranquility was experienced by everyone sitting in the pandal. The celestial beings clustered in the different stratas of heaven to watch the scene with great curiosity. Rama lifted up the bow known as Vajravarta as if it was a toy and placed it erect on a special stand. Then, he bent it like an ordinary cane and put the string on it. He then struck the string. The vibrant twang of the string was clearly heard not only in the pandal but also in the celestial worlds. The joy of Janaka, Videha and Sita knew no bounds. Rama proved himself to be the worthy bridegroom for Sita. Sita offered the floral garland to Rama.



Rama tied up the string to the Vajravarta cane

With Rama's permission, Lakshmana stepped in the arena. He lifted the other bow called Arnavavarta and stringed it. The twang of this bow was so loud that even the Diggajas - the eight elephants believed to lift the corners of the world on their shoulders, trembled with fear. Vidyadhara kings, who had magical powers, were so impressed by Lakshmana's display of valor and strength that they offered eighteen young vidyadhara beauties to him in marriage. Most of the kings were happy and shared the joy with Janaka but some like King

Chandragati and Bhamandala were so much overcome by gloom and despair that they left the pandal at once.

Ego and vanity are the root causes of sorrow. King Chandragati and Bhamandala were two great egoists who believed that no mortal could lift the divine bows. Therefore, they were sure that they would emerge victorious but Rama and Lakshmana shattered their pride and vanity.

King Janaka dispatched a formal invitation to Dasharatha for the marriage. He arrived in Mithila with the royal family and a grand wedding was performed, where in Kanakaraja, the younger brother of King Janaka and his wife Suprabha proposed and married their daughter Bhadra to Bharata, the younger brother of Rama, in the same auspicious.

After continuing celebrations for many days, Dasharatha and his relatives left for Ayodhya with all his friends and new daughters-in-law. The citizens of Ayodhya welcomed them with pomp. The revelry lasted for many days.

Chapter 10 – Ashtahnika Chaitya Mahotsava and Kaushalya’s attempt to suicide



On the eighth waxing moon of the auspicious month of Ashadha, King Dasharatha organized Ashtahnika chaitya mahotsava with full pomp. Best of the best ingredients for worship were bought from all over and a ritual called Shanti snatra was performed.

The auspicious water utilized during this ritual is distributed among the faithful devotees. Kancuki, the chamberlain of harem, carried an urn full of this auspicious water and left to the sanctum of the chief queen Kaushalya first. The other maid servants then carried the auspicious water to the sanctums of other consorts. It is a common practice to appoint a man of advanced age as a chamberlain. Kancuki was a frail man afflicted by old age. The others were young maidens. They reached hurryingly and delivered the auspicious water to the remaining consorts. The frail and aged kancuki could not match the ladies in speed and therefore, though he left first, could not reach the

sanctum of Kaushalya on time.

Kaushalya was eagerly waiting for the auspicious water. When she learnt the news that everyone else except her had received the snatra jala, the auspicious water, she was dejected. Her pride was wounded. She thought, "I am the chief amongst the royal consorts and yet everyone else gets the auspicious water except myself. I am so unfortunate. It is better to embrace death instead of being subjected to further humiliation." The frustration and anger subdued her power of reasoning. A wise Indian sage said, "Anger is born out of

self love and affects the power of reasoning. This leads to the total defeat of wisdom and conscience, which in turn causes total destruction."

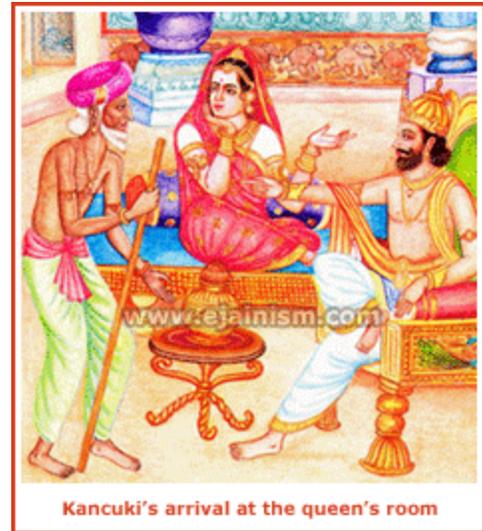


Kaushalya was a noble soul but her wounded pride led her to self pity and finally she decided to commit suicide. Killing is a great sin, but it can be atoned, whereas, suicide is the greatest sin which has no atonement. What should have been the ideal course of action for Kaushalya? She should have thought, probably my husband must have forgotten to send me the holy water. I must send a maid and procure it myself, but she was so overcome by her wounded pride that she decided to end her life abruptly. Fortunately, Dasharatha reached there on time. He was greatly shocked to see a noose around her neck.

He tried to convince her for not doing such sinful act. With great difficulty, he persuaded Kaushalya to abandon her plan. He threw aside the noose, gently lifted her, and placed her on a couch and asked, "Who has the audacity to hurt your feelings? Who has inflicted great anguish on you that lead you to such a rash act? Name the person, and I shall punish him." Kaushalya was still a wrath. With great difficulty, she spoke in a trembling voice, 'All your consorts except me received

the snatra jala."

Before Dasharatha could reply, Kancuki the aged chamberlain reached the room of the chief queen. The king at once took the urn from his hands and sprinkled some water on the head of his wife Kaushalya and asked the chamberlain, "You were the first one to receive the snatra jala. I personally gave you this urn and urged you to hurry up and deliver it to Kaushalya first. Then what is the reason for this delay?" Kancuki replied, "Whatever your majesty says is true, I indeed was the first one to receive this auspicious urn. It's also true that you ordered me not to hurry and yet I am late, but it's not my fault altogether. My advancing age has diminished my strength and ambition. I request you my lord to have a close look at me. You will know at once who the real culprit is."



The king had a close look at the chamberlain. The chamberlain, who was once a well built youth, bursting with energy, sharp eyes like an eagle, his body taut, well toned like iron bands, what was left of him now? His hair turned grey, eyes and cheeks were sunk, his limbs were trembling, his senses were slowly deteriorating. He was like a fossil, a bag of bones. This is a universal phenomenon. It is indeed so common that most of us just ignore it, but the plight of Kancuki compelled Dasharatha to think that the soul receives a mortal body. He is born, grows up and finally dies. This is repeated for ages and yet his attachment to senses and sensual pleasures just does not subside. Today this chamberlain is standing here with a trembling body; tomorrow I will take his place. The weakening of senses and strength, the affliction of maladies will

weaken me further. I must act to stop this vicious circle. Every moment new souls step on this planet to depart and the old ones depart to step in again. Yet the hunger, avarice and greed blindfold a man's conscience. Birth after birth, he relentlessly pursues the pleasures. Poisons destroy only the body when it is consumed but the pleasures destroy the body and soul both, birth after birth. The best remedy to put an end on this is to embrace ascetic life, thus King Dasharatha cultivated the spirit of ascetic. This proves the fact that a virtuous person grabs the unpleasant opportunities to atone his karmas.

Chapter 11 – Arrival of Muni Satyabhuti at Ayodhya

One day, Muni Satyabhuti arrived at Ayodhya. He was the master of all four knowledge. On learning the news of his arrival, king Dasharatha along with his family, went to meet him. Depressed, King Chandragati and Prince Bhamandala also reached there. They had returned from the mountain Ratnavarta and were on their way to home. Both the kings reached the place where the Muni was delivering a sermon.



With his mystical powers, the Muni learnt that Bhamandala was frustrated because he could not marry Sita. He therefore, in brief, discussed the previous lives of King Chandragati and his wife Pushpavati. He also described the previous births of Bhamandala and Sita. He also narrated, how Bhamandala was kidnapped at the moment he was born. When Bhamandala learnt that he was craving to marry his own elder sister, he fell unconscious.

After regaining consciousness, he informed King Chandragati that whatever the sage Satyabhuti said was absolute truth. King Chandragati

immediately dispatched his vidyadharas to Mithila, to return with King Janaka and his queen Videha. Bhamandala bowed down before his elder sister Sita, and apologized for what he did and wanted. Sita also blessed him. Rama embraced him, and thus the wrong was forgiven and forgotten.

When King Janaka and Queen Videha reached Ayodhya, King Chandragati told them, how did he find an abandoned baby in the garden on the mount Vaitadhya, how he adopted him and finally declared that Prince Bhamandala was actually the progeny of Janaka and Videha. On learning this, King Janaka and Queen Videha were elated. Bhamandala prostrated at their feet, and they blessed him. King Janaka then declared that he desired to hand over the royal crown and the scepter to the crown prince Bhamandala and embrace ascetic life. Muni Satyabhuti administered the oaths of renouncement to the great King Janaka.

Later on, King Dasharatha requested the sage Satyabhuti to narrate the account of his previous lives. After the sage finished his narration, he once again realized that the world is

transitory. Every action of a man adds to the burden of his karmas. Embracing an ascetic life is the only way that will stop the rotation of the wheel of destiny. King Dasharatha too decided to hand over his scepter to Rama and become a mendicant.

Chapter 12 – Kaikeyi asks Dasharatha for a boon

On reaching the palace, King Dasharatha sent for his family members and the assembly of the ministers. He then expressed his desire to become an ascetic. With folded hands, he asked them for their consent, but the wise Bharata intervened by saying, "If you have resolved to renounce this ephemeral world, please allow me to join you as well; for I shall not be able to endure the pangs of your separation, and I will be exposed to the evil and vile world. I am too eager, to accept the oath of renouncement along with you. By serving you, I shall not only serve my father, but an ascetic as well. This will help me to atone atleast some of the wrong actions of my previous life."



When Bharata's mother, queen Kaikeyi heard about all this, she got worried. She thought, "My husband has already resolved to become an ascetic. If he becomes an ascetic, I will not be called the royal consort, nor will I enjoy the power and the privileges of a queen. If Bharata becomes a king, there is still hope for me, for I would be addressed as the royal mother. But, my son and my husband are all set to shatter my aspirations." Over-powered by the temptations, she went to the King Dasharatha and said, "My Lord, everything is possible in this world. The sun may tomorrow rise in the west and set in the east. It might rain in the spring. Everything under the sun may change in due course, except one thing, the promise of a Satyavadi, a man who speaks nothing but truth. My Lord, I believe that you are a man who upholds the truth. Do you remember that you had granted me a boon when you tied nuptial knots on being pleased

with my skill of driving a chariot? You owe me a debt, for I have still not asked you for that boon. The religious law says that a person with a debt cannot renounce the world. I truly desire that there shouldn't be any hindrance in your path to salvation."

Dasharatha said, "Dear queen! I distinctly remember my promise. Ask me for anything, except changing my decision of renouncing the world." Kaikeyi said, "My Lord, how can I ever ask you to change your decision and compel you to remain in this materialistic world, which is called a massive swamp by the learned. I only request you to hand over the scepter to my son Bharata." Dasharatha relented and said "Bharata is free to inherit my throne."

After promising Kaikeyi, King Dasharatha summoned Rama and Lakshmana and said, "I was compelled to fight a large number of Kshatriya warriors when Kaikeyi chose me as her respective bridegroom. I could defeat them all, only because Kaikeyi volunteered to be my charioteer. Because of this I had granted her a boon, which she preferred to keep secure for

future. Now that I have decided to renounce this world, she has asked for that boon. She desires that I offer my crown to Bharata, and thus be free from the debt which I owe her. O Rama! You are my eldest son. You are my heir apparent. Though the crown belongs to you and you alone, my worthy son, I am compelled to usurp your rightful claim and hand it over to Bharata, so that I can take the vows without any hindrance."

On hearing this, Rama said, "My worthy father, you wish to fulfill my mother's desire and make my brother a king. Bharata is young, but still can surpass any warrior in valor. He is also an expert administrator. I am sure; you are handing over your regalia to a worthy person. Do not ever think that you are violating the command of Dharma, and usurping my rightful claim by doing this. Did you ever notice me craving for the power? Did you ever notice my disrespect towards you? This crown belongs to you and you alone and you may hand it over to anyone. I have no desire to sit on the throne, nor do I have a right to disobey you. How can I ever disrespect you? You can choose any one as your heir. I have acquired my person by your grace. You have given me the best of everything, taught me the ethics and inculcated moral values in me. You have full right on my being, my heart and my wealth. Bharata may be coronated, any time you wish. After all, Rama and Bharata are two inseparable entities. The question of my consent therefore does not arise."

When King Dasharatha heard Rama's words that were like a soothing balm to his wounded heart, he was very happy, but Bharata was adamant. He wanted to be an ascetic and didn't crave for power.

He said, "My worthy father, I was the first one, who expressed a desire to be an ascetic. Please do not impose the kingship on me." Hearing this Dasharatha said, "Son, Dharma says that one cannot disobey his parents. I had made a promise to your mother, if it remains unfulfilled, it will leave a blemish on my character in the ages to come. Do you want your father to be remembered as a villain and a traitor?"



Rama seeking permission for retiring to jungle, from Dasharatha

In order to convince Bharata, Rama said, "You have been offered the crown so that our father can be free from his debt. You are not craving for the power. You must shoulder the responsibility that our father has entrusted you with." Bharata, with tearful eyes said, "My worthy brother, you are sacrificing your right to the throne to free father off his debt. I know that I am not worthy of the throne. I appreciate your generosity, but I shall never accept your proposal, for it will amount to greed and covetousness. How can I ever deprive you of your rightful position? Am I not Dasharatha's son and your brother? My coronation is impossible."

Rama said, "My worthy father, if I stay here any longer, my brother Bharata will never accept the throne. Therefore, allow me to retire from hither. I will stay in the woods for some years like an ascetic. It will compel Bharata to shoulder his responsibilities. You will be free from your debt and thus be able to embrace the vows."

There are many versions of Ramayana which belong to the faiths other than Jainism. They mention that Kaikeyi had asked for two boons, (1) the coronation of Bharata and (2) expulsion of Rama.